

**April 5, 2010
For Immediate Release**

**Ride and Drive Safely and Pass Horses Slow and Wide!
Safety advice from local riding club**

Kat Beaulieu and Andrea Pearce of the Bowen Island Horse Owners and Riders Association (BIHORA) want the motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and motorcycle riders that share Bowen's roads with horseback riders to realize that horses aren't machines. Most horseback riders would prefer not to have to ride on public roads, but sometimes to get from their barn to an equestrian trail, or from one section of trail to another, road riding is a necessity. Even though they have the same rights as motor vehicles or bicycles according to the BC Motor Vehicle Act, most riders will stay on the shoulder as far away from the driving lane as possible, both as a courtesy to other road users, and as a safety precaution.

Although we look upon domestic horses as farm animals or pets, they still retain many of the instincts of their wild ancestors. Like deer, horses are prey animals that rely on their swift flight response to save them from becoming dinner for predators like mountain lions and wolves. They are hardwired to react instinctively to sudden noises and movements, or unfamiliar sights and sounds, by leaping quickly away and running as fast as they can. That's why almost any horse can be unpredictable and should be approached with caution on the road.

Most of the horses that you see on the roadside are well used to cars, trucks and people, so chances are that they'll walk or trot along calmly without getting worried about passing traffic. But on the chance that a horse's deep-rooted instincts suddenly take over when a bird flies out from a bush or a dog barks from behind a fence, motorists should always pass SLOW and WIDE, and take care not to awaken those instincts by making sudden or loud noises, or throwing things out the window.

Kat adds that not making noise can sometimes be just as much of a problem. Bicycles approach almost silently, often with the rider hunched over the handlebars. A mountain lion stalks its prey in a silent crouch, so it's little wonder that the sudden appearance of a cyclist, especially from behind, can panic a horse! The solution? Speak up! Horses are familiar with and unafraid of humans, so just a few spoken (not shouted) words of warning when approaching, a simple "Good morning!" or "Lovely day!" will assure the horse you don't intend to attack. If the horse seems anxious, or if the rider asks, be prepared to stop or to dismount and walk past.

Pedestrians should also speak up, and let the horse see you. It's a mistake to step off the trail behind a tree, as if you were planning an ambush. And dog walkers, make sure your dog is on a leash. A frightened horse can kick fast and hard with no warning, so for your own protection, you and your dog should give any strange horse a wide berth.

Andrea says that most people on Bowen are aware of how to behave around horses, but with so many visitors and off-island workers coming to Bowen, it's everyone's responsibility to help educate and set a good example.

Horse Council BC has made some information cards available to BIHORA to distribute in the community. Look for them in your mailbox this month.

Enjoy the road, stay safe!

For more information about BIHORA, please visit their website at www.bihora.org

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