

ask

The Owners' Circle

Experiencing horse ownership for all it's worth is very exciting, but it is important to remember that there are people all around you who are trying to do their jobs. Just keeping this simple fact in mind will help to make your paddock experience a fun and safe one!

What are the Rules of Etiquette in the Paddock?

by Ali LaDuke

The rules regarding proper etiquette in the paddock are quite simple, and primarily revolve around two central premises: safety for all, and the integrity of the sport.

First off, it is nearly universally accepted that no one should enter the paddock unless they are starting a horse, or have been specifically invited by one who is, to join them in the paddock. Entering the paddock to be in the spotlight, to impress others, or to get a better view, are not valid reasons to be in there.

When watching your own Thoroughbred being saddled, it's easy to forget that, while it's all quite exciting, and these animals are remarkable athletes, they are still horses and a bit unpredictable. This is precisely why the focus of the rules is on safety first, then integrity.

Ken Goldberg, who has been Paddock Judge on the Southern California Thoroughbred racing circuit for 11 years, explained that he tries to keep the paddock area as safe as possible. Normally he's pretty busy making sure the horses are out on the track at the right time, but he also has the authority to correct any problems.

"The main offense is usually cell phone usage," said Goldberg. "It's impolite, and it takes the cell phone users' attention off their surroundings. They can get hurt if they're not aware of the horses around them."

Goldberg is also concerned with the presence of children in the paddock because they tend to sit down on the grass. He explained, "It's really hard to get away from a horse when you have to get up off the ground first. That's why I always ask kids who have sat down to please get up. Also, I don't allow any babies in their strollers. The stroller can come in, but the baby must be removed. They're safer with a parent."

Dawn Jackson, Del Mar's paddock judge for the past four years, agrees. "Watch your kids," she said, "and don't let them run around. It's one of my biggest pet peeves."

Jackson added that the small paddock at Del Mar greatly increases safety concerns. "Lots of people want to go in the paddock at Del Mar," she said, "because it's fun and exciting. But unfortunately that means you have less room to move around if you have to." She's seen far too many incidents where people have to scatter, and it's never a welcome surprise!

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