

NO FLINGING, WHIPLASH, BITING OR KICKING

By Pete Dillingham

Our winter hibernation is over.....Spring has sprung! New life flourishes, long forgotten colors display brilliance and the season's warmth brings us all out the "woodwork". This time of year also marks the beginning of many wonderful hours of riding for horse lovers....but if safe and courteous riding guidelines aren't observed, than a "dream come true" can become a nightmare. The rules for safe riding apply to experienced as well as novice riders. Here are some tips to help those many miles in the saddle be a great experience for every posse.

1. **No biting or kicking!** I know, you're saying "How in the heck can I keep a critter who is used to living in a 'pecking order world' from 'throwing a leg' or 'chomping' on his neighbor?". In the saddle or in the herd, a horse will not get bite or kick without first giving a couple warnings (flashing of tail, pointing it's ugly nose and/or laying back it's ears at the intended victim). If a rider can keep it's horse's head pointed strait down the trail, the rascal can't give dirty looks and will have difficulty seeing a target to hit with a hoof. When a horse flashes it's tail at the horse behind it, **BUMP** the culprit firmly with both legs....this reprimand only works if the rider uses a squeeze (not a bump) when asking a horse to go forward. It's also wise to follow a "horse's distance" behind the next rider. If a rider feels that they can't keep their steed form kicking, put a ribbon on the horse's tail to give others warning.
2. **No whiplash.** "What in tarnation does 'whiplash' got to do with riding?" Have you ever seen a group of riders moving "easy" down the trail, when all of a sudden two yawhoos head off in a galloping race? Suddenly you got a whole herd is raising dust. The critters left behind might be thinking that there is something "horse-eating" on their tales. That's how a bunch of riders get mild to severe cases of whiplash! Now a Kentucky Durby can be fun, but a little warning to other riders is just plain safe courtesy. If some riders want to go slow, median, or fast, break into smaller groups with some experienced rider hanging back with the more cautious riders.
3. **No limb flinging!** Boy, nothing cans stings like a branch clutched to long by the rider ahead. When they finally let it fly, you feel like you've been slapped by your Mama! The motivation for this slingshot is always courtesy. The rider in front thinks that they are going to hold that annoying branch until the rider behind passes the limb zone. It never happens. The lead rider gets stretch out like a rubber band and everyone sees the problem to late. You make more friends by lifting the branch over your head and quickly letting it go!
4. **Extras.** 1) When exploring uncharted territories, lead riders should make others aware of hazards. Rotted out stump holes, thorny vines, and long forgotten fence lines have a way of popping out of nowhere. 2) When passing another rider and horse, give a warning. If the passing lane is on one side, the rider being passed should tip their horse's nose to the other side to avoid any horse arguments. 3) When traveling in a posse that has horses with different "speed controls", put faster horses near front and slower critters near back to avoid rear end collisions.

Horseback riding and nature fit together like a "hand in a glove". The adventures, friendships and memories from safe trail riding can last a lifetime.....if we show concern and care for our fellow riders.