

This could be the most contentious article I have written on horses and rival the great Corrales debates on sewers, coyotes, and skate parks that have graced the pages of the Comment in the past.

To wear or not to wear, that is the question..... Spurs? Shoes? Chinks or Chaps? No... HELMETS!

Oh, oh, I said the word. I can feel the tension already rising across the newsprint. Helmets..... Yes the topic of the month as we prepare for a summer of adventure aboard our steeds. After all the knights of the round table all wore helmets didn't they? Why wouldn't we join in? It just makes sense... or does it.

When did you last see jousting in Corrales other than parking for the Harvest Festival? Is horseback riding any more prone to hurt our heads than other routine Corrales activities?

I sometimes fear for my head while fishing for the last piece of Green Chili Cheeseburger pizza at the Village Pizza Monday night buffet. I worry about the heads of our elected officials at the Village Council meetings where there is a fair amount of jousting. How about the brain cancer you are getting by illegally talking on your cell phone while driving home on Loma Larga? Would a helmet protect those neurons from invisible cancer causing rays?

Things can get pretty "Heady" at the Sunday Grower's Market, not to mention the post office if you have a lower box and the one above you is open as you check your mail.

Maybe these should all become helmeted activities?

One of the most common accidents is falling and things like wet bathroom floor make it even a bigger risk. I suppose helmets should be required for all bathroom activities unless you still have a dirt floor outhouse or non-skid planks on the floor of your one or two holer.

Next to vehicular accidents, falling is the largest area of injuries for Boy Scouts and most Corraleños are hardly as agile as a sure footed First Class Boy Scout!

Gardening is certainly a cerebral activity in Corrales where all the refugees from Tanoan pray for their plants and commune with the praying mantises they purchased at Village Mercantile, not to mention the lady bugs. Heaven forbid if one was knocked on the noodle by a falling rake or a Roto Hoe handle and left the garden to nature to survive! I say helmet those gardeners before it is too late!

Now hold on Komadina... this is a HORSE article. Right? Then how come all those non-horse folks are trying to tell me I have to wear a helmet on Milagro my mighty steed? It is a miracle I can get on him much less not fall off at my advanced age.

I got so tired of well meaning jibes that I actually bought a helmet a few years ago. It looked a little weird and felt even weirder, but I did wear it to bed twice so my wife would not give me an intracranial bleed if she threw her arm over my head during the night. I felt so much safer when I dropped off to sleep, but the crick in my neck the next morning was not worth it.

So to wear or not to wear... what is the answer? My initial thought is that there could be worse ways to die. I would much rather die doing something I enjoy than at the end of a long stay in a nursing home unable to care for my every need. But that is just me and you may well feel differently. Quality of life to me is paramount and quantity is secondary.

But doesn't it just make sense to not risk what could be so easily prevented? So say the helmet always people. I respect their opinion. But you have to realize that I have survived 70 helmetless years (except for that one night in bed) and here I am. Sort of in one piece. Wearing a helmet is certainly a proactive way to lessen the risk of injury falling from a height off a horse, but maybe there are other things just as proactive...

You see I am very selective in the way I interact with a horse be it on the ground or on its back. I carefully select the horse I ride and the day and circumstances I ride in. I see people frequently out of control in a setting that is not conducive to their or their horses health. I kind of like ambling along the dirt trails of the outback (softer place to land). I don't need a blacktop path and

people waving at me and other distractions one might find in a parade for instance. But I would not chide anyone who loves riding in parades. You see I love parades, but I often will walk my horse along the crowd on foot so the children can pet my horse and get up close and personal. Little do they know I have decreased my risk by not riding on blacktop. I used to ride alone in very remote places. I no longer do that and love long multi-day rides with groups where most of the logistics are taken care of and I can just enjoy my horse and the view. Probably safer behavior for a senior rider.

I always work with my horse on the ground before ever getting in the saddle. I don't mean lunging to "wear the horse down." I mean communicating on the ground what I will later transfer to the horse from the saddle. Some days we never get beyond the ground game, but I always ask the horse if it was as good for them as it was for me.

Lastly I would caution as more risky behavior than not wearing a helmet the danger of ego in a rider. Just because everyone else is doing it does not mean you have to do it. You probably should question the friendship which depends on you doing things you don't feel good about and look for more harmonious partners. "Come on. You can do it." can make you better and more proficient but I always listen to that still small voice that says time to turn back and prepare a little better before accepting the challenge.

So there you have it... To Wear a Helmet or NOT to Wear a Helmet? That is an answer you will have to look for when you see me on the trail. Did John Wayne have to worry about this stuff? Time to saddle up and move out. Adios Amigo!