

To the point

Setting an example

Sir—Bravo to Brough Scott for writing about the importance of wearing an approved hard hat (Talk Yourself Horse, 23 November). Regardless of how experienced the rider or well trained the horse, there is always the possibility of an accident.

What kind of example does going hatless set young riders? You don't see motorcycle riders out on the roads without crash helmets.

*Helen Boulton
Aberdale, Mid Glam*

Time for change in polo

Sir—I was so relieved that the Hurlingham Polo Association (HPA) is finally investigating a safer helmet for polo players, after the tragic death of Gabriel Donoso (news, 16 November). The HPA was first asked to make a ruling on this after we lost another player, Paul Clarkin, in 2004.

Polo is one of the most exciting, entertaining and challenging equine sports. It is also the most unregulated. Old-fashioned helmets may look great and fit the "last days of the Raj" image, but as I understand it they are largely decorative. Don't let us lose any more of these fine players.

*Sophie Love
Kangaroo Valley, Australia*

Mirror, mirror

Sir—I was interested to read about the research regarding using a mirror as a substitute for another horse when travelling ("Behavioural study takes top award", news 23 November).

When I tried to travel my horse on his own, he would lose balance and almost come down, even when I drove very slowly. He was different when travelling in company, so I decided to try a mirror and put on a radio for him to listen to. He immediately improved.

*Helen Lawson
Swindon, Wilts*

Reliving the dream — and going too far

Sir—I wholeheartedly agree with Nigel Hollings's comments about pushy parents ("Mommie dearest", 30 November). As a judge with more than 20 years experience, I have found it increasingly frustrating to witness pushy parenting in action.

Last season, I overheard in the warm-up area: "If I can't see your face in the ring, I shall come in and slap it!"

The general nagging at children is becoming intolerable — other competitors are sick of it, and the children in question are soon going to become sour. It's interesting to note that producers don't seem to be as guilty of this, which brings us back to the parents "reliving the dream" syndrome.

Next year, at the risk of upsetting a few, I intend to have a quiet word with any parent I feel is overstepping the mark. I shall probably be told to mind my own business, but it won't be the first time and probably won't be the last.

*Sylvia B Cox
Wantage, Oxon*

A 'winning at all costs' mentality

Sir—I write in response to the comments made by Nicky Barrett about under-25 teams in Richard Davison's column (16 November), and the letters that followed (23 & 30 November).

As someone who works regularly with many different sportsmen, including riders, I was dismayed to see an inferred return to a "win at all costs" philosophy. Whatever happened to having fun AND being successful?

While I am sure that every effort to identify the best riders to represent us is taken and the training is of the highest quality, we must not forget that our representatives are human and have feelings and their own goals.

Many sportspeople with ability and talent are overlooked because they have not been shown how to manage themselves correctly, do not come from the right background or have difficulty coping under

competition conditions.

Other countries have changed their programmes and included mental training as part of a structured development process to bring riders on and give them the coping tools before such issues arise. Talent and technical abilities by themselves are not enough. We in Britain appear to be stuck in an earlier time, when the "stiff upper lip" and "we do it this way because it has always been done like that" prevailed.

*Gary Diplock
Banbury, Oxon*

The collecting ring should be just as safe

Sir—I was sorry to read about Peter Charles's accident while warming up at a show, and I trust he is making a good recovery (news, 26 October).

I have travelled all around the country to shows with my daughter and, during this time, I have been concerned at the number of accidents I have seen in the collecting rings when ponies have landed on the back bars of spread fences. I have seen poles broken on several

occasions, and ponies brought down, injuring their riders.

I was not at the show where Mr Charles sustained his injury, so cannot comment on the warm-up arena in question. However, I don't think I have ever seen a safety cup in use in a practice arena. Is there a good reason for this? I would have thought it would be in the venue's interests to make collecting rings as safe as possible. Safety cups are a requirement for the back bar of all spread fences in the BSJA competition arena. Is it time to make them mandatory in the collecting ring as well?

*Carole Pearson
Cheltenham, Glos*

Standards of care: priority when setting up a charity

Sir—I write with reference to the Ask H&H "Can my rescue home become a registered charity?" (23 November).

As an umbrella body representing over 60 equine welfare organisations, the National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC) was delighted to see the advice given by

Letter of the week

Learning the 'hard hat' lesson the hard way

Sir—I would like to add to the debate about wearing hats when riding and ask horse owners to consider using safety headgear while handling horses on the ground, particularly youngsters.

I learned my lesson the hard way in May 2002, while leading my then-yearling Exmoor to her field. Her excitement at being the last to go out and a sudden hailstorm made her leap, whip round and run straight at me, knocking me to the ground. I was not wearing a hat and was knocked unconscious.

When I came round, I was still holding the lead rope and the pony was spinning around me — from the aches, pains and bruising that developed, she may also have trodden on me a number of times. I was bleeding heavily from a cut to the back of my head that required stitches, and realised later that I had totally lost my sense of smell and taste.

A subsequent visit to a specialist confirmed that the concussion I had suffered had damaged the olfactory nerves, and almost five years later there is only minimal improvement.

I urge people to contemplate wearing hats around horses. The most routine everyday actions can suddenly and unexpectedly develop in to life-changing — or life-threatening — events.

*Mrs Denise Sykes
Bacup, Lancs*

The writer of the letter of the week wins a bottle of Champagne Taittinger



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