



# Introduction to Horseback Riding

## *Frequently Asked Questions*



Horseback Riding is wonderful sport for exercise, recreation, and competition, and with a wide variety of disciplines available it can be enjoyed for a lifetime. Plus it doesn't have to be expensive!

### ***English or Western?***

English riding involves Eventing, Jumping, Hunting, Dressage, Polo, and Thoroughbred Horse Racing. Western riding focuses on Reining, Endurance Riding, and Rodeo disciplines that have historically developed from working ranches.

Though the differences in equipment and apparel appear dramatic, fewer differences between "English" and "Western" riding exist than most people think. Both styles require riders to have a solid seat, with the hips and shoulders balanced over the feet, with hands independent of the seat so as to avoid jerking the horse in the mouth and interfering with its performance.

### ***Age?***

Riding can be enjoyed by anyone, of any ability, regardless of age. We can all remember pony rides as a child! For adults, it's never too late to learn, and provides excellent health and fitness benefits.

However, for a young child to ride on their own requires a basic amount of strength, and the ability to focus to an instructor for a minimum of one hour. Please don't forget we are dealing with an animal with a mind of its own that needs to be controlled for an extended period of time! For this reason, summer riding camp is a great introduction for children. Daily rides, plus a full week of farm and horse exposure, provides a good base for the fundamentals of riding and safety. With our experienced staff and counselors, the camp is suitable for children turning seven during the same calendar year, up to fifteen.

However, without the experience gained from summer riding camp, we recommend that children signing up for weekly lessons be a minimum of turning eight years old. You may find other farms willing to accept younger students, but we don't believe your child will be getting the best value.

### ***What are the best options for beginners?***

Summer Riding Camps are a fabulous introduction to horses and children can learn the basics of riding and care of horses in a fun environment. Campers ride every day, and are immersed in equestrian and stable activities for a week, reinforcing important fundamentals and safety. Whitchurch Riding Academy's Summer Riding Camp is accredited with the Ontario Camping Association, which monitors and audits camps for safety with over 400 regulations: [www.ontariocamps.ca](http://www.ontariocamps.ca)

Our riding school operates all year long, and can help you master the basics and introduce you to the wide variety of disciplines. At every level students compete in local schooling shows and can eventually advance to international events. Joining the Whitchurch Pony Club is great way to pursue excellence in riding and horsemanship. We are a local chapter of the Canadian Pony Club (an international organization with universal standards and testing): [www.canadianponyclub.org](http://www.canadianponyclub.org)

### ***Physical Benefits?***

Horse riding is a great form of exercise which has both cardiovascular and muscle conditioning benefits. Although it may seem as though the rider is not engaging in any physical exercise, an hour's activity can burn similar calories to that of a 30-minute jog (6mph) or cycle ride (9mph). All the health benefits associated with engaging in regular cardiovascular exercise are gained.

After your first ride you may feel muscles that you never knew you had! As the rider reacts to the horse's movements, the deep postural muscles of the trunk and pelvis, and the adductor muscles of the thighs, are continuously being conditioned.

### ***Psychological Benefits?***

Horse riding is recognised as having excellent therapeutic qualities. The psychological benefits can be of equal importance to riders as the physical benefits. Simply being outdoors and enjoying the countryside will boost your general well-being and act as a great stress buster. There is a real sense of exhilaration and freedom when you ride, a wonderful feeling that is second to none.

Furthermore, developing a relationship and sense of trust between yourself and your horse is highly rewarding. Learning to control and care for an animal much larger than yourself builds confidence and self-assurance.

### ***Equipment?***

To start, a few basics are needed:

- ASTM Approved Helmet
- Boots with a heel (*initially rubber rain boots will do*)
- Comfortable pants with a bit of stretch (*avoid jeans*)

Other items can be purchased as you progress, and make ideal presents: Riding crop, gloves, breeches, riding boots, grooming kit, saddle pad, and lead shank, just to name a few.

### ***Choosing a stable?***

It is essential to visit the farm, speak with the instructor, and watch a lesson in progress. There are many backyard operations that are not accredited, or qualified. Some things to look for:

- Is the stable and riding area uncluttered and safely maintained?
- Are the horses well cared for? Shiny coats, well fed, clean stalls?
- Are riding helmets and boots worn by all riders in the lesson?
- Do saddles and bridles look clean and in good repair?
- What is the main focus of the farm? Riding school, boarding stable, breeding farm?

### ***Instructor?***

Instructors and qualifications can vary widely. Some have attained formal coaching levels, while others have worked through the stringent levels of the Canadian Pony Club, and still others have years of coaching and have attained high levels of show experience. It can be confusing, and you will find no fixed standard, and each approach can be completely acceptable. Be sure to thoroughly investigate the teaching experience of the instructors, the temperament of the horses, and the safety record and reputation of the riding school. It's important to visit, and watch a lesson:

- Is the instructor clear in their teaching?
- Does the lesson fit the student's ability?
- Does the instructor have complete control of the class? Of the horses?
- Are they putting a priority on safety?
- Plus, it has to be fun!

### ***Cost?***

To suit various budget and skill levels Whitchurch Riding Academy offers a variety of group, semi-private, and private lessons, plus introductory lessons and summer riding camp. All prices are in line with other qualified establishments, and are published on our website.