

With Regards to Certified Riding Helmets, this Document covers the following:

- WHY SHOULD YOU WEAR A CERTIFIED RIDING HELMET ?
- WHY WEAR A HELMET CERTIFIED TO PASS INDEPENDENT STANDARDS ?
- SELECTING AND FITTING ASTM/SEI HELMETS

#### **WHY SHOULD YOU WEAR A CERTIFIED RIDING HELMET ?**

Riding is a wonderful sport, but it does carry an element of risk. Medical studies over the years have shown us some surprising things. Horseback riding carries a higher injury rate per hour of exposure than many other sports. This includes downhill ski racing, football, hang-gliding and motorcycle racing.

The age of the rider, number of years of experience, natural ability, and degree of expertise cannot and do not prevent riding accidents. Rider deaths in falls were caused by jumping in 23% of the cases; the rest occurred standing still, or at the walk, trot, canter and gallop. The most dangerous horse activity is riding for pleasure, based on numbers of participants injured.

The most common serious riding accidents affect the head; with the expanded use of the ASTM Standard SEI Certified helmets by riders under the age of 21, the largest group of head-injured riders has become ages 22 to 35. Many of the most serious injuries and deaths happen to riders older than 35.

Medical Examiner reports show that 60 % or more of horse-related deaths are caused by head injuries. Helmets can reduce this possibility by 70 to 80 %.

Repeated blows to the head can cause cumulative damage to the brain; each new accident expands the original damage. Unlike arms and legs, the brain cannot recover 100% from an injury. A serious head injury can quickly use all of a person's health insurance. The most catastrophic of these average a cost of \$4,000,000, plus a lifetime of suffering for both the injured person and his or her family.

#### **WHY WEAR A HELMET CERTIFIED TO PASS INDEPENDENT STANDARDS ?**

Although we know that no helmet can protect against every kind of blow, helmets made to ASTM F 1163 have been tested extensively in independent facilities, and have been certified by the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) to meet or exceed the standard. Over twenty five years of documentation has proven that they can prevent or minimize the damage caused by a blow to the head.

The manufacturers are constantly audited to be sure that their products continue to meet the standards. The standards are constantly being improved.

Certified helmets must show their date of manufacture so they can be replaced when needed. Their permanent labeling gives important information about their care and maintenance.

Certified helmets are available in many different styles and types, and in a broad range of sizes and prices. Not every rider will be comfortable in every model, and it may be necessary to try more than one to get the correct fit. The best way to do this is to visit a full service tack store which stocks more than one manufacturer's products.

Part of the SEI Certification process requires that the manufacturers provide liability insurance on their products. Helmets labeled "item of apparel only" do not have the same requirement, and their manufacturers do not consider them to offer any protection to a rider. Helmets made to other countries standards do not have an insurance requirement.

### **SELECTING AND FITTING ASTM/SEI HELMETS**

Riding helmets made to the ASTM F1163 standard and certified by the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) are considered to be the world's best head protection for horseback riders. Although no helmet can protect 100 per cent against every type of helmet injury, studies show a great reduction in both the number of injuries and the severity of injuries in those who use them every time they ride.

ASTM/SEI helmets come in a variety of types, and should be chosen for the type of horse sport the rider intends to enjoy. For English showing, a black velvet hunt cap type is always correct; for Western riding, there is a model covered with a traditional Western hat. Endurance, pleasure, and trail riders favor the ultra-light, ultra-ventilated soft shell models. For riding schools and hack stables, the light and ventilated hard shell schooling helmets are both popular and durable.

No helmet can do its job if it doesn't fit properly. It must be snug but not uncomfortably tight. Every ASTM/SEI manufacturer includes fitting and care instructions in the box with a new helmet or attached to the helmet. Insist on getting this when you buy one! Each model has special "tricks" for fitting, none of them difficult, but all of them important.

When selecting a helmet, make sure it has the SEI Seal on a permanent label inside. This may be hidden under a detachable liner which can be removed and washed/disinfected. The label will also show the date of manufacture. The practical life span of a helmet is five to six years...the manufacturer may specify.....so make sure what you buy has been made as recently as possible.

When a helmet fits correctly, it sits about an inch above the eyebrows, squarely on the head with the brim straight ahead. The harness must be fastened so there is direct firm contact with the jaw or chin, depending on the model and the manufacturer's instructions.

Most harnesses are adjustable on the sides or at the back with laces, velcro, straps, dials, or some other similar system. This should be adjusted to fit as closely to the head as possible with no gaps or lumps.

To check actual fit, place one hand on top of the helmet and rock it backward and forward, and side to side. The scalp should move with the helmet, which is shown by the eyebrows moving. Small fitting problems can be solved by following the manufacturer's instructions, usually by adding the foam padding which is provided with the helmet, or by adjusting the internal fit system . If the helmet needs more padding than is provided, a smaller size or different model is needed.

If buying helmets for a riding facility to loan, depending on the number riding at once you will probably need one of each available general size (XS, S, M, L, XL) and extras in the small and medium ranges. You should have models from at least two manufacturers since you will have much better fitting flexibility that way; all heads are not created equal!

Replacement on a regular basis should be part of your safety plan for a facility. Serious damage to a helmet cannot always be seen or felt. Most damage occurs between the outer shell and the inner line. Any helmet which has been in a hard fall should be inspected by the manufacturer or destroyed and replaced. Some manufacturers have a replacement policy, which is described with the owner's information and fitting guide. Make sure to keep your original sales receipt which may be used if needed for a replacement credit. Some of the signs of hard use in a helmet, and a need for replacement, are:

1. Harness pulling loose from the helmet
2. Squeeze clips with broken teeth
3. White helmets turning yellow
4. Black velvet helmets turning beige
5. Surface cracks, holes or dents
6. Chunks missing from the liner
7. Liner squashed down in places
8. Shell or liner cracked through

Here is a general safety reminder. After years of studies of horse-related accidents, the United States Pony Clubs' Safety Committee recommends that helmets be worn whenever working around horses, as well as when riding or driving a horse; grooming, leading, longeing, bandaging, loading, etc. This is especially important for children, whose heads may be at "cow-kick" height when working around ponies and horses.

Here's where to get help in finding helmets which meet your needs:

[www.seinet.org](http://www.seinet.org) (Click on Certified Products, Select "Equestrian Helmets")



Here is an example of the SEI seal, which is found on the permanent label inside ASTM/SEI helmets. It may be printed in any color.

Questions may be directed to New York State Horse Council Safety Chairman Dru Malavase at <mailto:drumalavase@hotmail.com> or at 2270 County Road 39 RD 2 Bloomfield, NY 14469. I can be reached at home at 716 657-7053 after 7:30 p.m. and on weekends