

Horses and dangerous drivers don't mix

Over the past few years, as increased development and overpopulation continue to take its toll on formerly quiet New Jersey roadways, more and more accidents involving horseback riders and car drivers are popping up.

One of the most frequent causes of these accidents is a horse's sudden move into the roadway, usually provoked by a speeding or honking driver. What a lot of drivers don't realize is that horses are living, breathing beings, and, most importantly, flight animals. A person on a bike is far different than a person on horseback—a horse, unlike a bike, has a mind of its own and can often be easily spooked by reckless drivers.

The most common complaint that horseback riders have about car drivers is the fact that they honk or shout at them. Some drivers not only scream or honk, but slam on their horns for several moments, usually trying to provoke the horse and rider. Other drivers come incredibly close to horses on roadways, often revving up their engines or attempting to zoom past.

Any of these behaviors are extremely dangerous to do around horses. Loud noises or sudden movements can lead to any horse

shying or spooking, often sending the animal straight into a car's path.

Margaret DeAngelis of New Hope, Pa., who boards her horse in Ringoes, puts drivers in two basic categories. "Basically, people who understand animals seem to slow down, and the rest are completely clueless."

Incidents with speeding drivers are also becoming more and more common. According to Joanne Pelosi, owner and manager of Pleasant Meadow Farm in Readington, "We have signs on both ends of my street instructing motorists to obey hand signals and slow to 25 mph when passing equestrians. Of course, a number like to speed up and scream obscenities from their cars when they see someone driving or riding a horse. What these drivers don't realize is that they are putting human lives in jeopardy, not to men-

The writer, a resident of Stanhope, owns a Morgan mare. She is also the author of several children's novels, most recently Janie's New Legs and Luck of the Draw, which benefit local charities. She runs the Horse Welfare Organizations website at <http://horsewelfare.8k.com> and can be reached at lunar_aradia@yahoo.com.

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HUNTERDON HORSE BEAT



Alyssa Weihe drives her mare, High Country Holly, down the trails and roadways of Hunterdon County.

tion the huge repair bill that they would have to deal with after the horse spooks and hits their car."

"Someone having to put their horse down from injuries sustained in a collision is a whole other story," Pelosi continued. "All of these things are every day possibilities when we're riding out there. They don't realize the physical and mental damage that they could cause by not slowing down and keeping everyone safe. I'm terrified to take my young horses out on roads to even get them used to traffic when it's just plain scary out there. Oftentimes, people are passing us doing at least 50 mph, when the posted speed limit is only 35 mph. They should automatically slow to 25 mph when they see a horse; that's the posted law."

"On the road today, there are either very considerate or not-so-considerate drivers," DeAngelis said. "One time, a group of us were on the road riding for a short time, less than two minutes, when we had to cross a small paved bridge. Suddenly, a man in a convertible drove up behind the group and started harassing us by driving way too close and revving his en-

gine. We asked him to be patient while we crossed and even told him that we had young horses that would be frightened. The man wanted none of it. After we crossed the bridge, he gunned his engine and peeled away furiously. It was really frightening, and I was livid."

Sue Robichaud of Robichaud Equestrian Retreats in Stockton shared suggestions for drivers who encounter horses on the roads. "I think the biggest problem is that people who do not know horses don't realize that noises or fast/erratic motions can be startling to a horse AND rider. In my opinion, if all drivers used the same caution that they would exhibit around a child playing with a ball near the street, this

would greatly reduce the likelihood of potential accidents."

"Drivers should go as slow as possible around horses," added DeAngelis, "People need to understand that horses are unpredictable and both the animals and people could easily get hurt. When in doubt, air on the side of caution. If you're passing a horse on the roadway, slow down and pass as far away from the animal as possible. If another car is coming on the opposite side of the road, wait for that car to pass before you pass a horse."

Carriage drivers are also greatly affected by dangerous drivers. "If I see a truck coming, I try to pull into someone's driveway," said Alyssa Weihe, barn manager, trainer, and instructor for Pleasant Meadow Farm. "My horse can be classified as bombproof, but a large truck barreling down the roadway can be scary for any horse. If I see someone driving dangerously and I'm riding with someone in a carriage, I ask the passenger to write down that person's license plate number and report them afterwards. I don't know if it helps, but it makes me feel better."

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