Did you know an average horse weighs 1,000 pounds?

That's enough to write off your vehicle if you hit it, never mind the possibility of injuring or killing the rider, the horse, or even yourself.

With increased development in rural areas and the reduction of off-road trails, motorists are more likely than ever to encounter a horse rider on the roadway. According to Manitoba's *Highway Traffic Act*, horse riders and drivers of horse-drawn carriages have the same right to use the road and must follow the same rules.

It is the responsibility of both the rider and motorists to help share the road safely. While riders seek proper training for themselves and their horses to ride with traffic, drivers must also obey the law and take precautions. However, the average motorist is not familiar with horses and may not understand that these living creatures are unpredictable and easily startled.

Whether operating a passenger vehicle, truck, agricultural equipment, snowmobile, ATV or bicycle, it's important to learn how to safely share the road with horses. Your actions behind the wheel can help prevent a dangerous situation.

Manitoba Horse Council

Produced by Manitoba Horse Council, the not-for-profit organization representing people involved in equine activity in Manitoba, and CAA Manitoba. Also thank you to Manitoba Public Insurance for their input.

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Manitoba Horse Council
Manitoba Recreational Riders

SHARING
THE ROAD WITH
HORSES

WHAT'S THE CODE?

PASS WIDE AND SLOW

RULES OF THE ROAD

Horse riders and drivers of horse-drawn carriages must travel on the road, in the direction of traffic, and not on the shoulder.

Although riders have the same rights as a vehicle to use the road, a rider must keep to the extreme right-hand lane where the roadway has two or more lanes, or as close as possible to the edge or curb of the roadway.

Road or shoulder?

When a horse rider is on the shoulder of a road, they are signaling to motorists that they are yielding the road and the vehicle may pass.

However, if a rider is having difficulty, or has an inexperienced or unsure horse, legally they may remain on the roadway indicating their possession of the right-of-way in the right-hand lane. This encourages vehicles to pass in the left-hand lane when safe to do so. If a rider has to ride on the shoulder, they should stay as far away from the traffic as possible.

A rider leading a horse becomes a pedestrian and is required to use a sidewalk if available. Otherwise they may walk on the left-hand edge of the roadway or shoulder.

SAFETY TIPS FOR SHARING THE ROAD

Follow a few simple steps to share the road safely with horse riders and carriage drivers:

- Slow right down and be prepared to stop when approaching a horse and rider or carriage driver – on either side of the road.
- Do not follow closely and rev your engine if it is not safe to pass.
- When safe to do so, pass wide (at least one car's width) and slow.
- Do not blow your horn at any time around horses – this can startle the animal and put everyone at risk.
- Accelerate gently when you have passed.
- Allow plenty of distance between yourself and the horse before returning to your lane.
- Prepare to stop and wait if the rider is having trouble controlling the horse.

ADDITIONAL TIPS:

Passing horse-trailers: Horse trailers can be slow-moving and unwieldy, especially if the horses inside are moving around. The centre of gravity is higher than a regular trailer and therefore can be more difficult to steer.

They are also slower to come to a halt and pull away at intersections. Please take extra care near a horse trailer.

Horse-drawn carriages: Carriage drivers will display either a reflecting triangle or an operating flashing amber light at the rear of the carriage. Please pass wide and slow.

Riders in a group: Riders should ride single file in small groups. When crossing a road, riders are advised to wait until everyone is ready and cross as a unit, stopping in a line along the road and waiting for the person in charge to give the signal to cross.

Groups of riders often contain children who may have more difficulty controlling the horse. Please be patient and allow the group to cross in a safe manner. Do not speed past when they have crossed as it may take a moment for the group to get back into a safe formation.

Motorbike/ATV/dirt bike/snowmobile riders: The size of your vehicle and the noise of the exhaust can be extremely alarming to a horse, especially if you are off-road. Follow the same rules as other vehicles, but take extra precautions when approaching and passing.

Cyclists: Bicycles can be particularly frightening to horses because there is no noise and the rider is often hunched over the handlebars in a predatory position. To alleviate these issues, sit up in your seat and talk to the horse rider. If the horse begins to appear nervous, stop and wait until the rider is back in control of the animal.

HAND SIGNALS USED BY HORSE RIDERS

Horses and riders must yield, stop and signal the same as any road user. The same hand signals required for cyclists are used by equestrians.

LEFT TURN:
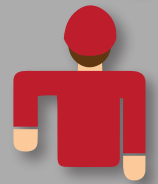Extend left arm straight out in the direction of the turn.

RIGHT TURN:
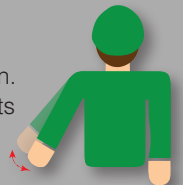Extend left arm out and angled upwards with open palm.

STOPPING:
Extend left arm out and angled downwards with open palm.

In addition, there are other signals that a horse rider may use to speak to an approaching motorist:

PLEASE SLOW DOWN:
Arm extended with open palm, and gesturing with a slow pumping action. This signal is used to advise motorists that they need to slow down when approaching and attempting to pass the horse.

PLEASE STOP:
Arm extended to front, hand up with open palm. Used to get the attention of the motorist quickly and ask them to stop when the horse is frightened.

Note: Horses are unpredictable. A rider on a young or frightened horse may not be able to signal as they work to calm the animal and keep it under control. Please stop if you see this is the case.