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Horses & the Highway Code

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Horses and their riders are among the most vulnerable groups of road users. Whether you're on a main highway or country lane, we're here to make sure you're safe when riding on UK roads.

We think it's essential that all owners and riders familiarise themselves with an up to date copy of the Highway Code, particularly the section relating to horses.

The Highway Code contains all you need to know about riding on our highways and byways, the rules to follow, protective clothing and headgear, hand signals, road signs, crossings, advice for drivers, main roads, country roads, codes of practice and traffic laws.

Below we've featured some of the rules and advice applying particularly to horse riders and owners when using UK roads. Please study them for your use, but also ensure you have your own copy of the current edition of the Highway Code.

The road user and the law

It is important to note that references to 'road' generally includes footpaths, bridleways and cycle tracks, and many roadways and driveways on private land (including many car parks). In most cases, the law will apply to them but there may be additional rules for particular paths or rights of way.

Rule 27: Equestrian crossings

Equestrian crossings are for horse riders. They have pavement barriers, wider crossing spaces, horse and rider figures in the light panels and either two sets of controls (one higher), or just one higher control panel for use by equestrians.

Rule 47: Horse-drawn vehicles

Horse-drawn vehicles used on the highway should be operated and maintained in accordance with standards set out in the Department for Transport's Code of Practice for Horse-Drawn Vehicles. This Code lays down the requirements for a road driving assessment and includes a comprehensive list of safety checks to ensure that a carriage and its fittings are safe and in good working order. The standards set out in the road driving assessment may be required to be met by a Local Authority if an operator wishes to obtain a Local Authority licence to operate a passenger-carrying service.

Rule 48: Safety equipment and clothing



All horse-drawn vehicles should have two red rear reflectors. It is safer not to drive at night but if you do, a light showing white to the front and red to the rear must be fitted.

Rule 49 Horse riders

Safety equipment: children under the age of 14 must wear a helmet that complies with the Regulations. It must be fastened securely. Other riders should also follow these requirements. These requirements do not apply to a child who is a follower of the Sikh religion while wearing a turban.

Rule 50: Other clothing

You should wear boots or shoes with hard soles and heels, light-coloured or fluorescent clothing in daylight, and reflective clothing if you have to ride at night or in poor visibility.

Rule 51: At night

It is safer not to ride on the road at night or in poor visibility, but if you do, make sure you wear reflective clothing and your horse has reflective bands above the fetlock joints. A light, which shows white to the front and red to the rear, should be fitted with a band to the rider's right arm and/or leg/riding boot. If you are leading a horse at night, carry a light in your right hand, showing white to the front and red to the rear, and wear reflective clothing on both you and your horse. It is strongly recommended that your horse also wears a fluorescent/reflective tail guard.

Rule 52: Riding

Before you take a horse on the road, you should:

- Ensure all tack fits well and is in good condition
- Make sure you can control the horse. Always ride with other horses who are less nervous if you think that your horse will be worried in traffic.
- Never ride a horse without both a saddle and bridle.

Rule 53

Before riding off or turning, look behind you to make sure it is safe, then give a clear arm signal. When riding on the road, you should:

- Keep to the left
- Keep both hands on the reins unless you are signalling
- Keep both feet in the stirrups
- Not carry another person
- Not carry anything which might affect your balance or get tangled up with reins
- Keep a horse you are leading to your left
- Move in the direction of the traffic flow in a one-way street
- Never ride more than two abreast, and ride in single file on narrow or busy roads and when riding round bends.



Rule 54

You must not take a horse onto a footpath or pavement and you should not take a horse onto a cycle track. Use a bridleway where possible. Equestrian crossings may be provided for horse riders to cross the road and you should use these where available (see page 12). You should dismount at level crossings where a 'Horse Riders Dismount' sign is displayed.

Rule 55

Avoid roundabouts where possible. If you use them, you should:

- Keep to the left and watch out for vehicles crossing your path to leave or join the roundabout
- Signal right when crossing exits to show you are not leaving
- Signal left just before you leave the roundabout.

Rule 253: Motorways

Prohibited vehicles: motorways must not be used by horse riders, pedestrians, holders of provisional motorcycle or car licences, riders of motorcycles under 50cc, cyclists, certain slow-moving vehicles and those carrying oversized loads (except by special permission), agricultural vehicles, and powered wheelchairs/powering mobility scooters (See Rules 36-46).

Code of Practice for Horse-Drawn Vehicles

The Code of Practice is available from the Department for Transport, Transport and Technology and Standards Division 6, 2nd Floor, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR. Tel: 020 7944 2078

Rule 215

Horse riders and horse-drawn vehicles. Be particularly careful of horse riders and horse-drawn vehicles especially when overtaking. Always pass wide and slowly. Horse riders are often children, so take extra care and remember riders may ride in double file when escorting a young or inexperienced horse or rider. Look out for horse riders' and horse drivers' signals and heed a request to slow down or stop. Take great care and treat all horses as a potential hazard; they can be unpredictable, despite the efforts of their rider/driver.



Planning a ride



What to wear



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