

EQUINE FASHION

The Right Fit

By Karen Elizabeth Baril

We all know how important wearing a helmet is, but making sure the helmet fits properly is just as important.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, out of all kinds of injury, those related to the brain are most likely to result in death or permanent disability. That's serious enough for most of us to strap on a helmet, but just as important as wearing your helmet is getting a good fit. And, while a helmet that is properly fitted will be comfortable, comfort alone does not guarantee a good fit.

“Everyone’s head is unique,” says Danielle Santos, Director of Marketing and Public Relations at Charles Owen & Co. “Getting a helmet that fits your head is important to your safety.”

Santos recommends visiting your local tack shop and trying on several helmets to find one that fits the shape of your head. “Helmets should fit snug all the way around,” says Santos. “You should be able to feel the helmet making contact all the way around your head. There should be no gaps that will allow side-to-side or front-to-back movement, or conversely, no uncomfortable pressure points. Similar to a pair of shoes that fit well, a properly fitted helmet will feel snug and secure.”

Michael Diamond of English Riding Supply notes that a helmet should not only fit well, but it should also feel stable on your head and not rock or feel unbalanced. “Even if the balance does not affect the security of the helmet, it can create a sense of being unbalanced for the rider, which can be also be a safety issue,” says Diamond.

The chinstrap should also fit snugly. “When adjusted correctly, you should be able to slide one to two fingers between your neck and the strap,” says Santos. “It should feel snug, while still allowing you to talk comfortably.”

Get the adjustment right on the chinstrap first, and then snug down the back of the harness. The harness strap should fall just under your ear lobe. It should be adjusted so that the helmet “hugs” your head. When the harness is right, the chinstrap will fall beneath the chin, not under the throat.

Once you have an idea of the size, you’ll try on several helmets while the fitter properly adjusts each one for a snug fit. Diamond notes that when trying on a helmet, consider how you

A Personal Story

Karen E. Baril

When my husband first started riding, his *big* idea included a western saddle and the hat to match. The image was appealing to me as well. Dave looks great in a broad-brimmed western hat. And, let’s face it, cowboys are hot. But, I’m a realist. I know our heads need protection no matter what style of riding we love. It’s all the same to our heads. A fall is a fall.

Like most accidents, Dave’s was unexpected. The day was sunny, the trail familiar, and there was no wind. Chances of a spook were slim. But, as we climbed up a steep, rocky section of our home trail, I heard a loud crack! A hefty tree limb split from an old oak and crash-landed just a few feet in front of Dave and his horse. Dave’s horse spun and bolted.

Maybe if the terrain had been a little less rough, Dave could have stuck the ride, but as it was, he fell hard, face first on a flat rock. His body went absolutely still. He was out for several minutes, what seemed like an eternity. When he woke, he was disoriented and confused. But, he was more fortunate than most. His helmet had taken the brunt of his fall; the shell cracking under the impact.

The repercussions were few, considering...a concussion and a very battered body, all things Dave could recover from, given time. Even so, three years later, he still has no recollection of the event.

There are all kinds of excuses for not wearing a helmet. “They’re not comfortable.” “They’re not part of the discipline attire.” “They don’t look fashionable.” If you’re reading this article, you’re either a fan or you’re thinking of becoming one. Do it. If Dave hadn’t had his helmet on that day, he simply would not have survived to ride another day. It’s really that simple.

are going to wear your hair. Whether you wear your hair down or up will affect the fit. "To make sure the helmet is secure, grab it with both hands and twist and turn. The helmet shouldn't turn side to side, fall off, or change positions," says Diamond.

Santos reminds readers that a helmet is an investment, both financially and in safety. Proper care will ensure the helmet's integrity lasts up to four or five years.

"Care for your helmet like you would your head," says Santos. "Don't toss it in the trunk of your car, leave it out in extreme heat or cold, or otherwise mistreat it. You wouldn't do that with your head; don't do it with your helmet! Try not to lend it out, as your helmet molds to your head shape for the best fit, and remember to replace your helmet every four to five years or if you've experienced a fall." Diamond reiterates the importance of replacing a helmet after a fall. He says that a fall of any type warrants a new helmet, no matter the severity.

A helmet is meant to protect your entire head in a fall. A fitted helmet reduces your chances of sustaining a brain injury. It's important to get it right. ■

Helmet Awareness Day

By Karen E. Baril

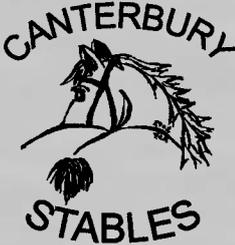
The online educational Helmet Awareness Campaign, Riders4Helmets, began as a small fundraiser, an effort to support dressage rider Courtney King-Dye. Dye suffered a traumatic brain injury in March 2010, when the horse she was riding tripped.

"I wanted to do something to help Courtney and provide education on helmet use as well," says Lyndsey White of Riders4Helmets. Although Lyndsey's grass-roots organization began small, it quickly gained momentum. The first National Helmet Awareness Day was held on July 10, 2010, and attracted participation from over 300 equestrian retailers. Last year the event went "global" as more and more people became interested. International Helmet Awareness Day, held on June 11, 2011, drew more than 500 retailers, eight manufacturers, equestrian organizations and top competitors. The official date for this year's Helmet Awareness Day had not been announced as of press time (although it will be during the summer of 2012), but be sure to visit www.riders4helmets.com for the latest information.

"I'm really excited about this year's event," says Lyndsey. "Riding groups and organizations can get involved even on the local level. We've got trail riding groups that plan a group ride to celebrate the day. Lesson barns, 4-H groups, Pony Clubs, breed clubs, everyone can get involved."

Chad Mendell, former executive editor of *The Horse*, has brought a wealth of marketing and media skills to the campaign. "This year, we'll have videos, live webinars (that can be downloaded for later use), another safety symposium and newsletters," says Lyndsey. "And, of course, we have a Facebook page with nearly 7,000 campaign supporters and Twitter!" says Lyndsey.

Visit www.riders4helmets.com for more information on how to celebrate International Helmet Awareness Day with your riding group.



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