

Driving Safely Around Equestrians

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The neighboring towns of Malabar and Grant-Valkaria are both rural in nature. Living in a rural area includes sharing our roadways with animals of various shapes and sizes, farm equipment, and horse trailers. Most of us have noticed equestrians on our roadways but few of us who do not have experience with horses understand equine behavior. Horses are big animals. An average horse weighs 1000 to 1200 pounds. Horses are prey animals which means in their wild state they are hunted by predators for food. Their most powerful survival adaptation is speed. When horses are startled their instinct tells them to run first and ask questions later. Horses are very unpredictable and have lightning fast reactions. A horse can be standing quietly and a second later jump 10 feet sideways. A rider has very little initial control over a spooked horse.

What does this mean to drivers sharing a road with equestrians? When a horse spooks it may jump in the road in front of or into the vehicle.

Certainly the horse will be injured or killed, the rider will be injured or killed and what most drivers don't realize is that they have a good chance of being injured or killed. Everyone knows the damage a deer weighing 100 to 200 pounds can do to a vehicle and driver. Multiply that by about 10.

How do we keep horses and humans safe? Following are some guidelines. If residents use appropriate safety precautions drivers from other areas may follow their good example.



Slow Down. The speed limit posted is the maximum speed permitted. Drivers must in all situations, whether it involves children, equestrians, joggers, an elderly resident at the mailbox or wildlife proceed at an appropriate and safe speed.



Give the horse a wide safety zone. Pass as far into the other lane as possible and wait to pass if there is oncoming traffic.



Don't speed up until well past the horse.



The sight or sound of a vehicle is not something that horses instinctively fear, horses are more likely to be afraid of a dog or a sinister-mail box. They may jump into a car's path to avoid the scary object on the side the road.



Don't honk, yell or throw things out of the car window.



If the rider appears to be having difficulty, stop and wait.



Be aware that if you are pulling a trailer or have noisy object in the back of a pickup truck the noise will probably spook the horse so proceed as slowly as possible.



Be patient. Most riders don't want to be on the road any longer than necessary.



Proceed with caution at all times.



Be polite and tolerant. Equestrians are allowed on our roadways and because of the unpredictable nature of horses they should always be afforded the right-of-way.

Please drive safely at all times in our rural community.