

SAFETY ERRORS BEHIND RIDER'S DEATH

A girl, four, in pony tragedy.

A girl aged four was dragged screaming to her death on her second riding lesson , an inquest heard yesterday.

Madeline Jackson's wellington boot may have slipped completely through the overlarge hoop when Welsh pony Noodles shied, the hearing was told.

She fell and was left hanging from the saddle with her riding hat scraping along the road after her instructor lost her grip on the reins.

But yesterday's inquest heard she might have been spared had safety stirrups been provided,

Miss Miller, of Manor Drive, Pickering, said the normally-passive pony, only 11 hands high, was startled by a rustling in the hedge on the opposite side of the road.

She said: "Noodles panicked and shied forwards. Madeline screamed which made Noodles panic even more. I tried to turn around to tell her to hold onto her saddle. I stumbled and lost my balance."

She said that, as she fell, she lost her grip on the reins with one hand. She was still holding on with the other but the pony continued to canter forwards and the reins shot out of her grip.

Noodles disappeared around a bend with Madeline still with her foot stuck and her head "scraping along the floor". Noodles had disappeared. Madeline died shortly after being transferred to Leeds General Infirmary.

Horse riding expert James MacKie was called in by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to investigate the tragedy last August. He said safety stirrups should have been fitted.

After the hearing, Mr MacKie said the case underlined the need for more clarity about safety procedures.

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MEMORANDUM

Accidents and injuries caused by being dragged.

As one of the top Equestrian Expert witnesses engaged in litigation advice and as a trainer and instructor who has been involved in many equestrian disciplines, I have come across very many cases where a rider's foot has become trapped in a stirrup when falling, causing the unlucky person to be dragged by the frightened and bolting horse.

I cannot think of a case where the injuries would not have been prevented had effective safety stirrups been used and, in my view, the most effective of all are the new Toe Stoppers.

Any rider will minimise the risk of serious injury by using Toe Stoppers but in my view they particularly useful in establishments where riders turn up in unsuitable footwear and/or where the correct size of stirrups cannot be issued.

To be dragged is one of the most terrifying experiences but the risk of it happening can, almost certainly be prevented.

James Mackie

23.8.04

CV: BHS "British Horse Society" Registered Specialist (3DE) Instructor, BHTA British Horse Trainer Association Accredited Trainer, member of National Coaching Foundation (NCF). BHS Cross Country Consultant. Mr. Mackie has a thorough knowledge of the BHS and its systems and yet completely independent from it and able to provide unpartisan advice. Expert Equestrian Witness Work and has practiced since 1988, writes on average 25 equestrian reports for new cases each year (50:50 Claimant/Defendant). Member of Academy of Experts & Society of Expert Witnesses, registered with UK Register of Expert Witnesses. Checked and listed in the Law Society Directory of Experts and listed with Association of Personal Injury Lawyers Database. Mr. Mackie is also experienced in County and the High Court cases.