

Developing Safety Gear for Equestrians

A new product development could lead to safer riding.

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As helmet awareness among equestrians grows, researchers at St. Louis University continue to tinker with another possible safety product. Experiments are underway to perfect the prototype of a rigid piece of neck armor that, when combined with a safety helmet, cradles the rider's neck. If successful, the equipment would prevent spinal cord trauma that could lead to death or permanent paralysis. Although the main market will no doubt be motorcyclists, equestrians could also benefit. In fact, the designer of the neck shield is a Washington University neurologist whose granddaughter was paralyzed in a fall from a horse. Apparently, he realized that a helmet and even a safety vest, like those worn by three-day eventers, still isn't enough to prevent life altering injuries if a rider's neck is subjected to insult. Yet, despite all the good intentions of creating such a piece of equipment, the biggest hurdle will be faced once the device is out of the testing laboratory: convincing riders to wear it.