

Guests' Orientation For Their First Ride

Orientation time: _____ Place: _____

Orientation for all first-time guests. The presenter starts outside the corrals and talks. The orientation then moves into the corral for demonstration with horse and wrangler.

The Wider Program :

- Horseback riding
- Horseback riding instruction - posted on the list, and available upon request
- Grooming and saddling
- "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth" and roping - see your schedule

The Riding Routine :

- Sign-ups are posted each afternoon for the next day's rides.
- Note the time of your ride and show up here at the barn a few minutes early ready to ride.
- Wait outside the corrals until your ride is called, then move into the mounting area.
- A wrangler will prepare your horse, then call you over to store items in your saddle bags and mount.
- Your ride will depart as near to scheduled departure time as possible. Late riders join subsequent rides.
- When you return we will help you dismount, gather your things, and see you safely from the corrals.

Three components come together to make a safe and enjoyable ride: *Horses, Guests, and Wranglers.*

Horses

Horses are prey animals. We humans tend to have pets that are predators like ourselves - cats and dogs for example. Their behavior is understandable to us because we have a similar evolutionary background. Prey animals like horses are quite different. What question do you think occupies the mind of a prey animal most of the day? "Who or what is about to eat me?" This concern causes them to be ever vigilant and prepared to run away if they feel threatened. The source of the threat may be in their wider environment - like an animal or a bush - even something they have seen a hundred times. But the source of the problem can also come from the rider on their back. A calm balanced rider will likely not disturb the horse.

Horses are herd animals. Many prey animals find comfort and safety in numbers. When asked to leave the safety of their herd, our horses can become a bit nervous. It is up to us to remind them of their job - taking us for a ride. We need to provide them reassurance and ask them to continue on the ride. This might mean redirecting a horse that has turned his head back to his friends, or asking him to move on by applying pressure to his sides.

Horses maintain a social structure within their herd that we call a "pecking order." They dominate others by threatening, biting, and kicking. It usually starts with a very grumpy look and the pinning of ears. This social activity can be very interesting when it takes place in the pasture or in the corral behind us. But when it happens while we are on their backs it is a potentially dangerous situation. Luckily, horses are usually easily distracted from their pecking order issues. Not unlike people, they have a "zone of comfort". Simply moving your horse ahead, behind, to the left or to the right to separate him from the other horse is often enough to end the situation.

Guests (on the ground)

- **Be sober** - Alcohol or medications and horses do not mix! If you have had anything to drink or medications which effect your judgment or balance, please do not attempt to ride.
- **Gear up** - It is your responsibility to wear appropriate clothing and equipment. We highly recommend that you consider wearing a riding helmet when riding here on the ranch. We have helmets of all sizes available for use at no charge. You can ask any of us to help you select and size a helmet at any time. Appropriate footwear is also extremely important. Your clothes should be on your body or in a saddle bag - no tying loose clothing on.
- **Be in the right place** - Here at the picnic tables while waiting, at the water tank when waiting for your horse. Guests should never approach horses while tied to the hitching rail or to a fence. Horses are claustrophobic and need to be handled very carefully when tied. Please wait for a wrangler to invite you to approach your horse.
- **Be human around your horse** - Your movements should be predictably human and take place at a “normal” pace. Excited smaller children could appear to be a predator like a mountain lion.
- **Never abdicate responsibility for your own safety** - Your wrangler does a safety check each time you mount - leather, stitching, snaps, buckles, stirrups, bridles, reins, latigos, cinches, slickers, clothing and saddle bags tied onto the saddle. It is also your responsibility to pay attention to these things. If you see anything that is questionable please notify your wrangler.

Guests (in the saddle)

Be a rider, not a passenger. You need to take responsibility for your environment and your own safety. Monitor mood of your horse and the horses around you and respond accordingly.

- Relaxed - ears flop, head level or down.
- Signs of a bad mood - ears pinned back, turning their head, swishing tail, turning their butt, picking up a leg like they’re going to kick.
- Let the other rider know that a problem is developing and enlist them to help separate the two horses.
- Move your horse away from the source of the frustration.
- Keep one horse length between horses when riding single file. You should be able to see the rear hooves of the horse in front of you. If not, you’re too close.

Don’t scare your own horse or the horses around you - Wear your stampede string. If you want to take anything out of your saddle bags, put on or take off clothes, take a picture, put on sun screen or bug spray, you need to ask the wrangler to stop the ride so that you can dismount. These routine activities are dangerous when you are horseback! And don’t be embarrassed to ask the wrangler to stop - the other riders will be secretly thanking you for being the one to speak up.

Wranglers

Our wranglers are here for your safety.

- They know where it is safe to ride and where we have permission to ride.
- They will point out obstacles like holes, loose wire, and boggy areas.
- They know our horses and monitor your behavior to be sure you have a safe and enjoyable ride.
- And they have been trained to respond in case of an emergency.
- For your safety and the safety of others... guests need to listen to instructions from their wranglers...
- To control the pace of the ride our wranglers need to be in the lead. Please respect their judgment.

- They will give you suggestions for going through gates, crossing ditches and ravines, etc.
- They will ask that you dismount to take photos, change clothes, or get things from your saddle bags.
- When a wrangler gets off of his/her horse to open a gate, ride through the gate far enough to allow room for all of the riders to get through the gate, stop your horses and wait for the wrangler to close the gate and mount before starting to ride again. If your horse is anxious to continue, turn him to face the wrangler and wait for the wrangler to mount and lead the way.
- Your wranglers will manage the pace of your rides, especially when returning to the barn. All rides will slow to a walk as we approach the ranch.
- Wranglers will help you mount and dismount.
- Wranglers carry radios in their first aid packs. There is a laminated card with directions should guests need to use it.

Approaching a horse and preparation for mounting

- Always approach a horse where the horse can see you. Their eyes are on the sides of their head so they see you well when you approach at the shoulder. They have blind spots immediately in front of their heads and behind their tails. So we can expect them to be nervous if we approach there.
- Approach in a measured and relaxed fashion. It's a good idea to speak to the horse as you approach so that you can be sure they know you are coming. You don't necessarily have to move slowly, but do avoid abrupt movements. Kids - no running around the horses! We know that you are excited, but remember that horses are prey animals. We should not act like predators.
- Horses often like to sniff new people and it is considered good manners to allow the horse to get a good sniff. When they are satisfied, they will take their head away.
- Before you mount you'll want to put your things in your saddle bags. We like to keep the bags balanced so you'll want to use both sides. When you go behind a horse, you want to have him be aware of your actions. We recommend you walk all the way around the back end out of the range of a horse's kick. If you are experienced, you may choose to place your hand on his rump and walk right behind him maintaining contact with the horse at all times.

Demonstrate mounting

1. Stand at the left shoulder, not too far away from the horse.
2. We mount from the left side. Why? Because your saber on your left hip will get in the way otherwise.
3. Take the reins and some mane in your left hand.
4. Place your left foot in the stirrup.
5. Place your right hand on the cantle.
6. Gently pull yourself up using your foot and left hand, gently swing your leg over the saddle bags, gently sit down in the seat, and gently put your right foot into the stirrup.
7. Keep your feet secure in your stirrups and keep control of the reins.
8. Take a deep breath and relax before asking your horse to move.

Demonstrate dismounting

1. Slide foot out of stirrup to the tips of your toes. Swing leg over back of saddle and step down.
2. Demonstrate for kids too - swing leg over back of saddle, take foot out of the stirrup, slide down holding onto saddle and ties. Be sure nothing gets hung upon the saddle horn - a pocket, camera strap, stampede string, etc.

Demonstrate posture in the saddle

1. Sit up straight but relaxed and balanced in the saddle, weight distributed between your bottom and stirrups.
2. Don't count on the cinch to hold you on, need to balance. Can't tighten the cinch enough to hold the saddle in place if you are unbalanced.
3. Heels down.
4. How to hold the reins:
 - When not asking the horse for a change, your hands should be in the "neutral position."
 - Don't wrap the reins around your hands.
 - Don't hold the saddle horn with your rein hand.
5. Body position when standing still, moving forward, stopping, going up and down hills.
6. Watch where you are going. Don't look down at your horse.

Discuss the concept of pressure and release

- All horse queues are based on the concept of **pressure and release**.
- We apply pressure to some part of the horse's body and when the horse does what we want we release it.
- Pressure can be constant, like when we pull on the reins to ask the horse to stop.
- Pressure can also be rhythmic, like when we persistently tap the horse on the sides to ask him to go.
- I like to equate pressure and release to saying "please" and "thank you".
- Pat Parelli's "**Phases of Firmness**". Similarly, if you just barely tap him on the sides he may conclude that your light taps are less of a bother than walking for you. Again, you may find yourself on a non-responsive horse. So with your first squeeze you should be very gentle. With the next squeeze (again coming at a fairly short frequency from the first squeeze) should be firmer still. Continue to ask with sufficient frequency and increasing force for what you want. As soon as your horse "gives to you" release that pressure.
- **The frequency with which you queue your horse is very important.** If you squeeze your legs once to ask your horse to go, he may just not respond to see what happens next. If you give up, he will conclude that he just has to wait you out. If you ask by squeezing once a minute he will just wait. But if you ask about twice a second, your persistence will pay off and he will begin to walk.
- **Release.** As soon as he does, you stop - and give him his "release". If you forget your release, you are being rude and will get poor results from your horse.
- **Note to wranglers** - some of our horses are hard to get moving. We ask guests to use three phases - start with increasingly firm pressure on the sides of the horse, start kissing, and finally use reins to swat the horse on the rump. We do have a "popper" for those horses that really give guests a hard time. Do NOT provide a popper for a horse which has not been trained to ride with one.

Demonstrate how to get the horse to go

- Show them how to move forward. Bring up your life, squeeze legs, reins in proper position.
- If the horse does not move off, increase the frequency and pressure. Kiss. Use reins.
- Discussion of reining:
- In western riding we hold the reins in our left hand. Does anyone know why? The assumption is that everyone is right handed and needs their hand free to pull their saber, rope that steer, or shoot that gun. Of course, we don't usually do these things here at our dude ranch so you are free to use either hand. In fact, while neck reining you'll find it helpful to switch hands from time to time.
- We tie a band around your reins so that you don't drop them. If you are an experienced rider and don't like the band, please move it to the end of your reins. But please don't remove it.
- When you are not asking your horse to stop or turn your rein hand should be in the "neutral position".
- This is a location in front of your saddle horn and floating low over the horse's mane. You don't want to rest your hand on or behind the saddle horn or high above the horse's neck.

Demonstration of stopping a horse

- To get your horse to stop, gently draw the reins back toward your belly button. If you have to pull your hand all the way to your chest, your band on your reins is in the wrong place.
- As soon as the horse stops, release that pressure.
- Show them how leverage works on the horses mouth and curb strap so that they can understand using a soft hand and releasing pressure.
- When riding, one of the most common problems we see is that people tend to hold on to the reins and the saddle horn with the same hand. This is tantamount to losing control of the steering and the breaks while driving your car on the highway. You need to make a conscious decision which hand to use to hold the saddle horn (if you choose to do so) and which hand will be your rein hand.

Demonstration of neck reining

- When trail riding in western tack most riders will "neck rein" to turn their horses. This is accomplished with one hand.
- To neck rein, move your hand **forward and to the right** or **forward and to the left**. Human nature is a funny thing and most people instinctively pull back and to the left or right. But this tells the horse to stop! So be clear and exaggerate that motion with your hands and bring that hand forward.
- Remember not to hold on to the saddle horn with your rein hand!

Demonstration of direct reining

- Neck reining works great when everyone is headed in the same general direction but some times we ask horses to separate themselves from their herd once again - during team penning for example. Direct reining is a clearer form of communication with your horse.
- Direct reining is accomplished by hanging onto the reins at the band or knot with one hand, palm down.
- To ask the horse to turn right, we hold the rein in our left hand. Move your hand forward, just like with neck reining. Slide the right hand down the right rein, palm down, and out to the side like you are trying to lead the horses nose around to your right knee. This will pull the horse's nose around to the right. Note that this process leaves the left rein slack.

Wranglers-HelpingGuestsMountTheFirstTime&DemonstrateSkills

- Introduce the rider to their horse. Give them the name and any information about the horse that might be useful to the guest or make them more comfortable with the horse. Never tell them anything to scare them.
- Help guests store their possessions in the saddle bags.
- Check to see that they don't have any clothing tied to their waists, necks, or other body parts.
- Ask if they have any questions and if they feel comfortable with the mounting instructions.
- Help them mount. Go over left hand mane/rein, stirrup, right hand cantle, how to pull up, how to sit down gently, take a deep breath and relax.
- Show them how to hold the reins once they are mounted. Discuss the neutral position in front of saddle horn.
- For the first ride, that ride's wrangler will lead them into the arena where each rider will demonstrate their skills.
- We need to be sure that they can control their horse and are up to the ride they have been assigned.
- We will get each rider to trot in the arena before taking them on the trail. They should know what it feels like so it doesn't scare them if their horse trots to catch up to the group or when going through a gully. We want to be sure that they don't hang onto the saddle horn with both hands. They must be able to pick up their reins and slow the horse to a walk or stop.
- Whatever gaits we plan to use on the trail need to be demonstrated by each rider in the arena.
- On orientation days we may have at least one beginning ride that stays in the arena to practice skills. Make good use of obstacles like barrels, poles, cones, etc to make it fun.