

30 Tips for Better Trail Riding

Improve your trail rides with our best collection of tips.

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1. Desensitize your horse to scary situations you may encounter on the trail in a safe environment, such as an arena.
2. Gradually introduce him to traffic where you can control the situation.
3. Before you even think of hitting the trail, you and your horse should have mastery of basic skills in the arena. You should have whoa and go, steering, and control at all gaits.
4. If your horse isn't used to riding alone, build up his confidence by going out for short jaunts frequently, working up to longer rides as his confidence grows.
5. Don't tailgate! Maintain one horse length between horses.
6. Before you trot or canter on the trail, check with the other riders in your group.
7. In a mixed-levels group ride, put an experienced rider in the lead and another at the end.
8. If your group is well matched in skill level, take turns riding in the lead, middle and end positions.
9. Negotiate road crossings as a group so that no horse is left behind on the other side of a busy roadway.
10. Horses feel safest in a herd, and some may panic if they feel deserted. It's best to keep all riders in your group together, although experienced horses and riders may be fine venturing off alone.
11. At water stops, wait until all horses are done drinking before leaving the watering place. Some horses won't drink if they are distracted by the fear of being left behind.
12. If your horse tries to hurry home, refocus his attention by asking him to ride in serpentine along the trail, or flex to give his shoulder.
13. Rather than pulling straight back on the reins when your horse dives for a bite of grass along the trail, try pulling him left or right while you encourage him to move out.
14. Mind your multi-use manners: Show courtesy to hikers, bikers and others sharing the trail. You are an ambassador for equestrians!
15. If you crave competition, consider participating in a judged trail ride (trail trial), endurance ride or competitive trail ride.
16. Looking for adventure with your friends or family? Some camping facilities, state and national parks offer amenities to accommodate horses, including corrals.
17. Approach slippery, slick or rocky trail conditions slowly. Keep yourself centered in the saddle, so you don't throw your horse off balance.
18. Clean up after yourself: If you parked your rig at a trailhead, don't leave piles of manure and other mess behind.
19. Save our trails—join the Equestrian Land Conservation Resource to work for land access and preservation on a local or national level. www.elcr.org
20. Wear a helmet with an extended visor for added sun protection.
21. Be seen: If you ride out at night, reflective tack and clothing is a must. Wear dayglo orange in hunting territory.
22. Keep your tack in good repair. You don't want a cinch or bridle to break out on the trail.