**ASA, PERIOD SIDESADDLE ATTIRE (historically correct, inspired, costume)**

**Period sidesaddle attire:**

**Historically correct** means “down to the last stitch”, hand sewn and of period fabric, etc. **Historically inspired** means the clothing is indistinguishable when seen from a short distance. Changes have been made in the “inspired” clothing to make it easier to assemble on a sewing machine, washable, and safer. Aprons can be made to resemble the full skirts of an earlier era.

The Watts-Hettinger book contains an excellent glossary of period attire. Remember, corsets were the rule for a long time in our history. Women’s clothing was handmade and extremely fitted to the individual. The terminology alone is staggering, not to mention the difficulty with exact reproduction. Of all the sidesaddle clothing, historically correct period outfits are the most confusing and the most often poorly represented. Do not confuse historical street wear or party wear with riding outfits. Costumes with low necklines or revealed shoulders are not historically correct for riding. Petticoats of lace or frill were never worn for riding because of the impracticality of laundering and mending these garments. Frilly clothing was carried in a satchel and put on at arrival. Look also to Mary Thomas’ book, “The Fair Lady Aside” and to the Friddle/Bowlby book, “The Sidesaddle Legacy” to help reference correct period costumes.

Be sure to check what men historically wore during the time period you are representing. Women often wore jackets based on men’s styles and fabrics. If you want to be as period correct as possible, check the type of trousers worn by men during the time period in question. Women wore that same type of trouser. This is true for Civil War era riding, for early Spanish riding, and for early Western sidesaddle attire. Remember that you cannot interpret what riding clothes looked like in a specific time period without doing your research. Today’s western clothing, for example, the Stetson hat, was not seen during the early days of sidesaddle. Refer to the ASA Library “Costume” section in the files attached to the Face Book Members Only page. There are many books that can be borrowed to ensure correct interpretation.

After 1850, the style of hunt attire for ladies made a drastic change, as the **safety apron** came into use to prevent skirts getting entangled on the saddle. The durability of the apron greatly improved the ladies’ ability to ride in more difficult events. Bloomers or pantaloons were never used for sidesaddle riding, particularly for the hunt. Ladies always wore some type of durable trouser under their riding skirt.

Today, for historically inspired correctness, under the apron, wear a pair of riding **trousers**, breeches, jodhpurs, or western pants. Safety first is the best recommendation to be made here. Circular skirts fell out of favor in the 1870’s because of a series of serious and fatal riding accidents that resulted from women being thrown out of the saddle, but entangled on the saddle horns by their long voluminous skirts. If you must wear such a skirt for your period correct or period inspired outfit, leave the right side seam undone. Attach **Velcro** so it can be fastened up when you are out of the saddle and so that it can keep the skirt smooth when riding. If you should suffer a mishap, it will tear open and you will not become entangled. Period attire skirts are longer than modern aprons. Remember that if the skirt is knee length on the horse, then the horse can become entangled. Also, the excessively long skirt can flap and frighten the horse. Keep your design as safe as possible.

**Hats** should be correct to the time period of your habit. Keep hat brims under five inches, as larger ones tend to blow with the wind and obscure your vision. If a large hat is called for, consider making a hat around a safety helmet. Never compete or jump in your historical costume. Modern safety helmets must be used for this. Children under the age of 18 must wear safety helmets at all times, even with period attire.

If you are riding in your period correct or inspired outfit and it is not as safe as modern attire, you must have a safety walker or rider accompanying you to keep the horse in control or in case of mishap.

**Period tack:** Very few really old sidesaddles exist in a condition that is safe to ride; so saddles in use for reenactment are those from the 1800’s; hopefully, the late 1800’s. Prior to 1890, the tack in use was generally of the English type, but the western sidesaddle, invented by Charles Goodnight, for his wife was developed in the 1870’s. This type of western saddle became increasingly popular because of the added comfort for long periods of time in the saddle. If you ride in an old sidesaddle that does not have a leaping head, you must have a safety walker or rider accompanying you. Period inspired tack must include the use of a more modern saddle that has a leaping head.

**Costume attire:**

Breed rules may or may not be helpful. For example, some breeds specify certain costumes, such as ante-bellum for Tennessee Walking horses or Spanish for Paso Finos and Peruvian Pasos. Be sure to open the right side seam of your skirt and use Velcro that will open and prevent entanglement in case of a fall. Try to mold a large brimmed hat over a safety helmet. Children under 18 must wear a safety helmet at all times when in the saddle.

For **parades**, amusement, and “fun” classes, almost anything goes (except maybe, Lady Godiva). For example, the ASA ladies have ridden aside as a group in several theme parades, such as the McDonald’s Thanksgiving Day Parade in Chicago and the Pegasus Parade at the Kentucky Derby Festival in Louisville, Kentucky. Some years, the ladies have all been fairies, Disney characters, snow queens, safari troopers, Little House on the Prairie, and so on. In a Presidential Inaugural Parade in Washington, DC, the ladies were costumed as Union troopers. Keep to the costume theme so that all the riders fit into the visual plan. Keep it fun, but remember that the rules of safety still apply: no long clothing or costume parts that will impair unexpected dismount or that will tangle in the horse’s legs. Consider helmets for everyone, but safety helmets are mandatory for riders under the age of 18. Always have safety walkers to control frightened horses or to deal with the unexpected.