What to Wear?

Attire for Horsemen and Horsewomen

Each style of riding has its "correct attire." It is not only correct for appearance sake but also for safety.

Clothing should fit in such a way as to not hinder the movement of the handler/rider and yet portray a horseman-like appearance as indicated for the various styles of riding. Clothing should not be excessively loose so as to catch on objects that could result in injury to the wearer. Nor should clothing be excessively tight, so that it restricts the wearer's freedom of movement around horses.

Foot-wear — leather, not canvas — needs to cover the foot and provide some protection in case a horse steps on your feet. For riding, the shoe or boot needs to have a heel that will help keep your foot from slipping through a stirrup. Having such a heel is important so the youth can easily and quickly become separated from the horse in emergency dismount situations or if being thrown from the horse.

He: All youth age 14 and under participating in any 4-H equine activity are required to wear properly fitted protective headgear that meets or exceeds current ASTM/SEI standards. This helmet must be securely fastened at all times while riding or driving an equine.

Spurs can trip you when you work on the ground. Be careful, and remove them if you're not ready to ride. Do not wear loose jewelry that can catch on objects you come in contact with when working with horses.

Attire for Horses

All tack and equipment used with horses should be in good condition and should be checked periodically for its safety. Cracked leather and frayed girths are an accident waiting to happen and need to be replaced.

For western saddles with rear girths, the rear girth needs to be attached to the front girth under the belly of the horse. There is usually a loop on the front girth to which you may tie the rear girth. An untied rear girth may slip back into the horse's rear flanks and cause the horse to buck the rider off.

The rear girth should also be adjusted snug enough so that a horse will not stick a rear foot in it if kicking at flies. Rear girths on western saddles are basically needed only if you are going to rope cattle, so it is probably easier to just remove it from the saddle.

Halters should be adjusted so a horse cannot get a foot in the halter and so the halter cannot catch on other things as the horse moves around. Usually it is best to take the halter off horses that are in stalls or out on pastures when people are not around. The halter and lead should be placed so they are readily accessible in case of an emergency that requires the removal of a horse from an area.

When placing a saddle on a horse, be careful to not hit the horse with stirrups, buckles, cinches, etc., as the saddle is placed on the animal's back. If the saddle has a rear girth, it is attached to the fore cinch; when taking the saddle off, the rear girth is released first. Other items that attach to the saddle, such as martingales, tie-downs, and breast collars, are attached after the girth is fastened and are removed before the girth is released.

Some horses are cinchy — they respond negatively to the tightening of the girth. They may threaten to bite, lie down, flip over backwards, buck, or exhibit other undesirable behavior. On these horses, tighten the girth in increments over a few minutes time.

Always walk the horse some before mounting to be sure the horse will accept the tightness of the girth. The girth on most horses will loosen after the horse moves some, so retighten it before mounting. Also after riding a while, it is wise to recheck the tightness of the girth.

Bridles should be adjusted so that the bit fits snugly in the corner of the horse's mouth (curb bits) or so it creates a wrinkle in the corner (snaffle bits). Bits hanging too low in the mouth take away from the control of the horse and may irritate the horse. Be sure the bit does not have badly worn joints that will pinch the corners of the mouth.

The bit needs to be wide enough for the horse. Ponies usually wear 4- to 4-1/2-inch-wide bits, light horses 5-inch-wide bits, and draft horses 5-1/2- to 6-inch-wide bits.

A horse that tosses its head every time you take hold of the bit should have its teeth checked for the presence of sharp points. Due to the natural structure of the jaws of the horse, sharp points are a common problem. The head tossing may be due to the check-piece of the bit pushing the horse's cheek into the sharp points.

Another possible tooth problem is the presence of wolf teeth, which may sit in front of the first molars. If the bit bumps these when you activate the bit, that will also cause head tossing. These teeth can be pulled by a veterinarian.

If the horse does not have teeth problems and still tosses its head, it is probably your way of handling the reins and/or lack of training of the horse. Find a horseperson who can help you with your riding skills.

Curb bits have a curb strap or curb chain. It needs to be at least one-half inch wide and lie flat against the jaw when activated. It needs to be adjusted loose enough to