



Horses and Rider Weight

There are many different breeds of horse and pony and these come in many different shapes and sizes. This means that their ability to carry different loads varies considerably. Some horse or pony breeds (both large and small) may have a bone and musculature structure that allows them to carry weights that go well beyond that expected for a horse or pony of their size. There are also a range of other factors beyond the breed that influence the weight carrying capacity of a horse or pony. These include the:

- Conformation, body condition and age of the horse or pony
- Orthopaedic and/or other injuries being carried by the horse or pony
- Condition and/or fit of the tack

Guidance on how to determine the maximum weight carrying capacity of a horse or pony is given below. For the reasons given above, this weight may be adjusted up or down to reflect the horse's or pony's individual characteristics, limitations and abilities.

Assessing the maximum weight carrying capacity should be undertaken only by a competent person and this should be agreed with the owner/registered keeper. A competent person is one with the appropriate knowledge and skill. This weight should be recorded on the Horse Assessment Form.

Calculating the Maximum Weight Carrying Capacity?

The Government has not provided guidance on the maximum weight carrying capacity of a horse or pony in their Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids. There have been several studies that have looked at carried weight. While these have been broadly inconclusive, there seems to be some evidence that exercising with a rider/tack weight greater than 30% of the horse's weight is signposted by metabolic changes and the risk of orthopaedic injuries.

The ABRS+ recommends (based solely on anecdotal evidence) that the maximum weight carrying capacity of a horse or pony should be **no greater than 20% of the horse's or pony's weight**.

If you do not have horse weight scales, you can work out the body weight of the equine by using the following calculation:

$$\frac{\text{Weight in kgs} = \text{Girth (cms)} \times \text{Length (cms)}}{11880}$$

(Length = point of shoulder to point of buttock)

(Girth = Measure the tape from 1 inch behind point of wither, all the way around the horse)

Next divide total body weight by 5 for max. carrying weight in kgs.

This will give you the maximum weight carrying capacity which works out to be at 20% of the horse's body weight.

This weight is for that of both the rider and the tack; **the tack weight should be deducted (this is normally ~10 kg) to determine the maximum rider weight.**

The body weight of a horse or pony used in calculating the maximum carrying capacity assumes that the horse or pony is **not above its optimum weight**. Body condition scoring should be used to determine whether a horse or pony is at its optimum weight (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-horses-ponies-donkeys-and-their-hybrids>). If the horse or pony has a body condition score that is above 'Good' (ie 'Fat' or 'Obese'), the body weight used for calculating the maximum carrying capacity should be reduced to reflect the excess body weight being carried.

Assessing Horse and Rider Combinations

The skill of the rider may be considered when assessing the maximum weight carrying capacity of a horse or pony. Where a rider is unbalanced when riding (due to inexperience or being too tall for the horse or pony), you may wish to increase the rider's weight by up to 10%.

Weigh the rider in their riding clothes using scales.

An experienced, well-balanced rider would attract no additional weight (0%)

An inexperienced rider that is unbalanced may attract **up to 10%** of additional weight (ie if they weigh 60 kg, their 'effective' weight is 66 kg)

How much additional weight is a judgement that should be made by a competent person.

Conclusion

Weight can be a sensitive subject, but it is crucial that you consider what weight the horse or pony can reasonably be asked to carry. This includes the weight of the tack and equipment, as well as the rider.

The ABRS+ recommends that you place maximum weight carrying limits on each of your horses and ponies to help protect from overwork and injury. We recommend that:

- This no greater than 20% of the horse's or pony's weight
- That the weight of the tack is deducted to identify the rider's maximum weight
- The rider's weight attracts an additional weight of up to 10% where the rider is inexperienced or unbalanced
- These weights be adjusted to reflect the horse's or pony's conformation, body condition and age and if the horse or pony is carrying orthopaedic and/or other injuries.