



Leone Equestrian Law LLC



What To Know Before a Catch Ride

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In the hunter and jumper rings, catch riding is a common occurrence. A green or mischievous horse or pony matched with a timid or novice rider can present notable challenges, especially on horse show day. A catch ride with a more experienced rider is a useful training tool and remedy in the right situation to resolve a horse's inexperience or bad habits including bucking, rearing, spooking, or refusing to jump.

Other times, trainers may just need a catch ride in the under saddle class because an owner or rider has two horses in the same division.

Regardless of the reason, individuals involved in the decision-making process should be aware of potential problems and liability concerns that can arise out of a "simple" catch ride.



To protect all parties, communicating about the horse's and rider's abilities, skills, and limitations should be given before a catch ride. Photo by [Jump Media](#)

Suppose a catch rider is selected to ride a horse because its current rider cannot get it to jump around the course. The catch rider enters the ring, the horse spins and throws the rider into a jump causing serious injury. The rider wants to sue, noting that they should have never been put on the horse. The horse owner says falling off is part of the sport, and they knew the horse might stop. Whether or not a legal remedy exists will depend upon the equine liability statute of the particular state and the unique factual circumstances of the fall.

Equine liability statutes protect participants in horse sports from civil liability in an effort to encourage the sport of riding. State equine liability statutes aim to protect equine activities because riding and showing horses is hazardous and unpredictable. By shifting the risk to participants, states can better achieve their goals.

Unless specific exceptions apply, participants cannot sue for injury. Horse show entry forms also contain language mimicking part of its state's equine statute, disclaiming liability for injuries resulting from inherent risks of equine/animal activities.

However, if someone gets hurt, the injured person can always sue. From there, questions about disclosure of the horse's habits to the rider and the rider's experience to the horse owner tend to arise. Answers to these questions are found by looking at how much the rider was informed of the horse's bad habits before getting on, how honest the rider was about prior riding experience, the safety of the riding or show environment, and assumption of risk recognition.

Did the trainer or owner know the horse's propensity to spin and stop, and tell the rider; did the horse previously injure other riders? These questions would immediately arise and as a result, should be broached ahead of the catch ride.

Similarly, did the trainer or owner reasonably try to determine the catch rider's ability and experience to safely navigate the horse over a course of jumps? If a rider can prove that the trainer or owner knew the horse's tendency to misbehave, and knowingly matched it with a novice rider, an exception to the general rule of immunity may exist.

Proving a connection between the negligence and the injury is also crucial for someone to succeed on a claim for injuries. The court has found that even if the trainer or owner failed to properly determine a rider's ability, liability could only result if failing to understand the rider's ability was connected to the damage.

Suppose that no one adequately assessed the catch rider's ability but instead of being injured because the horse stopped and spun at a jump, the horse tripped and fell going around a turn. Even if the owner or trainer didn't closely examine the rider's abilities, a lawsuit would fail because the fall was caused by an inherent risk of riding any horse and not anything to do with issues related to the horse or rider.

This article originally ran online on January 25, 2021, on [Horse Network](#).

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Armand Leone, Jr. and Lassandro. Photo courtesy of Armand Leone, Jr.

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For advice and counsel related to the equestrian industry, contact Leone Equestrian Law at info@equestriancounsel.com.

Led by Armand Leone, Jr., MD, JD, MBA, Leone Equestrian Law LLC provides legal services and consultation for equestrian professionals ranging from riders and trainers to owners and show managers in the FEI disciplines on a wide variety of issues.

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