

Levels of Riding Ability Defined

Total Beginner - Total beginners have little experience (if any) at all with horses in general. They may have been on a "trail ride" at a rental stable once or twice but they do not know general horse handling or the basic commands to make the horse move forward, turn, trot, stop and back unassisted. They cannot saddle or bridle a horse themselves and are not comfortable handling a horse from the ground.

Advanced Beginner - These people have a little experience with horses. They may have grown up around horses or taken a few lessons. Maybe they used to ride a little as a child, but they may not be able to saddle and bridle a horse by themselves. This rider can mount and walk off unassisted. They know how to ask the horse to move forward, turn and stop. They may also be able to even trot or canter on a very smooth, well broke horse.

Confident Beginner - A confident beginner has the knowledge of an advanced beginner but will also be able to handle a horse that may not be overly willing to do as asked. Sometimes an older horse that is well broken may still balk at leaving the barn or be a little reluctant to leave a secure place. This rider will have the confidence to give a little kick if needed or use a more persuasive aid when required even though they may lack experience. They may or may not be able to post or rise to the trot. They are willing to learn and have no "fear" of horses.

Novice - Novice riders have some basic experience with horses. They have possibly had a few lessons, maybe owned a horse as a child (or recently), but have not competed or trained young, green horses. They can catch, halter, groom, saddle and bridle a horse by themselves. They can mount and ride off unassisted. A novice rider may or may not be able to rise (or post) to the trot, but they can trot without bouncing and can stay comfortable with a slow canter on a gentle, well broken horse. They should know how to ask and obtain a slow controlled walk, trot/jog and canter/lope. They can change direction and circle their horse. They are learning what a diagonal is and leads are. They may have even started a little jumping and are comfortable on a well broken horse, but may not be comfortable on a greener, younger, or less experienced mount.

Intermediate - The intermediate rider has taken lessons or trained under a mentor for a while, rides in a specific discipline (or has experience in several disciplines) and may compete. He or she has ridden several different types of horses and can independently manage a horse's care. Their seat is secure, they do not apply unintentional aids to the horse when they lose balance or become unseated. They know how to rise or post to the trot and ask for and obtain a specific lead or change in lead. They are capable of riding a less experienced horse and helping in that horse's training. They can train/compete at a more advanced level with a trainer's assistance. The intermediate rider is knowledgeable about different horse breeds and disciplines. He or she knows basic horse conformation and can detect lameness issues.

Advanced - Advanced riders have ridden most of their lives and have worked with a trainer/mentor for several years or had several years with intense riding instruction. They have competed successfully at recognized shows in their discipline. They can ride most horses including working with young/green horses without assistance. They know advanced maneuvers in their preferred riding discipline and can positively affect the horse they are riding at all times. The advanced rider can teach lessons to beginners, break and train horses and teach a horse advanced maneuvers. The advanced rider knows horse breeds and conformation well and can detect unsoundness vs. blemishes in a horse.

Professional - Professionals are paid to ride horses. They have studied under masters and are able to break horses, train and handle problem horses. The professional makes his or her living from horses. They can teach both horse and rider and have themselves competed in high level equine sport.