



THE ABRS+ GUIDE TO "LEARNING TO RIDE"



Produced by The Association of British Riding Schools,
Livery Yards and Equestrian Centres

THE INFORMATION BELOW IS A GUIDE FOR THOSE LOOKING TO TAKE UP RIDING, AS TO HOW TO GO ABOUT IT, WHAT TO EXPECT AND HOW TO BE BEST PREPARED:

Starting Riding?

Horse riding can be an enjoyable pastime whether for leisure or whether you have aspirations to train and compete in a particular discipline such as dressage or showjumping.

It's never too early or too late to think about taking up riding. You can take up riding at any age, and most riding centres cater for children and adults alike. Many riding centres can also cater for those with minor, moderate or even severe disabilities, making riding accessible for all.

Being around horses and ponies has been shown to benefit people in many different ways – it's great for your physical fitness, helps your mental wellbeing and relieves any stress you may have. It's also a chance to meet other people from lots of different backgrounds who share a common interest.



Finding somewhere to ride...

When seeking somewhere to learn to ride, you should ensure your selected establishment is appropriately licensed to offer horse riding activities. This will ensure safe and suitable training and facilities of the highest levels.

The riding establishment will be able to provide you with a horse or pony suited to your experience, height, and weight. They can also advise you on how they feel you will best learn, be this in group lessons, or on a one-to-one basis.

The best way to find a riding establishment near you is to search [ABRS+ Member Establishments](#), or the [Find a Riding Centre](#) tool supplied by British Equestrian. All of these riding centres are approved by your Local Authority and also by a Member Organisation of British Equestrian, such as the ABRS+, which means they've been inspected to ensure that they're fully insured, use qualified coaches, and have policies and procedures in place – such as safeguarding – to ensure a safe and high-quality experience.

Booking a Lesson

The first step, you must contact your selected riding establishment to ensure if they provide riding lessons that would be suitable for you.

They may ask you:

- Age
- Height
- Weight
- Previous Riding Experience
- Any Mobility Restrictions

To ensure you find a suitable establishment that can cater for your needs, it is important that you are honest when giving them this information. This will ensure you can be booked on to the right level of the lesson, and with the right type and size of horse or pony.

Please note that many riding establishments have a weight limit for the welfare of their horses, so if you don't know your weight then you may be asked to get on the scales when you arrive the riding establishment. If you think this could be an issue, please mention this at the time of booking.

You should also ensure that you are best prepared for your lesson by asking the following questions:

- How soon do you need to arrive in advance of your lesson
- If you need to wear any specific clothing or shoe type
- What equipment are they able to provide (such as riding hats or body protectors)
- Is there anything else they require from you on the day

Please also ensure you are aware of any cancellation procedures in case you cannot make the planned appointment.

If you cannot make the lesson for any reason, you should ensure that you advise the establishment as soon as possible so that they can re-book your slot.



Being Prepared

Ensure you turn up in advance of your lesson. This will enable you enough time to be organised and have the necessary equipment fitted - such as a riding hat or body protector- so that your lesson can start on time. When you arrive, go straight to the office to let them know that you are there.

To ensure safety and comfort, its important to be appropriately dressed:

- A riding hat (that meets the current safety standards). Most establishments will provide you with a hat if necessary and ensure that this is correctly fitted.
- Jodhpurs or suitable trousers that allow easy movement (not jeans or shorts)
- Wearing layers is advised to enable you to stay warm, but be able to reduce clothing if you get hot. Avoid scarves and anything with a hood.
- Short or long riding boots. If you don't have riding boots, then sturdy shoes with a small heel will suffice. Not trainers or open-toed or heeled shoes.
- Gloves would be advisable to both keep your hands warm and avoid sore hands. If you don't have riding gloves, most types of gloves would suffice as long as you can move your hands freely.
- To take along a waterproof jacket is also advisable
- You should also remove any jewellery such as necklaces, earrings or watches, and long hair should be tied back

Whilst many believe riding equipment is expensive, items such as riding hats, boots and jodhpurs can be bought relatively inexpensively, or even second-hand. A second-hand hat is not advised for safety reasons but hats are available for all budgets, ensuring it meets the most recent safety standards.

What else will I need to do?

The riding establishment will need you to fill out a rider registration form with details about yourself, and other important medical information such as next of kin, medical conditions or other important information that your coach or the establishment may need to know.



IMPORTANT

When you arrive on the yard, it is important to follow instructions at all times and not go wandering off to pat ponies or enter paddocks. This could put you in danger or disrupt lessons. Ensure you act sensibly on the yard and follow instructions at all times.



The Lesson

First and foremost, you will be introduced to your coach/ instructor and your 'mount' (the horse or pony you will be riding). Approach the horse or pony calmly but confidently and give them a pat or scratch. Horses and ponies have limited vision directly in front of them, so approach towards their shoulder and talk softly to them as you get closer to ensure they aren't startled. It's very important to never approach a horse from behind or to take them by surprise.

If you've never ridden before, your lesson will start right from the basics of how to get on, how to sit in the saddle, how to have your feet in the stirrups and how to hold the reins. This may not seem like you're off to a flying start but is an incredibly important aspect of ensuring you are safely in the saddle and correctly positioned.

Your coach will need to ensure that your stirrups are the correct length and that your girth is tight. These checks are all made to ensure that the equipment is fitted correctly and that you are safely prepared for your lesson.

When you start out, it is likely that you will have a leader who will help control and guide the horse using a lead rein whilst you are under instruction. This is completely normal and is so that you can concentrate on riding technique, whilst being confident that the horse or pony remains under control.

The rest of your lesson will depend entirely upon your previous riding experience, your confidence levels and how well the instructor thinks you are progressing. There is no set time frame for learning to ride, but just to ensure that it is done in a safe manner, and not rushed so that you avoid the risk of falls or being overwhelmed. Do not be disheartened if it takes you a while to even master stopping and starting!

Some lessons will be repetitive until you learn a certain skill such as getting the horse to speed up or slow down or learning rising trot, whilst other lessons may use exercises or games to help you learn or understand a certain aspect such as improving balance or riding position. If there's anything particular you feel you need to improve, or if you don't understand exercises or instruction, make sure you let your instructor know.

Group rides can be a great way to build confidence but it's important to remember that the instruction time will be split and that you should respect the needs and presence of other learner riders. However, it's a great opportunity to share in learning with others.

At the end of your lesson, wait until the instructor tells you to dismount to ensure you are back on the ground safely. Most establishments welcome help from their clients with untacking horses and putting them back in their stable and it's a great way to learn more about your horse.



Accessible Riding

Horse riding is one of the most accessible sports for disabled people or those with a long-term health condition – nearly a quarter of equestrian participants say they have a disability. However, you may need specialist sessions, which are offered by Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA). There are over 500 RDA groups within the UK.



the RDA is an inclusive and diverse organisation. They welcome clients with physical and learning disabilities and autism, and there are no age restrictions. Through their network of member groups, RDA is at work in every corner of the UK, in our cities and remote rural areas, bringing the therapy, achievement and fun of horses to as many people as they can.

There are also over 50 riding centres in the UK with Accessibility Mark accreditation that are able to offer sessions to disabled riders. Each accredited centre has been through training with experienced RDA coaches to ensure they're able to meet the high standards required by the RDA. Once centres have gained the Accessibility Mark status, they're offered continuous support from the RDA to ensure they provide you with a fantastic service whatever your level of riding.



Understanding Riding Terms

Below are some of the terms you may hear when you are first starting riding:

HORSE: An equine that is over 14.2 hands

PONY: An equine that is less than 14.2 hands

HANDS: The way a height of a horse or pony is described. One 'hand' is approximately 4"

GROOMING: Brushing and preparing a horse or pony for riding

HOOF: A horse or pony's foot

TACK: The equipment used on horse (such as saddle and bridle)

SADDLE: Leather or synthetic seating for riders placed on the horse's back

BRIDLE: The straps on a horse's head that hold the bit and reins

BIT: Sits in the horse's mouth and is controlled by the reins. Usually metal but sometimes rubber or plastic.

REINS: The straps attached to the bit that help you stop and steer

GIRTH: The strap under a horse's belly that holds the saddle in place

STIRRUPS: Where your feet are placed when sitting in the saddle

STIRRUP LEATHERS: The straps that hold the stirrups in place. These can be changed in length to move how high or low the stirrups sit.

SADDLE PAD, SADDLE CLOTH OR NUMNAH: The padding that sits under a horse's saddle

NECK STRAP: A strap sometimes placed around a horse's neck for learner riders to hold on to help balance

LEAD REIN: A rope or rein used to lead a horse either from its headcollar, bit or bridle

MOUNTING BLOCK: A block or step to stand on to help you mount the horse or pony

ARENA / SAND SCHOOL/ MANEGE: The place where riding lessons take place, an enclosed area usually with a surface of sand or rubber

ARENA LETTERS: Letters placed around the arena to help you know where to stop, start, change speed or make movements

FLATWORK: A lesson that does not involve poles or jumps, working on rider position, controls, and movements in the arena

POLE WORK/ GRIDWORK: A lesson that involved the use of poles or jumps for exercises to improve rider position.

HACK: Going out for a ride on the roads or on bridleways



Expanding Your Equestrian Education

Many riding establishments will offer non-ridden activities to help riders of all ages understand and learn about riding and the care of horses and ponies. Schemes like the ABRS+ Rosette Awards, and the ABRS+ Progressive Tests help those wanting to learn more do so in a fun and educational manner. These are split into Equitation (riding) and Stables Management (horse care).

ABRS+ tests have been specifically designed to provide a logical and progressive system of training. They give adult and child riders a structured programme of realistic stepping stones to achieve their equestrian goals both in the saddle and on the ground. The tests can also be adapted as necessary to suit riders with a disability. These Tests are run by our member centres and may be part of their regular lesson structures, or run separately as specified progressive training.

These include Rosette Awards in categories such as Points of the Horse, Saddlery, Grooming, Tack Cleaning, Poisonous Plants, and Pony health plus tests in different aspects of riding too.

The Progressive Tests are more structured and aimed at improving riders covering basic riding and handling skills, moving on to more developed practical skills and advanced riding movements.

Many equestrian establishments are also Pony Club Centres as well, offering Pony Club activities for children and young people without their own ponies, with activities including rallies and camps, as well as group training and assessment on horse care and riding.

Whilst it may seem appealing early on to purchase your own horse or pony, this is a huge responsibility and you need to ensure that you have suitable riding experience to a high level, as well as substantial knowledge of horse care and management. Your coach and riding establishment would always be the best person to advise you as to when you are ready to buy your own horse or pony.

As an alternative, many riding establishments also offer part loans or shares- where you take responsibility for horse or pony for set days a week- or 'Own a Pony' days in the holidays on the same basis. This can be a great introduction to horse or pony ownership in a more affordable, structured and supervised manner.



Volunteering

Often riding establishments are happy to welcome volunteers to care for the ponies and help prepare them for lessons. This may be on a casual basis such as before or after lessons, at weekends, or during school holidays, or the establishment may have a specific process or timetable in place for those wishing to help out on the yard.

Volunteering is a great way to meet people, make new friends, and support the sport you love. It's an easy way to gain experience of the care required for horses and ponies and can help you grow in confidence, as well as giving you the opportunity to learn new skills – all at the same time as giving something back.

Some riding centres may need volunteers to help with leading in lessons or accompanying out on hacks, care and preparation of horses for lessons such as grooming or tacking up, or even with other care for the horses such as turning out or mucking out. Establishments that are also larger may hold events and shows that they need help with too.

The ABRS+ runs a specific scheme for helpers and volunteers. The ABRS+ Equestrian Care Award (ECA) can be taken from the age of 10, are logbook-based and are designed to encourage helpers to develop increasing competence in assisting before, during and after lessons and a growing awareness of Health and Safety around the yard.

It's important not to be upset if you offer to volunteer and are turned down. Equestrian establishments can be busy and dangerous places and it may be that they feel you are not yet experienced, they do not accept volunteers or that they cannot accept any more. However, it's important to express your interest in case an opportunity does arise. If this isn't possible, you can always gain more equestrian experience by taking part in tests and award schemes such as those mentioned previously, to help develop your skills, knowledge and confidence.



Need more help or advice?

The ABRS+ is an association dedicated solely to the representation, support, and promotion of professional equestrian establishments. We ensure that all of our members are fully licensed, and operating in line with our Code of Practice, as well as holding the necessary levels of competence in equine care and instruction.

If you would like to find out more about our member establishments, find a riding establishment, to find out more about our rider training or anything else the ABRS+ offers, you can find further information on the ABRS+ website: www.abrs-info.org

Or get in contact at: office@abrs-info.org

Or give us a call on; +44 1403 741188

