

April 2012 Essex Rider Magazine  
Safety Measures to keep in mind at all times

As the weather is now more like spring, you will likely have noticed the changes in attitudes of the horses. Many are much more rowdy and more difficult to keep focused in general.

**A couple of SAFETY points when mounting up**, which are important at any time of year but even more so at this time, is to keep good control over your horse when mounting up and perform the leadership disengagement exercises from the saddle once mounted and before riding off.

Before stepping into the stirrup, be sure you have your horses' head turned laterally around toward you. Then be sure to grasp the on-side rein in your forward hand (often the left hand) to maintain that position and fix your hand onto your saddle pommel or front section. Be sure to hold, loosely, the offside rein in that (under 1 finger) hand as well. Grasp the cantle or rear of the saddle in your other hand (often the right hand). Hold those positions until you are safely in the stirrup with your weight and leaning against the side of your horse. Then release your rear hand but maintain the forward hand position until securely seated and have both feet in the stirrups. Before releasing (from your forehead) the pommel or front saddle position, make sure you have the onside rein well inside your hand, as well as having the offside rein in your other hand.

This will assure that, as you mount, if anything should cause your horse to become startled, the direction of movement will be limited to circling around you in a tight circle with all force holding you against your horse.

This would keep centrifugal and centripetal forces working in your favor. This will also keep you in control of both reins at all times and will assure you are in position to be able to do the initial lateral movements involved with a disengagement exercise whilst the horse is able to "see" you.

Avoid the common mistake of holding both reins evenly (approximately on the crest) and allowing his head to face forward. If he is facing forward, he could leap forward or worse, run a distance forward before you have reached the seated position or are seated securely and before you could take over proper control of his direction. If you make this all too often common mistake and have only progressed to the one weighted foot in the onside stirrup position, it is likely that the saddle can begin slipping to your onside as he exhales in stride and you will be in dire circumstances to say the least.. No helmet can help in this case as your neck is in most danger. Alternately, the mistake could allow him to spin away from you at speed and throw you backward onto the ground. Again, a helmet doesn't do a great deal of good if you hit the ground backward at speed. Even if you managed to hang on, you could be run against anything stationary.

**Therefore, it is an easy, necessary safety measure and a good use of only a small amount of your time, to bend your horse laterally toward you and proceed as I explain above.**

**I also strongly suggest that once saddled and before riding off, riders do the disengagement leadership exercise that I continually advocate and provided in previous articles.** As always, these exercises should be accomplished using pressure-release actions.

**Tacking up notes :** (1) I often see riders making a **dangerous error when reaching under their horse** to grasp either the cinch/girth or the straps for rugs. I still have trouble calling a cinch by the same name as the physical part of a horse. If you are

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working from the left side (even though there is no reason to work only from the left) and you reach under the horse with your right arm you are tempting fate. A horse could be stung underneath by an insect (or many other causes) and suddenly kick at the insect whilst your arm is in the way and break/shatter your elbow. Elbows do not heal well. Of course, the mistake is made even worse should you reach under with your other arm whilst facing the rear and get kicked in the face or chest. Many riders do not understand the extreme and semi-permanent to permanent damage that can be caused by reaching under a horse, even when facing forward as opposed to the ultra risky mistake of facing the hocks.

It is a simple safety measure that when reaching under horses, you should face the front of the horse and (if working from the left side of the horse) step with your right leg under the horse to protect your right elbow. In this manner you have a leg joint that bends in the correct direction as well as some extra padding if you are kicked a bit higher. Your elbow does not bend the correct way and will shatter if kicked.

**(2) Saddling a horse can also be dangerous** if you are using attachments such as breast plates, flank cinches or martingales, etc.. If any attachments are connected before the cinch/girth is tightened then you run the risk that is the horse becomes frightened and runs with a saddle dangling by the attachment, then the saddle causes the horse to become even more frightened and a huge wreck can ensue. Therefore, you must always connect any attachment only after tightening the cinch/girth first. You also should always disconnect those attachments first before loosening the cinch/girth.

**Closing Reminder:**

I continuously advise folks to **chinch up in stages. Small bytes are best, just as small bytes are best for all training / learning** for both horses and riders. Whilst there is no fixed rule for how tight you should cinch your horse, remember that you should tighten it in stages.

I first cinch a horse snugly, but I don't cut him in half. I want to give him a chance to warm up and get comfortable before I really cinch him up. I'll do groundwork for a few minutes and then I'll check the girth and tighten it a little more. I'll do groundwork again for a few more minutes and then I'll tighten the girth for the third time. On that third time I do the cinch up, I really do it up tight. You may have heard me tell a joke about this in sessions. I often say that when I tighten a girth up, I tighten it until he looks like a peanut. Even though that's a joke, I actually do make a point to tighten girths firmly.

When the horse is warmed up and mentally ready, I'm not afraid to cinch him up tight. The reality is most people don't tighten the cinch up nearly enough. This isn't just careless - it's dangerous. When a saddle slips under a horse's belly, whoever's riding him is going to end up in a massive wreck. If you've warmed your horse up and given him time to get used to the saddle before really cinching him up tight, you should be able to cinch him up quite snugly without making him feel uncomfortable.

**I truly hope these safety measures serve ya'll well.**

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