
Taking Western seriously

Posted by scotty - 2006/08/10 09:17

One of my two roles in life is freelance journalism and I mainly cover equine issues. I'm new to Western and have been quietly researching the market for some time, visiting shows, getting to know people etc and reading up the history of this style of riding all with a view to taking it up myself. But, and I know this is going to arouse strong feelings, I don't think western riding will be taken really seriously in the UK, with as many converts as might be the case otherwise, unless you DITCH THE COWBOY HATS!

The first reaction I get from horsey friends and some non-horsey when I tell them I want to have a go is 'will you have to wear a silly hat?' and this is a shame. The finesse and softness of this style of riding has its origins in what we would call classical riding but to the outside world it's a bunch of wannabee cowboys. This is fine if that's what you are actually doing and you yourself want to play at being a cowboy just like some people dress up as roundheads and cavaliers etc. But to promote what should be a serious sport is it absolutely necessary to wear them? In the US, in many of the areas where Wes riding predominates, you see people in bars and cafes wearing cowboy hats as it is normal for them. But it isn't here and we also have a culture of wearing crash helmets in the UK, which is something you so often just don't see in the US. Many riders now have personal accident insurance, especially those who don't get paid sick leave (like me!) and the insurance is immediately invalidated should you have a fall and you are not wearing a helmet. I appreciate that some riders probably only wear 'the hat' in the show ring but accidents happen anywhere even with bombproof horses and I think that the cowboy hats really detract from this sport as some people, who might otherwise have a go, are put off by the thought of having to look 'wussy' and different if they wear helmets. I've seen only one or two people wearing helmets in the showring. I know this won't be a popular view but it's meant well from somebody who continues to be attracted to the sport and would love to see it taken more seriously, which I think will happen if you leave the cowboy hats at home. You can promote 'Wes' riding in all its glory without looking as if you wish you were in Texas.

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Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by LizSwitzer - 2006/08/10 11:35

wow... where do I start? Nobody else has jumped in, so I may as well.

I'm not gonna tear you off a strip... like I originally planned, because I appreciate your points on the safety issues of hard hats versus cowboy hats....

HOWEVER... do you honestly let your english riding pals make cracks about our cowboy hats when some of the ladies thighs clad in cream jodhs :sick: should be, at the very least, cautioned under the indecent exposure laws, and just how many men do YOU know that look manly in long boots and breeches hmmm? Scrawny bow legs have never really done it for me I am afraid... but a man in a quality cowboy hat.... :woohoo: :evil:

We dress as is appropriate to our sport, as dressage riders ride in tails and top hats... no helmets at top level, and side saddle ladies ride in habits, and again... no helmets. Even the top level show hunters etc - the men are wearing bowlers ... why must you find yet another reason to laugh at us?

There are some riders, and some clubs around the UK that make the whole darn thing a farce, but if the people that are so far up their own backsides EVER crawl out long enough to visit the real world they will see that SOME of us take huge pride in our appearance, our riders and horses are turned out to a standard that would make HOYS qualifiers look scruffy, and we spend more on our hats than a tenner for a kiss me quick cowboy hat from Skegness!

IF the British public ever get over themselves and the God awful "what will the neighbours think" attitude, they will see that western is not about dressing up and playing cowboy... as you mentioned... HOWEVER in my humble opinion, if they do think we look like fools, and prefer to snigger in the corner about our outfits and not give us and our horses the credit we deserve... well who the he** needs them?

Western riders are in general a friendly bunch and I for one love seeing my extended "family" at the start of every season. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to pull up at the first show of the year and see old friends, groggy good mornings passed at 4 am, and smokey campfires at 11 pm... I love that I can leave my trailer open with my saddle in full view, I love that my kids can wander safely from barns to restaurant to arena without me. I love western people. I don't want it invaded by a bunch of sad, snooty people that look down on us, mainly as they are beside themselves with jealousy that we have what they so desperately want:

A fine bunch of people with the best horses in the world.

One last word... next time you go to a show, why don't you get one of your pals to go up and tell David Deptford or Michael Gatt, or any one of our other guys they look daft in cowboy hats... dare ya!

;)

Re: Taking Western seriously

Posted by Bit of Both - 2006/08/10 12:13

I don't think I could agree more strongly with something than I do with Liz's comments.

Although I don't compete in western so I can't comment on the atmosphere at shows and the friendships from all reports it is the best. I know from the "english" scene how intimidating it can be but although I only spectated at a western show everyone was friendly and chatty and helpful when I didn't know what classes were on next etc.

There is nothing stopping you wearing a safety helmet if that is your preference, infact I think there is even a safety cowboy hat (don't hold me to that). You could rest assured that if you did choose to wear a helmet no one would laugh at you or make you feel "different" unlike the "english" scene that has trouble adapting to change.

I can understand your reservations to wear a cowboy hat but it is more you feel selfconcious than anyone looking at you funnily - everyone there will be dressed the same after all. When I worked in Oz people wore hats and boots to do the shopping, go to the pub, go out for dinner and I felt weird as doing the same but nobody looked twice even though they were wearing theirs with more conviction than me (to start with anyway ;)

As for the turnout of the horses/riders, I have to strongly disagree with Scotty. They always look PERFECT, even just for schooling lessons. I have never seen such high levels of turnout -the horses gleams, the riders outfits are either neatly pressed jeans and shirts or co-ordinating eye catching slinkys etc, the silver on the saddles totally shines - how many "english" peeps could say the same about the metal wear on their saddles?

I don't really understand where you are coming from, I'm sorry, I don't mean to be rude. I also don't understand the need to disassociate western riders with "cowboys". That is where this method of riding has originated from and where it was refined into what it is today. Cowboys aren't all hats, spurs and yehaahs, they are skilled horsemen/stockmen with years of experience in the saddle riding all different types & ages of horses in all different spheres be it ranch work, stock work, cutting, mustering, roping, doctoring etc and from that the competition classes like reining, western horsemanship, trail riding, etc have sprung up.

I am not very knowledgeable on this subject, I'm currently trying (with limited success) to train my horse western and just try to learn as much as poss from watching, reading, listening and from forums like this but this is just my point of view on the original posting.

I'm not looking down on "english" either - that's why I'm "bit of both" as I ride english and have done since I was 5 but since 2003 have been interested in western/QHs since working on a cattle station and just been trying to find out as much about it as possible.

Maybe you should try going for lessons with/at any of the places advertised on here and you could find out first hand everything about the sport and why people wear what they wear etc. Infact I'm sure that you will find that most places insist on you wearing a helmet for lessons on their horses.

I really don't see how the cowboy hat can or does detract from the skill involved in this style of riding or the wow factor be it sliding stops, spins, cutting etc.

I think we should be trying to be more like the USA rather than less when it comes to this sport. As per the forum thread relating to the AQHA world show and the standard set over there. Surely GB should be raising its standards (especially with the chance of reining becoming an Olympic sport) instead of trying to totally disassociate itself.

Sorry, hope I haven't droned on too much and that at least some of the things I have said make sense - trying to type very quickly so the boss doesn't notice what I am up to during working hours :whistle:

Re: Taking Western seriously

Posted by scotty - 2006/08/10 12:49

To Liz and Bit of Both. Phew. Give me a break guys. I'm actually on your side but playing a bit of devil's advocate. If you

read my post you will see I didn't in any way shape or form impugn the standard of turnout, of horse and rider, neither did I suggest the wes community isn't friendly etc. To be honest, this is why I was attracted to it in the first place! I entirely agree that the 'English' scene isn't nearly as good. That wasn't my point. I just felt that the hats give an unfortunate impression, not in terms of 'what the neighbours think' as I couldn't care less on that score. It's simply that Western has so much to offer, especially to, shall we say, more mature riders. Wes has many attractions, one of which is that you can compete at the bottom doing the best you can, either on your own or working with a trainer, and having great fun with your horse, at any age whereas at the 'fun' level of 'English' competition, it tends to be dominated by kids on ponies. This is what I've seen on my travels to Wes shows and I think it's fantastic and so refreshing. I think Wes could be huge as it has so much to offer and was merely offering a suggestion. I've been asked why people wear the hats so I was interested to see what would come back from my post. I appreciate it's the dress code, as with top hats for dressage etc (although you only see that at the top) but I just happen to believe that safe head gear is really important and I wouldn't abandon my crash helmet for a cowboy hat, not because I give two hoots for what anybody thinks but because I prefer to keep my head intact and also, my insurance wouldn't pay out!

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Re: Taking Western seriously

Posted by LizSwitzer - 2006/08/10 14:08

Hi again, really should be doing my housework you know!

Anyway, thanks for supprt to Bit Of Both, and to Scotty... I know you didn't make any comments re turnout/atmosphere etc, I was merely pointing out that THOSE are the attributes we should be crowing about and not be so concerned with the hats on our heads!

If you are truly on "our side" why would you not be able to defend our right to wear what we like? As for the issue of putting people off... white johds in show jumping are flattering only to the 21 and under crowd of girls that we all like to think we once were...and why is it ok for dressage people "at the top" but not us to go hatless when quite frankly my green broke 3 year old puts EVERY dressage horse I know to shame, behaviour wise.... (I have worked with international Grand Prix dressage horses so please don't think I mean pony clubbers or something:)) And don't worry, before you say it I absolutely agree an accident can happen anywhere, anytime, and on any horse... they're horses after all.

Fact is, you and anyone else can, and do wear hard hats in western competition. Esp the youth riders... it is compulsory, and it is gaining momentum in the USA. But for those of us who don't, just let us be.

We are western HORSEMEN (and women),the people that want to dress up and play cowboy... well they DO that in re-enactments, and they go linedancing. They don't pay thousands for beefy QH's and show entries, and so on!

I don't know if you have been to any AQHA shows, but I wish you would if you haven't as you'll see the western hat really is the least important aspect, it merely ties it all together neatly. I know at local level, the quality and style can be um, how do I say this nicely...well, you know... er... rustic? Will that do? And some competitors look more "howdy doody" then "Hi Ho Silver" but, thats what they can afford, they are probably on big hairy cobs, with not so great tack, but they're having fun, and those of us that take it seriously do put alot more effort into our wardrobes, and it does I believe, make the whole ensemble look considerably less "desperate dan". (please NO OFFENCE to anybody ok... just trying to illustrate a point!)

But I am ranting again, simply put, we don't hold ANY grudge against ANY age person in a hard hat. It's your brain, you care for it as you see fit.

I grew up in the USA and I didn't wear a hard hat til I came here,it wasn't done, no big deal. I love my cowboy hat, I live in it, have done for over a decade(technically we don't wear cowboy hats in CT but I do! :P) each and every day even at Tesco :blink: you'll find me in my tatty straw hat (save the expensive one for showing!)... and yet I won't ride on the roads without a hard hat... I don't jump without a hard hat... so I guess I choose my risk factor.

I am aware, as is everyone else who chooses to ride bare headed, that my horse could fall, or dump me, or anything, anywhere... but my car could get hit by a lorry. I could fall down the stairs... or even when riding in my hard hat I could break my back, or my neck...I just can't protect myself from everything, all the time. So I will just try to enjoy what I do. And pray that God is keeping an eye on me!

So please, all I am asking is that you help us western riders to spread OUR word... don't try and make US conform, or we may as well hang up our spurs, wave the white flag and say uncle... we're done.

Hope to see you at the shows in your cowboy hat ok?! (You can change before you ride!)

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Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by Theresa - 2006/08/10 17:54

Hi, no plans to rant but to say that my experience isn't that people don't take Western seriously because of hats or outfits. In fact my other half who has taken up riding has said that if I rode English he would never of been interested (Jods, long boots and hat with a bow don't do it for him! - did find him a hard hat without a bow in the end).

Also, we stock western clothing in an English tack shop and most of the English riders love the sparkly outfits, I have one group of girls that are doing a dressage pattern to music and are allowed to wear anything and they're going for the cowgirl look.

Would rather convert the English riders than give up our hats and outfits!

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Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by markrm - 2006/08/10 23:15

Well said Liz and Bit of Both. Scotty, I appreciate now that you were trying to play devils advocate but your first post didn't come over that way. You should pay more attention to the standard of horses and riding and the friendliness of the people involved, not worry about what people wear. I rode English for quite a few years before being converted 100% to Western. If you think about it English riding attire is pretty strange, much of it probably dating back to the 19th century or before, but no one thinks twice about it over here because they are used to seeing it. Clothing for Western riding (certainly for men) is all about practicality and comfort and I would much rather wear a pair of wranglers and a comfortable shirt than Jodphurs and jacket. With all the positives of Western I have to say I would wear practically anything if it was expected (I say practically anything however I draw the line at pink latex!). Enjoy the advantages of Western riding and the people that go with it and wear the clothing INCLUDING THE HAT, with pride.:)

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Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by amanda - 2006/08/12 09:28

Hi Scotty,

thanks for your comments! I think there is a lot of truth in what you're saying but, you know what?...we're quite used to some people having a little giggle at us! Some of those people actually change their minds when they see just what our horses are capable of, some then converting to western. As for the others that continue to laugh, if they are that unintelligent and unobservant, I don't think we really want them invading our great western community!

These days you'd have to be living in a cave not to have seen or read about western riding - practically every month in one or other of the mainstream 'English' magazines there is an article about western riding, promoting the sport in it's true light. These enlightened editors/journalists have seen beyond the 'cosmetics' as do many of their readers. They are also responding to the huge surge of interest in western riding, fuelled in part by the momentum gained by 'natural/intelligent horsemanship type demos/clinics/books/DVD's etc.

We've just done a days western riding demo for our local pony club and the kids were fantastic. Nearly all of them had seen western riding somewhere previously, they were all enthusiastic, and all happy to give it a go with their ponies. The instructors, all extremely experienced horsemen and women, couldn't wait to hop up on our horses, and all agreed that they loved the lightness they experienced. As for hats, I wore a hard hat and my husband a baseball cap. We save the stetson for the showing (much too expensive to ruin by wearing for everyday riding!). We didn't really give the hat issue a thought, and as nobody else mentioned it, I don't suppose they did either!

Guys in jeans = yeah baby!

Guys in Jods = no, oh no, no no no!

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Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by Calamity - 2006/08/13 13:13

Just to add my twopenneth - I've always worn a hard hat when riding out, training and sometimes in the show ring. If it's

a posh show, I'll probably wear a stetson. It is entirely up to the rider to assess the risk level and do what they feel comfortable with, but I agree it should be compulsory for youth riders (even though I've seen youth competitors wearing stetsons at shows and baseball caps when training!). I work in an establishment that cares for and rehabilitates people with acquired brain injury, and it is not an easy road for the victim. Most people think it will never happen to them, but it can. However, I have to say one riding accident victim was wearing an english riding hat, which was knocked off when she was dumped by her spooked horse. So perhaps the safest place to be is on a well trained, calm and sensible western mount.

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Re:Taking Western seriously (For Scotty)

Posted by Bit of Both - 2006/08/17 15:58

I was just on ebay (again) and if Scotty, or anyone else for that matter, is looking for a safety stetson there is one listed if you search on "Western Riding".

Maybe this would be more suitable and in keeping with others in the show ring. It seems to be the best of both worlds as it reaches the required safety standards and looks like an ordinary stetson? I'm sure if you contacted the seller direct they would be able to advise where they purchased it.

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Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by Jeannine - 2006/10/10 21:18

Hi there,

are people in general are not always very critical of new things? I am in the UK now for almost 3 years and the western society here is very, if not extremely friendly. I had a warm welcome from pretty much everybody!

In Germany the western riding sport was small to some time ago but has massively grown in the last 10 years.

The WES equivalent society counts around 20,000 members now. You have shows every weekend within a 50 mile radius. So the industry is big. But that brings good and bad. Yes the sport is much more accepted, I can go to the pub or supermarket with my spurs on and nobody is surprised.

But on the other hand, it all became VERY competitive, people seemed to have lost their sense of humor and forgotten the reason why they originally started riding western.

So I guess being looked at like a stranger because not so many people know and understand the sport is not always so bad. At least you get a lot of support within the western world.

... just my thoughts :-))
Jeannine

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Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by Jeannine - 2006/10/10 21:22

me again - if you are after the safety stetson.

I do sell them but I just want to make you aware that this is not a BHS approved hat nor is a very sophisticated hat. It does give you some protection but is no replacement for a riding hat.

At the moment there is a 8 week delivery time as the manufacturer is behind production.

If you want more infos or need any other tack please get in touch.

www.westerntack.co.uk

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Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by jinglejoys - 2006/10/23 18:25

I think the OP was just putting forward an alternative point.I like the gear and I love the hats but I'd feel safer in a safety hat of some sort.I do find the usual hard hat hot and uncomfortable so have gone for the Troxel like the Endurance people but I think they might not come up to British Standards.

I don't do Western yet as Malaga is still waiting to be backed but I do drive my little mule Blue and if people think Western looks odd you ought to see the outfit drivers get done up in!--Me just being awkward drives a small mule Bitless,blinkerless,barefoot and in a saddlechariot without a groom! Enough to send "them what does it proper" into a fit of apoplexy!!!! :evil: :)

I would fancy riding my mule western in culottes as I haven't worn a skirt for years,I'd love to know if anyone does it presuming its allowed

Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by Gem - 2007/08/21 13:46

In WES and the ApHC and BAPS you do not need to ware a Stetson.New rules came into action last year for WES after there was an accident in the showmanship class, something to do with a stalion missbehaving. and you no longer need to wear a stetson on the ground or on board.

There are more ridiculous looking western shirts and tack than hats.

Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by billywhiz - 2007/08/21 19:05

Being present at the incident, the horse inquestion chinned the handler. Hat stetson or hard would not have helped. Hard hats are very sensible and I would encourage all to wear them.

Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by Belle - 2007/08/21 21:52

I guess I feel obliged to add my piece too! I rode 'English' for over 20 years before converting to western. For some reason I never saw the hats as 'silly', I just accepted them as part of the style of riding. Any english riders that we've shared yards with have been more interested in the horses and tack than our headgear. I've attended many english shows where, in general, competitors are not overly approachable and are keen to find fault with one another. I'm guessing that they wouldn't be so understanding even at my local gymkana if I wanted to make their dress code more appealing to myself by wearing some nice pressed Wranglers and a shirt instead of jods and a jacket!!! They have a traditional dress style but likewise so do we and I'm not sure it would be a wise move to adapt our style to suit 'would be converts'. Competitors are more than welcome to wear hard hats if they wish to in the show pen and I'm pretty positive that not one other competitor would pick fault with them or make them any less welcome.

Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by Shiny Mole - 2007/08/22 08:54

I only bought a quarter horse so that I would have an excuse to buy a stetson!!!!!!

Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by campbh - 2007/08/22 09:35

As a newbie to both western and showing this year, I've competed more in a hard hat than in a stetson - and wouldn't dream of not wearing a hard hat for warming up/schooling or hacking out. And no instructor has ever allowed me to get on for a lesson, even with my own horse, without a hard hat on.

At shows I've not once been made to feel either stupid or novice for not wearing a stetson; my decision on which hat to wear has been governed by how confident I am on each occasion, on how settled my horse is and - not least this year(!) by what the weather's doing!! And whether I've worn a stetson or hard hat has made not a jot of difference to results - when I've done better it's because I've ridden better, not because I've looked any better!

That said, I love the fact that here is an equestrian discipline where you can really express yourself through your attire and your approach to grooming, and the care that western riders take with their gear and their horses does put most English competitors to shame. It really does look fabulous (or am I biased now??!:lol:)

Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by limeyandyank - 2007/08/22 17:11

I always prefer to wear a baseball cap but often get 'tut tutted' by the English riders. Might be due to the fact that it's a Harley Davidson cap and i'm not on an iron horse! LoL :lol:

Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by QQH - 2007/08/22 20:18

I knew I liked you.....tut tut;) B)

Jude

Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by misty - 2007/08/25 20:01

People take you seriously when they see what your horse can do! Our Rosie is still (like us) very green but when I go out hacking with English buddies and I need to back up, turn tightly or nip through hedges they are impressed at how well she does it. In backup none of these four steps back and struggle for more. They all ask how she stops! I just have to remember not to stretch my legs forward when they get tired.

So all you guys who are GOOD just get out hacking so people can see.

I so want to wear a stetson!

Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by dijjim - 2007/08/30 17:25

It seems that everyone forgets (and that includes some organisations rules) that stetson is a brand name and there are many brands of straw and felt hats out there including Eddy bros and Baileys who both make super western style hats.

Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by markrm - 2007/08/30 21:53

I think it's best to wear a hard hat if you're in any doubt, and there's no shame in that - horses as we all know can be very

unpredictable. I love wearing the stetson - it's comfortable and practical (when we actually get some sun) but it doesn't do much to protect you from impacts.

Post edited by: markrm, at: 2007/08/30 22:56

Post edited by: markrm, at: 2007/08/30 23:18

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Re:Taking Western seriously

Posted by hunterrookie - 2007/08/30 22:11

To add to this, my buddy who is VERY into her dressage and had been competing at the area festivals came to watch hubby at the WES champs. After the usual cracks about wanting to pull the horse together and send it forward:P She was MOST impressed!!! She's even threatening to have a sit on madam soon ...IF we let her! WES enforced the stetson/hard had rule well at the Champs, and quite right too..even tho I was caught out as a handler in a baseball cap...oops sorry Paddy! If these venues give a waiver for our rules by allowing the stetson (cowboy hat, call it what you will), then we should respect this and not flout it in caps or bare heads!

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