

HISTORY OF HORSES IN THE SCA/INTRODUCING YOUR HORSE TO THE GAMES

Horses were a daily part of life in the Middle Ages. They were used for transport, travel, and combat and thus were incredibly valuable. They were not just a form of livelihood. Peoples lives literally depended on their horses. Years of training were invested in them and unlike modern times, everyone knew how to care for and to ride horses.

Because the SCA recreates the best part of the Middle Ages (ie, the chivalry, romance, and beauty), horses have been used in the SCA since it started over 35 years ago. And like our counterparts in the Middle Ages, we revere and respect the horse, perhaps even more so, because they are no longer common place in our modern lives. Approximately 15 years ago, in Southern California, a group of SCA horse enthusiasts formed the first safety rules to govern use of horses in the SCA. This group also outlined the parameters whereby a person could be elevated to the status of a Safety Officers (called Equestrian Marshals in the SCA). Both my husband and I were members of that group and we have been Safety Officers since the early 1980's. Furthermore, I helped write the original SCA-wide (International) Equestrian Regulations which specify criteria for conducting a safe event and for authorizing Safety Officers as well as Riders. We have a strict Rider Authorization process to ensure that riders can first demonstrate that they can handle their mounts before they can take up any games equipment.

The SCA, Inc, began purchasing Equestrian Insurance for events in the early 1980's and since then have covered an average of 50 equestrian events annually throughout the United States alone. Our insurance does not permit jousting or rodeo-type activities. We have never had a horse get injured by any equipment. The only rider injuries we have had were when a rider fell off. The bottomline is that we do everything in our power to keep our insurance company happy with us so that we can continue to play. We are proud to say that we have never had any claim against our equestrian policies.

When first introduced to the idea of the SCA equestrian games folks are puzzled about what we do. However, the easiest frame of reference is to visualize gymkhana games. Like gymkhana, we do polebending and flag race, except we are in costume. Sometimes the horsez are dressed as well with a caparison (looks like a horse's winter blanket) or at least a pretty cloth to cover a modern looking saddle blanket. So it is important that the horses be used to flapping cloths. Most horses have been sacked out, so that is no problem. When I use a new horse for our games, I introduce/train him to 'costumes' by first lettting him smell an old sheet. Next I drape the sheet over his back. I will also drape the sheet over myself and then a nearby horse, so he can get used to seeing it in motion. This works well when we start on the ground and then repeat the process when mounted.

In some events we use spears, exactly like they do for the Maryland State sport of ring jousting ---where by rings are plucked off for points.
<http://users.supernet.com/wizardsknoll/joust.html>
<http://www.geocities.com/marylandjousting>
(Disclaimer jousting is a misnomer here because spears are never pointed at another

rider of horse). In other events we hit the quintain with a blunted heavy-duty spear. To get the new horse used to these 'long sticks', I will again work with him from the ground and use a broom stick at first instead of a spear. I walk up and let him smell the broom, then rub him down with it and wave it around him. I repeat the process when mounted. To get him used to the idea of my actually using a spear, I will take the broom handle and tap the side of the barn with it as I walk by with him. Once he is used to that, I 'll take a trash can lid and tie it to the fence, then hit that really hard with the broom handle to make a loud noise. Once the horse does not shy from that sound and impact, I am confident we can try the real thing, albeit on foot and at a walk.

We do a fun challenging game we call, "Beheading the Enemy." Essentially, it is polebending with a target. We hit a target off of the pole with 'fake sword or mace' as we ride past the pole. The fake sword is a usually composed of a short children's plastic toy sword wrapped in closed cell foam, all of which is duct taped to keep the foam in place. The fake mace is closed cell foam wrapped around the end of a short piece of dowel. Our Regulations specifically state that the target must be struck AWAY from the horse. The target is a styrofoam wighead wrapped in duct tape, covered with cloth, and tethered to the pole. When struck by the rider, the target simply falls off away from the horse and hangs there to be re-set by the ground crew. Obviously the fake sword, fake mace, and styrofoam target cannot hurt the horse or rider.

For the event occurring in May, we intend to do Beheading the Enemy, spearing rings (see the Maryland Ring Jousting site), and hitting the quintain. We will work with each horse to introduce him carefully to each part of the equipment as described above. We have blunted lances that we use for this purpose and experienced riders who assist each person with their mount. No one is allowed to participate in the competition until they have completely demonstrated their ability to control their horse while using the equipment. Thus each new rider and horse combination must get authorized under the supervision of the Safety Officers before they are allowed to participate in our games.

In conclusion, we have an Authorization process for Riders, we have Safety Officers, and we have Safety Regulations. We utilize all of them to keep our horses and riders safe while we have fun playing our games. Our club has rented from wranglers in the past. Here are 2 recent ones and I urge you to contact them: Catherine Walker at King's Arrow Ranch, Lumberton, Miss. 601-796-4000 (call her 8am her time or 67 am PST). Cat has rented to SCA for the past several years. And Lola Lang of Lang's Horse and Pony in Mt Vernon, WA at 360-424-7630. Loal knows me personally as I have done a little veterainry work for her and sent my som to her Horseback camp. Our local SCA chapter has rented from her for just about a year .

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