

Tragedy for hatless rider

Sir—On 18 October, my partner was riding our hunter on a quiet road when something frightened the horse and caused it to bolt. My partner was found on the road with serious head injuries.

He was an experienced horseman who, unfortunately, chose not to wear a hat. He was wearing a baseball cap because he was only going out for a "short while". He was transferred to Beaumont Hospital in Dublin, but died of his injuries on 23 October.

This is the most shocking event that will affect us forever. It could so easily have been a different story.

I would like to plead with everyone involved with horses to wear a correctly fitted hat when riding, no matter how experienced the jockey or quiet the horse.

April Rees
Tuam, Co Galway

Team chase rule: flawed?

Sir—How bizarre a sport we team chasers follow when we have a mid-season rule change with no consultation with our committee or competitors (news, 2 November).

Determining whether a horse has fallen or merely unseated its rider, in the heat of the moment and from the other side of a large hedge, is going to make life difficult for fence judges. In eventing, the fence judges can usually be placed strategically to see both the landing and take off sides of a fence.

Everyone seems to agree that the rule itself is good for horse welfare. But plenty of them can see problems enforcing the new rule — and as Tony Blair has found, an unenforceable law is ultimately a bad law.

Mark Smith
Shurlock Row, Berks

In the best hands?

Sir—I left the recent British Horse Driving Trials Association (BHDTA) conference with the feeling that our sport is now hopelessly under-represented and in the hands of people who feel invulnerable to constructive criticism or questioning.

The association has squandered the opportunity to become the authoritative voice

of competitive driving.

I was left questioning the need for a governing council that has apparently accepted that its sport is shrinking beyond hope of redemption, and the only answer is to hide behind ineffective "rules".

Was I the only member left with the distinct impression that all decisions had already been made and "discussion" was not being considered?

Peter Edmondson
Neindigate, Surrey

What comes naturally

Sir—How great it was to see a balanced discussion of natural horsemanship in *Horse & Hound* (26 October).

Chris Bartle says: "People fall into the trap of thinking that a two-day course or the latest halter and rope... can instil in them horsemanship."

Prancing around in designer jods or roaring around country lanes in a Range Rover does not a horseman make. But there's no law that says you can't dream a dream and take every step on any available path to get you there.

I admire anyone who has success with horses and who endeavours to reach the top of their field. I'm not competitive — I'm a relationship person and I want to have a partnership

Letter of the week

Who will campaign for GENUINE 4x4 users?

Sir—Like many of your readers, my wife and I own a 4x4 vehicle. The purpose of owning this vehicle is not for status, intimidating other road users, burning an unnecessary amount of fuel nor transporting children on an inner city school run. It is solely to tow a horse trailer legally. Our 4x4 is used sparingly and covers less than 3,000 miles a year.

While I completely agree with making this type of vehicle unpopular in order to reduce vehicle emissions, there is an alternative to raising our road tax to £1,800.

If road tax were abolished and fuel duty significantly increased, this would have the same net effect in making these vehicles undesirable to the average person, but would still allow the equine community to use them sparingly without being penalised for their hobby.

In certain European countries, this type of tax is a reality — although fuel duty is lower than in Britain.

I suggest that we make our politicians aware of the threat posed to our hobby, and urge the British Horse Society to lobby on our behalf.

Matthew Rees
Bishopston, Swansea

The writer of the letter of the week wins a bottle of Champagne Taittinger



with my horse so we can have fun, hack out, hang out and challenge each other to learn more about our different ways of seeing the world. What's wrong with that?

Sophie Morton
West Wittering, West Sussex

Sir—I read with interest the article "Instant horsemanship". The Americans have been successful in selling and then merchandising ideas. The web is the ideal method of promoting such ideas and there is a huge market, with customers spending fortunes, while conventional riding schools are going out of business.

After riding for 45 years and running my own equestrian business for more than 20 years, my experience suggests that anything about horsemanship takes hard work, long hours, dedication and learning from those with more experience and qualifications than myself.

There are many self-professed experts whose main skill is selling their system, not actually getting qualifications to match Mr Bartle's. When their record exceeds his, we should perhaps take their advice.

Richard Halls
Millbrook, Beds