

" Helmet or not? Over 18 yrs old It is a choice "

The Icelandic competition riders all MUST wear helmets. With all other (over 18yrs.) riders, they make their decision for their own reasons. Is insurance valid without a helmet? Again the adult individual has a choice to find out.

Mike King of Intercity Insurance Services stated, "Falling off of a Quarter Horse is the same as falling off of a Thoroughbred. It (helmet use for juniors) is the law and most insurance companies will not provide coverage if riders are not wearing helmets. Unfortunately, few facts about injuries ever reach the public as cases are often settled before they hit a courtroom."

Sadly, the facts are only brought to light by the tragic horseback riding-related deaths in Ontario over the past few years. These include Elizabeth Hader, a 10 year-old girl who was killed when thrown from a horse that spooked at a public trail riding facility. She suffered severe head injuries and York Regional Police confirmed that she was not wearing a helmet. Most recently killed was Patricia Moore. Pat, an experienced barrel racer and rodeo contestant, died from severe head injuries when her horse stumbled and fell to the ground after leaving the ring. Pat was also not wearing a helmet.

Safety helmets should be ASTM/SEI certified for equestrian use in order to provide the necessary protection. The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) writes safety standards for products that are risk-related and the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) ensures that the manufacturers comply with the standards. Certified helmets are put through a number of tests specifically related to horseback riding such as, concussion from certain heights and on sharp edges, temperature, moisture, and more. Other types of helmets, including bike and hockey helmets, are inadequate as they are certified for their specific sport alone.

In conclusion, it is up to the horse industry itself to make the necessary changes surrounding helmet use while horseback riding. Riders should never feel that they must sacrifice wearing a safety helmet in order to be part of the crowd or to be successful in competition. It is not only the Western riding industry that suffers from this helmet issue. Dressage at the Grand Prix level, Saddle Seat, and Costume Classes all cater to not wearing a helmet. Parents, coaches and trainers must start setting the example. Wear an approved safety helmet all the time - your children and clients will follow your lead. Old practices remain intact only because no one challenges tradition. It is up to all of us to help educate a new generation and create a new trend where it is "cool" to wear a helmet and "un-cool" to not wear one.

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