

## Tragedy on the Trail

By Melva Burich, Des Moines, IA

One nice day in October, 2010, my friend and her husband took their inexperienced niece and boyfriend riding on the river trails west of Madrid. To get on the trails they rode down the gravel road to the new bike trail. Rode it about 500 ft to the trail head and dropped down on the trails for a great afternoon of riding and pictures. Returning the same way they went, they got back on the bike trail and were about 20 ft from the road when a pack of bicyclists came up behind them without announcing themselves, spooking three of the four horses.

This resulted in my friend getting bucked off and laying on the ground hurt. Another horse spooked as well and my friend's husband yelled for the boyfriend to jump off to be safe. The husband then jumped off his horse to check on my friend. Her horse and her husband's horse took off lose for home while the third spooked horse also took off but ran across the exposed concrete for the section of trail. The mare sliced her tendon and an artery and was bleeding out. The neighbor nearby heard the commotion and came up to see what was going on as it was close to the road and went back for his car to take my friend and husband home.

With my friend safe at home, her husband took his four wheeler and his hand gun and went back looking for the hurt mare. He found her on the trail they'd just come up, standing and bleeding to death. When he got there she dropped to the ground. He called our vet to ask where he needed to place the bullet to put the mare out of her misery. He had to leave her laying there on the trail. The good citizens at a nearby boarding stable volunteered to help remove the body. He did this without question. We spent two hours getting the mare up off the trail and up onto the bike trail where a flatbed trailer was used to take her home. It was pitch dark so we were working by the lights of the tractor. And back to the bike riders – they didn't even stop to see if everyone was okay! My friend has lucked out with just bruised ribs and hip, a swollen ankle and lots more bruises, but worst of all is her broken

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## Ann Bennett, Windrush Hill Farm

This is a very sad story and as sad as I am about the horse, I am so glad that the people survived this without more serious injuries. I always consider a trail ride a proposition that affords you very little control over the external environment, because if it isn't bicycles, it could be a turkey flushing or a deer or a gun shot or even a hunter in camo gear with a bow, or a combine. A silent pack of bicycles coming from behind the horses at speed sounds like a pretty scary thing. Even my most solid horse may have bolted, and I am not sure that there is really any way to de-spook a horse for that.

Certainly, we can expose our horse to bicycles riding around them and reduce their fear of bicycles. But I am not sure there is much you could do otherwise about this situation due to the surprise and stealth factor.

So then what you need are riding skills to survive the spook, and reflexes that work. The riding skills might include how to do an emergency one rein stop, and how to do an emergency dismount and kicking your feet free of the stirrups. This also makes me think of the value of a mecate lead rope that feeds to your belt (slips, not tied fast!) and allows you a lead rope to grab even in an emergency or involuntary dismount so you might be able to maintain control of your horse.

I think trying to educate bicycle riders is a good goal, and I cannot understand why none of them stopped to help unless they were just unaware of the carnage left behind. But I am thinking of the things within our control, like dismounting and leading, if you happen to know that you are approaching a bicycle trail.

The other thought I had is that if this is a busy intersection with horses, bicycles and other pedestrians, maybe signs that say, "Please slow down and let horseback riders know that you are approaching by yelling 'HEADS UP,'" would let the bicycle riders know what to do to avoid an accident.

I also thought of the little bells on my bicycle when I was a youngster, that I could go ring/ring to announce my arrival; does anyone else remember those?

## Bicycling Rules

Courtesy of the Barrington Bicycle Club (BBC) in Illinois:

[www.barringtonbikeclub.com](http://www.barringtonbikeclub.com)

### RULES FOR SAFE AND COURTEOUS ROAD CYCLING

Safe road cycling either individually or in a group requires that every cyclist understand that he or she must do more than "stay within his legal rights" to share the roads peacefully with motorists. It is not sufficient to follow only what the law allows cyclists to do. The reality is that a cyclist is always extremely vulnerable to motorized traffic and variable road conditions, which requires that the cyclist operate defensively at all times. The Barrington Bicycle Club (BBC) recommends adhering to the following guidelines for safe cycling on Barrington Area roads.

### SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS RELATING TO HORSE AND HORSE TRAILER ENCOUNTERS

The Barrington Area Conservation Trust – working cooperatively with the Barrington Hills Riding Club and the BBC- is deeply concerned that there is a good understanding of the special considerations involved when cyclists encounter horses with riders and the additional dangers imposed by road encounters with horse trailers because of their unique design on often-narrow roads. Accordingly, drawing from their experience, they have passed along the following sensible additional guidelines to be considered in dealing with horse related encounters on the road:

#### When encountering equestrians on horseback...

- Always announce yourself long before you encounter a horse — at least ten bike lengths before you reach them to give proper notice.

- When approaching from behind, a pleasant "on your left" is appropriate, as is "biker behind you." This allows the horse to identify your presence before they hear the whir of the wheels or see you coming up very quickly, which can cause a startle or a kick.

- When approaching from the front, remember that a younger horse may not have

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heart. This mare was a long time member of my friend's family and a good horse and a tremendous loss for her.

"What can we do about this?" I ask myself and the trail committee. The only thing I can think of is to get the message out there to the bike riders to raise awareness. We as horse riders don't mind sharing the trail. We just ask that they use their heads and give us a warning yell when they are coming up on us horse riders. This is for our safety as well as theirs. Thank you and safe riding.

## "Bicycling Rules;" continued from page 1

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- Don't crowd the dividing line. Stay to the edge of your lane so that the horse does not interpret your movement as threatening, and so that the truck/trailer has adequate space. If you have a conversation with the rider, the horse can identify you as a person and not a mountain lion — it is amazing how much this helps.

- Do not pass by riders in close proximity. Horses can move sideways extremely quickly, and if startled they could easily move into you, causing serious injury. Move across the dividing line before you approach the riders if there is no oncoming traffic. A horse often views anything coming from behind as a predator and can react badly to it.

### **When encountering horse trailers/trucks...**

- Do not ride between the truck/trailer and the edge of the road. It's possible that you won't be noticed by the driver and that you'll be forced off the road.

- Do not ride so fast that you remain in the lane where the truck/trailer will return after they pass you. The truck/trailer must cross back over the center line, and you will place yourself in harm's way.

- Avoid blowing by the truck/trailer at a stop sign. Bicyclists may be tempted to pass a truck/trailer, usually on the left but sometimes on the right, at a stop sign. The rig stops at the sign, but the bikers don't. However, the truck/trailer can't easily see you and runs the risk of hitting you when it starts moving again because you are not supposed to be there.

- If a trailer approaches you from behind, the truck/trailer will pass you if room permits. They cannot safely remain over the dividing line for very long, so they will move back into the traffic lane as quickly as possible. If you ride too close to the trailer, you run the risk of getting hit by the trailer as the truck/trailer crosses back over. You may not be seen depending on where you are in relation to the trailer, and the impact of the trailer hitting your bike won't be felt by the truck at all. They will have no idea that your bike was hit.

- Be aware of traffic back-ups. Many roads in Barrington Hills are very narrow, so the truck/trailer can't safely pass you until they get to a suitable spot. Be aware that this can cause traffic back-ups behind you and anxious drivers. There will be great motivation to cross back over very quickly – be prepared to slow down to give the truck/trailer right of way or you risk being hit.