

Road Safety Factsheet

Horse riders advice and information

July 2021

Introduction

There are around three million horse riders in Great Britain, many of whom ride on the road. Although they prefer not to do so, riders often have no choice because they need to reach to bridleways and other off road facilities. Horse riders have a right to use the road, and both riders and motorists are responsible for each other's safety.

Horses are powerful animals that are easily frightened and can panic, especially near fast-moving traffic or at sudden loud noises.

Horse Collisions and Injuries

In 2019, there were 22 serious injury collisions reported to the police involving ridden horses, and 43 slight injury collisions.^{1*}

Table 1: Ridden horses involved in reported collisions by collision severity, 2016-2019.^{1*}

	Fatal	Serious	Slight
2016	0	34	79
2017	0	28	61
2018	3	27	47
2019	0	24	41

The British Horse Society (BHS) runs a website, www.horseaccidents.org.uk, for people to report a wider range of equestrian related incidents, including road incidents, slippery road surfaces, cycles or equine transport accidents. It estimates that a high number of equestrian accidents every year are not reported.

The BHS has been collecting data on horse-related incidents using the above website since 2010. In December 2020, a study² was published documenting the findings of analyses on 4107 report incidents (between 2010 and 2020) with the aim of describing the incidents and discovering which factors lead to an increase or decrease in the risk of collisions and/or horse deaths. The following key points were found:

- Drivers passing too closely was reported in 84.2% of incidents
- Road rage and speeding were reported in 40.3% and 40.1% of incidents
- 56.9% of incidents were reported in the spring and summer months, with 54.9% of incidents reported to have occurred between the hours of 10am and 2pm
- The South West, South East and West Midlands were the regions of the UK with the highest numbers of report incidents
- The median age of the handler involved in the incident was 40 years of age, with 88.8% of handlers being female
- Most horses involved in the incidents were not injured, but 18.6% were mild or moderately injured and 3.2% died (or had to be euthanised due to their injuries)
- Collisions were more likely when close passing occurred (or in combination with speeding) than when speeding occurred, but speeding was more likely to result in a horse fatality
- Collision risk was reduced by 80% when high visibility clothing was worn

As a result of the large amount of reported close passing and speeding (as well as road rage), the BHS states that driver awareness of how to safely pass horses needs to be increased by investigating how to communicate this to a large amount of drivers and cause behavioural change. It is also stated that, due to the effectiveness of high visibility clothing in reducing collision risk, horse handlers should take this step to increase their safety.²

Training

The British Horse Society provides road safety training for horse riders and operates a Ride Safe Award. RoSPA recommends that all riders should undertake road safety training, if possible before riding on the road, and take the Ride Safe Award. Further details are available from [this web page](#).

Horse riders are advised to read the Highway Code, especially rules 47 to 58 which provide advice on using horses on the road. These rules can be found in the online version of the Highway Code [here](#).

Supervision

Young, inexperienced riders should always be accompanied by adult, experienced riders when riding on or near the road.

Helmets

The Horses (Protective Headgear for Young Riders) Act 1990 requires children under 14 years old to wear protective helmets when riding a horse on the road. It is the responsibility of the parent, guardian, horse

owner or person who has custody of the horse immediately before a child rides it, or an employer of a child, to ensure that the child is wearing an approved helmet when riding on the road. Children of the Sikh religion are exempted while they are wearing a turban.

The Horses (Protective Headgear for Young Riders) Regulations 1992 define approved helmets as ones which conform to one of the following: BS 6473:1984, BS 6473:1987, BS 4472: 1988 or BS 6863:1989 (for pedal cyclist helmets) or to a standard that provides an equivalent level of safety. However, BS 6473 and BS 4472 have been withdrawn and are no longer in use.

In October 2014, BSI also withdrew BS EN 1384: Helmets for Equestrian Activities because a number of shortcomings in the standard had been identified, which indicated that it did not sufficiently cover the Basic Health and Safety Requirements of the PPE Directive. Riders with a helmet conforming to BS EN 1384 should contact the helmet manufacturer or retailer to ask whether it is safe to use.

RoSPA recommends that horse riders wear a helmet specifically designed for horse riding (rather than a pedal cycle helmet, for instance) and that meets one of these standards:

Specification	Purpose
PAS 015	Equestrian Helmets
ASTM F1163	Standard Specification for Protective Headgear Used in Horse Sports and Horseback Riding
SNELL E2001	Helmet Standard for Use in Horseback Riding

All horse rider helmets sold in the UK must also have a CE mark. If possible, in addition to the CE mark and one of the above standards, choose a helmet that also has a BSI Kitemark, which provides an extra level of quality assurance.

The law only requires children to wear helmets when riding on the road. However, it is strongly recommended that all riders of horses, or other equine animals, on the road wear a helmet.

As with all helmets, it is important to ensure that they are the right size for the rider and are worn correctly. If possible, choose one from a reputable shop that has staff trained to help ensure the helmet fits the wearer

Visibility

All riders should wear high visibility (fluorescent and reflective) garments when riding on the road. Fluorescent and reflective ankle bands and stirrup lights are particularly effective in attracting the attention of motorists. If possible, riders should use high visibility garments that conform to BS EN1150, a European Standard for high visibility garments for non-professional use. There is a standard for high visibility garments for professional use, BS EN471, which can also be used.

The Highway Code (Rule 51) advises riders that it is safer not to ride on the road at night or in poor visibility. Riders who must use the road in these conditions should ensure that the horse has reflective bands above the fetlock joints and carry a light, which shows white to the front and red to the rear. A relatively new standard for "visibility accessories" has been introduced: EN 13356.

Other Protective Wear

Other accessories, such as body protectors, can also offer useful protection. Advice is available from the Safety Department of the British Horse Society.

Riding on the Road

Before taking a horse onto the road, riders should ensure that they can control the horse, and that the saddle and other equipment fit well and is in good condition. Horses that are inexperienced in riding on the road, or are nervous of traffic, should be ridden by experienced riders and be accompanied by other, less nervous horses.

Riders should follow the Highway Code and obey all road signs, road markings and traffic lights. Riding two abreast can be useful, especially if one of the riders or horses is inexperienced, but riders should return to single file where the road narrows and when approaching bends.

Riders should not carry passengers, or anything that might affect their balance or become tangled in the reins. They should keep both hands on the reins, except when signalling, and both feet in the stirrups.

Where possible, riders should avoid busy, high speed roads and difficult junctions, such as roundabouts.

Riders should be courteous to other road users, and thank drivers who have slowed down for them.

Motorists

Motorists should understand the needs and vulnerability of riders and horses, and behave courteously towards them at all times. Horses are large, powerful animals and a collision with one poses considerable risk to the motor vehicle and its occupants, as well as to the horse and rider.

Drivers should be aware that riders are often children, and therefore, less experienced as both road users and horse riders. Horses themselves may be inexperienced and nervous of traffic.

Drivers should watch out for horses on the road, especially when approaching bends and on narrow rural roads. They should always slow down when seeing a horse and drive past slowly, giving them plenty of room and being ready to stop if necessary. Drivers should never sound their horn or rev their engine near horses.

Motorists should be aware that when turning right, riders will not move to the centre of the road, but stay on the left until they reach the point where they intend to turn. Drivers should also be aware that horse riders

behave differently from other traffic at roundabouts. Riders will not normally signal on approach, but will stay on the left within the roundabout until they reach their exit, and then signal left. They may signal right when approaching and passing exits they do not intend to take.

Riders are seated higher than drivers and often, therefore, have a better view and may be able to see a hazard the driver cannot see. Drivers should look out for signals from horse riders and be ready to slow down or stop as indicated.

Further Information

There is useful information and advice for horse riders and motorists on the following two British Horse Society websites: www.bhs.org.uk and www.horseaccidents.org.uk.

References

¹ Department for Transport. Table RAS20003: Vehicles involved in reported accidents by accident severity and vehicle type, Great Britain. GOV.UK website. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/reported-road-accidents-vehicles-and-casualties-tables-for-great-britain#vehicles-in-reported-road-accidents-ras20>. Updated September 30, 2020. Accessed July 7, 2021.

² Pollard D, Grewar JD. Equestrian Road Safety in the United Kingdom: Factors Associated with Collisions and Horse Fatalities. *Animals*. 2020;10(12):2403. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/12/2403/htm>. Published December 15, 2020. Accessed July 7, 2021.

***Due to changes in severity reporting across some police forces since 2016, newer statistics are not comparable to earlier years. Therefore, the DfT provides both adjusted and unadjusted casualty figures in their statistical data tables. RoSPA uses adjusted figures as the DfT states that they are recommended “for the analysis of trends over time”.**