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**DANGER WARNINGS TO DRIVERS
AND HORSE RIDERS ON THE ROADS**

Motorists and horse riders need to be more aware of the potential dangers they face when they meet on the roads, a leading lawyers' association has warned.

"More and more riders are now using the roads as they make their way to bridle paths - sometimes with tragic consequences," said top lawyer David Marshall, president of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL).

"Around 3,000 riders are involved in road accidents every year, some of which are fatal to riders or other road users. One in five horses are killed in accidents or so badly injured that they have to be put down," he pointed out.

APIL, which campaigns to promote safety and alert the public to hazards, believes that many of these accidents could be avoided. "Riders and motorists need to be doubly cautious and make more allowances for the unpredictable nature of horses," Mr Marshall said.

Backing APIL's appeal, former Metropolitan Police chief inspector and equestrian expert Alan Bingle pointed out that more riders use busy roads to reach bridle paths and trails which have been cut off from their stables by new housing and road schemes.

He said: “Drivers need to slow down and give as wide a berth as possible, and riders should be sure that both they and their horses are safe to be on the roads.”

Mr Bingle added: “A lot of blame is put on the motorists and in some cases quite rightly so. But just as all drivers have to take a driving test, there should be legislation that insists that people who ride on the roads are competent to do so. The British Horse Society Riding and Road Safety Test goes a long way to giving the rider the skills they need. But riders do this voluntarily – it is not mandatory.”

An expert court witness, Mr Bingle has investigated a number of riding accidents involving fatalities on the roads. “Horses can be easily startled,” he pointed out. “The echoing noise made by a small, empty van, for example, can be frightening to a horse when being driven past at 30 mph. “

The British Horse Society’s head of safety Sheila Hardy said that 100,000 riders had now passed the BHS Riding and Road Safety Test which was introduced about 20 years ago.

“More than half of those who take the test are leisure riders but we believe that all riders owe a duty of care to themselves, their horses and other road users,” she commented. “That duty of care should include training for and taking the BHS Riding and Road Safety Test before they venture on today’s busy roads.”

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