

Horses Are from Neptune

Bikes Are from Pluto

Rude People Are from Uranus

During my teenage years, I spent nearly every day at the barn riding and grooming my horse to perfection. I traveled long distances for a show, or to visit a tack shop to peruse and buy something as little as horse treats. A horse insignia was on everything important to me...socks, trapper keeper, pencils, and a myriad of other valuables. Rain made me sad if it meant missing out on a day of riding. One day while waiting at a red light on my way home from a horse show, I saw a cyclist across the street straddling his top tube, also waiting for the light to turn green. My trainer said, "Damn, look at those thighs," while I was amazed and asked if you can get muscles like that horseback riding. Her reply: "I doubt it." And so began my fascination with biking and my quest to reduce the jiggle in my thighs.

A few years ago I spent Easter Sunday putting together a new bike. Every major holiday, bike related items fill my list. I drive far to bike, ride in extreme conditions, and chances are pretty good that if someone is in my life, they are interested in biking to some extent. I revolve my weekends and vacations around biking. My point is this: equestrians and cyclists are the same – we are both very passionate about our hobbies, both spend enormous amounts of time and money on our hobbies, and we both meet up on common ground to enjoy our hobbies. Oh, and we both like carrots and sugar cubes, so you see, we are more alike than you realize, yet much conflict exists between us. Let's face it, horses have been spooked by cyclists and equestrians have gotten hurt. Cyclists have all ridden through mounds of manure, and some of us have been yelled at by equestrians. And, boy, we all have heard the argument about who does more damage to the trails. I hope with some understanding, the relationship between equestrians and cyclists will improve.

A Bit About Horses:

Each horse has an individual disposition, just as humans do, from blasé to hotheaded. Horses see, hear, and smell much more acutely than humans do. They are a prey species, cautious and scared, approaching things as harmful until proven otherwise. They protect themselves by biting, kicking, and running. Horses have a very large field of vision, but they do have blind spots between their eyes, directly behind them, and under their nose. Being herd animals, if one horse spooks and runs, the rest of the herd takes this as a sign of danger, following the spooked horse to safety. When a horse reacts to a potential threat, it is often instinctual, not a result of their owner's inability to control their animal.

We all cannot be experts on animal behavior, but we can learn from our experiences. An experienced equestrian from northern New Jersey has been actively involved in the horse community for thirty years. While riding one day with her friend, they had several unpleasant encounters with cyclists. The first triggered her friend's horse to buck while the cyclist rode off oblivious to the fact that rider was left on the ground with multiple pelvic fractures. As the woman moved her friend's horse to the side of the trail to prevent any further injury, another cyclist rode right up behind the horse and was extremely rude, stating his disapproval of the horse on the trail. They tried to talk to him, but he stated since he does not have a horse, he does not need to know the rules. There was not even a chance to warn the cyclist or explain anything before his verbal attack. The cyclist rode off while other people gathered to help, waiting for the EMS to arrive. **Despite horrifying experiences, equestrians are eager to build relationships with cyclists with hopes to prevent future injuries from occurring.**

If you've ever had a bad trail user experience (or heard of a horror story), you can understand why these two worlds tend to be defensive when they encounter each other on trail. However, we can improve our trail experience and prevent potential injury through *simple respect* for the other trail users you encounter. Although avid cyclists tend to know the rules and practice them, the newer cyclist may not have been exposed to the rules. This is where your peers can help teach and make responsible trail users out of the new cyclist. In that light, and in order to better understand each other, let's look at the common (mis)perceptions and responsibilities of equestrians and of cyclists.

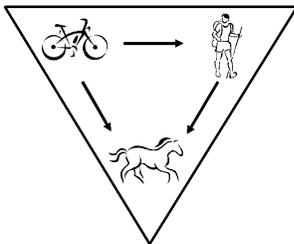
Cyclists' Perception Towards Equestrians:	Equestrians' Perception Towards Cyclists:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equestrians are rude and anger easily. Often cyclists are in a zone, turn a corner, and there is a horse! By the time we realize you are there, you are already angered and yelling. • Cyclists do not enjoy riding through manure, clogging our tires with it, or having it fly up to hit us in the face. At the very least, manure should not be left in the lot. • Equestrians do not participate in trail maintenance.* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyclists are rude, disrespectful, and ride up quickly behind horses without warning. • Cyclists do not understand the multi-use trail yield sign. • Cyclists do not understand that equine digestion causes frequent elimination. If you come across a pile here or there, bunny hop it.
Equestrians' Responsibility:	Cyclists' Responsibility:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owners can and should do their best to desensitize their horses if they plan to take them on the trails. At the barn, mimic threatening trail encounters by walking your horse up to a bike, then have someone ride a bike up to your horse. Take the horse to the trail and do the same thing, gradually increasing the speed of approach and amount of noise. Spend as much time as needed doing this on the ground with your horse before you try this mounted. Take responsibility for training your horse and do not ride an animal you do not feel safe on. • Turn and move to the side of the trail if cyclists come up behind you so the cyclist can be seen by your horse. • Ask cyclist to stop if they do not on their own. • Dismount if necessary to protect yourself from being thrown. • Be polite and communicate with cyclists about your horse's behavior and how to pass safely because you know best how your horse will react. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your eyes open for horses. • If coming up on a horse from behind, verbally let them know you are approaching. Do not ring bells or squeal brakes as this can scare a horse. • If approaching head-on, stop. • Ask the equestrian how to proceed and offer to dismount. • While approaching, talk to the horse. Remember, they are afraid and hearing your voice means you are a human and humans, after all, supply food and treats. • Keep in mind that with years of training, a horse can still spook and hurt themselves, their owner, and cyclists. • Ask before you pet a horse. Remember, they do have blind spots below their nose and between their eyes, the two areas we are inclined to reach our hands out to.

* Some equestrians have indicated that they don't participate in trail maintenance because a) horses cannot remain tied up without supervision while their owners work, and b) weekends are the only time they have to ride on the trails. I do understand and respect this point of view, but the same is true of cyclists: when we participate in trail maintenance, we are giving up ride time too, and for many of us, the weekends are the only time we can ride. Although we can lean a bike against a tree at a trail work session, often, we leave our bikes home, or if we do bring our bikes, we get so wrapped up in working

that we do not allow time to ride afterwards. Trail maintenance sessions are typically scheduled in 3-4 hour blocks of time, but volunteers are not obligated to stay the whole time unless they choose to. Finally, trail work is scheduled nearly every weekend (and some weeknights) at various parks which makes it easier for anyone to participate.

What We Can All Do:

- Be polite to encourage positive relationships. Making eye contact and smiling certainly helps. People are always more receiving of kindness than a person who is hostile and defensive.
- Be patient and willing to move aside. It may be necessary to find a wider spot on the trail before passing.
- Communicate what you can do or what you need the other person to do.
- Both of our sports are fun, but remember there is an inherent risk for injury that comes with our sport when riding solo, crossing paths with anyone we encounter, or even crossing paths with a tree. Each of us is responsible for doing our best to be safe.
- Learn the meaning of the multi-use trail yield sign:



- Cyclists yield to hikers and equestrians.
- Hikers yield to equestrians

There *are* rude equestrians and cyclists, but that is not enough reason to assume all are rude. If you have an unpleasant encounter on the trail, recognize that it is in isolation. On your next encounter, try to be open-minded by greeting giant quadrupeds with a smile and friendly words. I have been biking for nearly eighteen years, “bumping into” many horses, and to this day I have had very pleasant interactions with them. I just wish one would take me serious when I ask to swap our mode of transportation for the day! Hopefully with efforts to co-exist peacefully, we will “bump into” each other more because in the end, there *is* enough room for horses and bikes on the trail.