

American Sidesaddle Association: Commitment to Safety



Purpose: The American Sidesaddle Association (ASA) is committed to safety in all aspects of equine use and care. Safety for the equines, the riders, the environment, and the spectators must be a continual focus. ASA expects the affiliate clubs and members to comply with the following basic safety guidelines when engaging in ASA-sanctioned and mounted club activities.

Philosophy: The ASA is a national equine organization, made up of affiliate clubs that are fully committed to safety while modeling sidesaddle riding as an art of historical importance to women and of relevance to modern use. ASA members must be role models during all their activities wherever spectators are involved and should incorporate basic safety into equine care and use. Equine sports are inherently dangerous due to the unpredictability of the animals and the demands of various sports and activities.

Definitions: (1) Official ASA sanctioned events are announced well in advance of the event in order to allow and encourage participation. These events include but are not limited to: clinics, parades, demonstrations, exhibits, and overland events. These sanctioned events must make use of the ASA's insurance and can use the ASA logo and all ASA informational materials. Open shows and hunts are not usually ASA sponsored, in which case, they fall under the standard United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) safety rules. (2) Sanctions are punishments that are carefully considered by the ASA officers whenever there is a complaint regarding an ASA affiliate club or member who has seriously violated the safety rules. Compliance failures that cause complaints, if proven to be valid, can result in sanctions against an affiliate club or member. An example of a serious violation is allowing a youth member to ride without a proper safety helmet. Sanctions can include not receiving an ASA award point for the event, not being allowed to participate in the awards program for the rest of the year, or removal from the club. (3) Judge/Instructor/Clinician (JIC) is an ASA member who has had extensive sidesaddle experience and has passed ASA's rigorous written and practicum examination. (4) ASA insurance is provided by an equine insurance agency and includes limited-amount bodily injury and property damage to others, not to the ASA members who are involved in the activity. The insurance company must be notified in advance of the intended event in order to arrange coverage. This is done by the ASA Treasurer.

Policies: The following safety policies must be followed by all members of the ASA:

Equine Safety

All equines used for riding must be free of injury and illness, of a healthy weight (determined by a veterinarian, if there is a question about their weight from a JIC or other club member), and in good general physical condition for riding in the discipline for which they are being used. Every effort must be made to ensure the comfort of the equine, throughout all aspects of use.

Equines must be trained for riding and should not routinely exhibit behaviors that might endanger themselves, the rider, or spectators.

All equines being transported by the trailer for long distances of over 12 hours must be provided with breaks for rest, food, and water. There is no rule regarding distance or time on the trailer, but humane treatment is expected.

All tack used on the equine must fit correctly without causing injury or discomfort to the animal. This includes saddle, bits, bridles, and trailering equipment.

Veterinarian care on site is required for ASA sanctioned overland events such as long-distance competitive and endurance rides. Members should familiarize themselves with any veterinary services that are provided by other entities for open events.

Tack

Sidesaddles must be safely constructed and kept in good repair. Proper saddle fit for both the rider and the equine is essential.

Saddles cannot be used for jumping unless they have been reinforced for this purpose, usually via a metal jumping bar built into the tree itself. Saddles that are not properly reinforced either at the time of manufacture or later by a reputable saddler will greatly sore the equine's back and the tree will be damaged. Balance strap and essential rigging must be used and in good repair to stabilize the saddle for jumping. Some older saddles were built without balance assembly. These are to be used for flatwork only and must be properly fitted to the particular equine in order to remain stable during use.

All sidesaddles ridden by ASA members must have a leaping horn. It is the position of ASA that antique saddles that do not have a leaping horn should be used primarily for display, however, some of them can be upgraded by adding a leaping horn. Saddles without leaping horns are very unsafe.

There is only one exception to the mandatory leaping horn rule. If historical reenactment requires the use of an antique sidesaddle, the saddle must be properly fitted to the horse and rider as much as possible, with padding as needed. The ride must be short to protect the equine from injury. A safety walker/ground escort and/or a modern-saddle mounted escort must accompany the historical reenactor. These escorts must ensure that the equine wearing the historical sidesaddle has a halter under the bridle to assist in the rescue. A lead rope should be on hand, as well.

Break-away stirrups must be used at all times, even for historical reenactment. These can be called by names such as quick release, safety, breakaway, and stirrup bar with a breakaway mechanism. Most tapadero or hooded stirrups are also breakaway. Both English and western stirrups that meet this requirement are available.

All sidesaddles used in ASA sanctioned events are subject to inspection by a JIC or a knowledgeable club member. The tree, pommels, leaping horn, billets, latigos, girths, cinches, balance straps, stirrup leathers, and rigging must be in good condition so as not to break during use.

Training devices or tack that is painful to the equine or that restricts its movement or balance is not allowed. This includes, but is not limited to, severe bits (bits not suitable to the purpose at

hand), draw reins, tie-downs, German martingales, side reins, and nosebands with studs or ridges on the underside.

Dress

Equestrian helmets that meet or exceed the requirements of the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) and are rated by the American Society for Testing and Materials/Safety Equipment Institute (ASTM/SEI) are required to be worn by all ASA member riders. This USEF headgear is also required by many other equine entities for many types of events. Any member who allows a junior ASA rider (under age 18) to ride without this type of helmet is subject to ASA sanction.

For shows and events in which another headgear is traditionally worn, ASA members should, if at all possible, use the newest and still evolving safety headgear such as Western safety hats. Safety bowlers are also available, but many members find that they can create a better one by gluing a soft bowler brim to a USEF ASTM/SEI rated black helmet.

Safe footwear is essential and must be suitable for the use and task at hand. These are usually considered to be proper boots with closed toes and low heels. There can be no open-toe or insubstantial footwear while working with equines. Exemptions are for historical reenactment or costume classes.

Ladies' sidesaddle habit aprons are the safest type of skirt for aside riding. Breeches or western pants as appropriate should be worn under the apron. This is the acceptable ASA attire. If historical reenactment or costume class calls for a long or full regular skirt, it should be designed as a break-away in order to avoid entanglement in the saddle horns, should the rider become unseated. Examples of break-away design include creating a seam on the right side of the skirt and affixing Velcro so that it will open to avoid entanglement. If that is not possible, the rider should never let the skirt bunch up around the horns and should keep the skirt on the same side of the saddle horns along with the rider's legs. Undergarments, even in historical classes are discouraged, but if used, should also have break-away considerations. Riders engaged in trail or eventing do not usually wear an apron or a skirt.

Events

Public exhibitions, defined as being any under-saddle demonstrations or exhibits of sidesaddle riding in a public or commercially sponsored activity, can be trade shows, parades, expos, rodeos, and other events that involve spectators or the general public. The ASA expects the rider members to be role models for safety. All equines used in public exhibitions must have training and experience that will help them overcome behavioral issues that could pose a danger to riders or spectators.

For all group events, members must give their emergency contact person's name and number to the event coordinator or other such involved person.

Parades require the use of safety walkers/ground escorts. The number of walkers is determined by the parade coordinator, but usually, there should be at least one walker on each side of the route per six equines. Equines should wear a halter under the bridle and the walker should have a lead rope to snap on as needed. Walkers caution crowds from getting too close and help control nervous equines who may back into the crowd or bolt.

Members are expected to comply with all the safety aspects laid out by events sponsored by other entities such as hunt, eventing, competitive trail, etc.

Members engaged in holding clinics, giving lessons, and doing demonstrations must pay strict attention to ensure that there are no environmental hazards such as clutter, construction debris, etc., that could be a hazard to riders, equines, or spectators.

All sidesaddle clinics sanctioned by ASA must have a JIC as the primary instructor. The JIC is responsible for ensuring that all safety measures are being followed. The JIC inspects all saddles that are in use for safety and correct fit. The JIC also inspects all equines used in the clinic for behavioral and health issues. This is done prior to saddling and the JIC decides whether or not an equine is temperamentally unsuitable to the task.

All ASA-sponsored clinics must use the ASA insurance, issued for the specific dates of the clinic.

Jumping with a sidesaddle will be taught only by JICs who have also successfully completed the “jumping” section of the JIC coursework. Students must also have had previous training astride in jumping. Additionally, the equines should have had some jumping experience.

Updated: April 18, 2022