

Summertime and Horses and Safety

Summertime and horses seem to go together, and safety should go with them, says a University of Maryland horse specialist.

The hazy, lazy days of summer are wonderful for working and playing with horses, says Dr. Edwin E. Goodwin, Extension livestock specialist, but they sometimes lull a young horseman into careless handling of his animal.

Basic safety rules are mostly common "horse sense" and young horsemen should practice safety until it becomes a habit.

Horses usually reflect the attitude of their owner or handler. If you are cautious, but deliberate around your horse, he is likely to be careful about his actions as well. If you are kind and gentle, but firm, your horse will soon come to know what you expect and will respond. You must develop this kind of understanding before you can train a horse or before you can expect

to get the best performance from him, Dr. Goodwin explains.

Unexpected noises, loud shouting or rough handling may make your horse nervous and jumpy causing him to react without warning. This is not only annoying, but can actually be dangerous to the rider and the horse as well.

Loose fitting or flapping equipment can cause unexpected reactions from your horse, also, Dr. Goodwin says. Many accidents result from poorly maintained or poorly adjusted tack. You should check the reins and saddle girth every time before you ride. If either is weak, broken or rotted, it should be replaced. Broken reins or saddle girths can result in a runaway horse and an injured rider.

In working around horses, make all your movements calm and deliberate. Be sure the horse knows where you are before you approach or touch him. If your horse is used to your being in the stall with him, you can usually safely approach him from any angle. But if you suddenly walk up behind him and touch him, he may kick before he realizes it is you.

Speak softly and kindly to the horse before you touch him.

Most horses respond better if you rub them on the shoulder and neck before you take hold of the nose or ears to halter or bridle them.

After you have caught and bridled the horse, run your hands gently down the forelegs and along the belly to let him know you don't intend him any harm. After a while he will come to expect and enjoy the touch of your hands on his body.

To lead your horse away from the barn, hold the reins or lead shank about a foot or 18 inches from the chin. If you hold too close to the horse's head, he will sometimes fidget and you will not have good control of the animal.

Lead from the left side, and never from directly in front of the horse, a sudden noise could cause him to bump into you. If necessary, you can teach your horse to keep to your right, off your feet, by putting your elbow out to bump his shoulder when he wanders too close.

Be sure you have "headroom" when you mount. Watch out for low tree limbs and barn doors.

Ride your horse away from the barn, but lead him back—for the first few times—and never let him run wildly toward the stall. In this way, he does not learn to be a "barn sou".

When you return to the barn, be sure you stop him briefly before allowing him to go into the stall, if he gets into a habit of rushing into the stall, he may dig you against the door posts and injure you.

If you are riding with others,

try to remember to give your friends plenty of room. Don't crowd each other. Keep at least one horse length between animals on a trail or in the ring.

If safety becomes a habit both you and your horse will still be enjoying each other at the end of the summer, Dr. Goodwin concludes.



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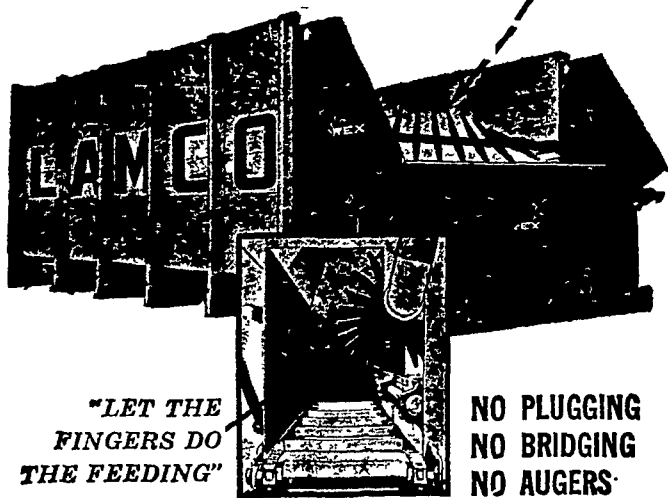
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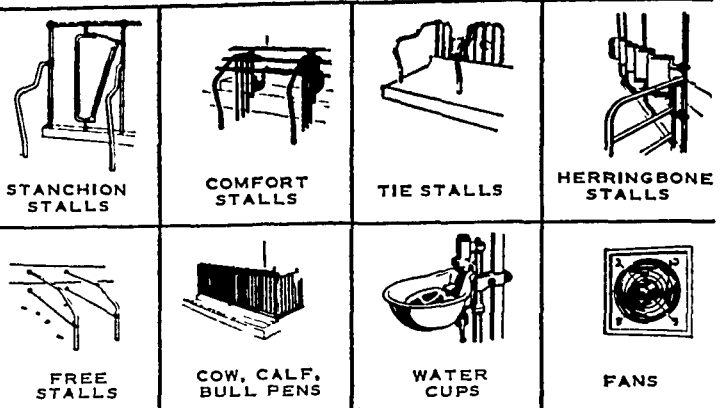
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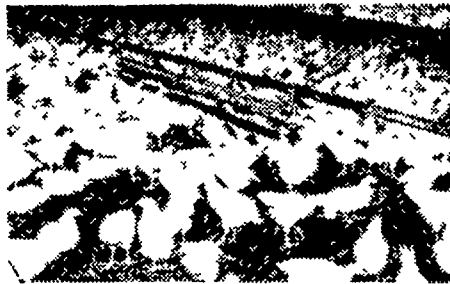
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