

# Horse sense is often common sense

By Wendy Thomson  
In many counties in Ontario, the horse population is on the upswing as more and more people acquire them in all shapes and sizes for breeding, showing, or just plain riding.

Every Sunday when the weather's good, dozens of riders take to the back country roads to get relief from the tedium of travelling in circles in their own back pasture. Almost every rider who has taken a horse out on a road has had at least one unpleasant experience—and sometimes many more—due to the fact that most motorists are entirely unaware that horses do have rights on the road.

From my own experience while riding, I've noted there are four kinds of motorists. The first is the mouthy type. As he comes level with the horse, he either leans on the horn, or winds down the window and shouts something (usually unprintable.) Would anyone in their right mind go up behind a golfer just as he's about to start his swing and shout obscenities in his ear? In all likelihood, the loud-mouth would end up with a golf-ball in his mouth and a club wrapped around his neck. Which is as it should be. But why do it to riders? To them, riding is a most enjoyable sport; they don't like riding on the roads but often must to get to fields and trails.

The second type of driver has to prove the superiority of the car by gunning it as he passes, and either frightening the horse enough to make it bolt or rear, or putting them both in the

ditch. The rider is too busy getting his mount under control to get the licence number and lay charges. In my opinion, the "superiority" of the car is in direct ratio to the intelligence of the driver. In this case, the horse comes out way in front.

The third driver is, to me, the worst. For some reason, it's often either a family man with a back seat full of youngsters, or a guy taking his girl for a drive. The men seem totally oblivious to the presence of 1000 pounds plus of horse, and drive straight on down the middle of the road without slowing down, looking neither left nor right.

When a car comes this close and fast, to the thinking of a horse it is a potential enemy, and his first reaction is to get his defences ready. This means swinging his hindquarters toward the car in readiness to kick. This may end in a collision between the two. The driver is ahead, physically he has the car between himself and the horse.

The rider has only himself between the car and the horse. There are few motorists in the fourth category, those who pass a horse and rider correctly, that is, carefully, quietly, and SLOWLY, stopping if need be. Farmers, police, and horseowners, all of whom have knowledge of the unpredictability of horses (and other farm animals) on the road, often prefer to stop and let the rider go past before continuing on, whether the horse seems skittish or not. I silently bless

these drivers whenever we meet them.

If you have an active dislike for horses, think they're an old-fashioned idiosyncrasy that is best ignored, or have anti-horse feelings of any kind and take it out on them on the road, you may be liable for a fine of up to \$200, imprisonment for up to 30 days, plus suspension of your driver's permit for up to 6 months.

According to the Ontario Highway Traffic Act, any vehicle whether it be car, motorcycle, bicycle, or tricycle, overtaking a horse and rider must pull over to the far left when passing and leave the horse one half the road. When approaching and passing a horse coming toward them, they must pull to the right and leave half the road free. A driver must operate his car in such a manner as to prevent frightening the horse, and to ensure the safety of the person riding or leading the horse.

Where portable or traction engines (farm machinery and such) are met on the road, the driver of the engine must pull over if he can, and stop if asked to do so till the horse is past. The person in charge of such an engine must see that it makes no noise by whistling or otherwise when any horse or animal is passing or near.

There are "musts" for the rider, as well. If there is any damage done by his animal to shrubs, trees, poles, lights, signs, sod, or other highway property, he must report it to the police. If a horse-drawn sleigh is in

use, it must have at least two bells attached to the harness. No person shall race or furiously drive any horse on the roads. If a person, through drunkenness, is unable to ride with safety to other persons on the roadway, but does so, he is liable for a fine and imprisonment.

Finally, a rider must allow a passing car half of the road. This is where some riders fall down. In pure self-defence, they stay in the middle of the road until they come to a drive where they can get right off the roadway. They have no way of knowing which kind of driver is approaching and are simply trying to play it the safest way they can for all concerned.

A motorist asks "Why don't you just stay off the road?"  
A horseman answers "Why should we? We were there first!"



EVEN THE BEST trained horse will shy when a motor vehicle passes too close on the road. Writer Wendy Thomson demonstrates on her own horse. (Staff Photo)

## OBITUARY

### Mrs. A.F. Love dies in London

Mrs. A. F. Love, the former Eva Perryman, passed away in London May 12 in her 87th year. She had been in hospital for the past three years.

### Deer dies

A young deer was killed in a collision with a car on 15 Sideroad near Speyside Sunday evening. The car driven by Douglas William Thomson, R.R. 2, Rockwood, received \$75 damage.

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GIVE THREE BOYS a warm spring day, a plank and a mill pond and you'll have a very wet situation. Gerald Barden, twin brother Gary and Bob Jackson of Eden Mills went for their first dip of the year last Wednesday in the mill pond in the village to cool off. (Photo by Jim Jennings)



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