

# FALL SAFETY

## Essential skills for riders

*We were recently told about Lindsay Nylund, (pictured right) a former Commonwealth Games silver medalist gymnast, who had attended a one day event teaching riders how to fall. As you can imagine that made us sit up and take notice!*



*Generally, as riders, we are taught how to stay on, but as falling off really is an inevitable part of riding it seems to make sense that we are given some tuition on how to hit the ground as 'safely' as possible.*

We caught up with Lindsay to find out more.

### **I see your background is in gymnastics – how and why did you make the move into the horse world?**

I spent 20 years in gymnastics. 10 years as a competitor, the highlight being a Commonwealth Games Silver medalist and competing in World Championships and Olympic Games. After retirement as a competitor I coached men's and women's gymnastics initially at club level, and subsequently took on the role of head coach of the WA Institute of Sport Men's Gymnastics Program. After 10 years of coaching at high performance level, I decided on a career change and moved into the Corporate HR field for 20 years.

About two years ago, I decided that I would like to change my career focus back into training and coaching, but did not want to go back to the high performance gymnastics scene, so I began contemplating options. Around that time, there were a number of tragic jockey falls within a short period of time and this caught my attention. When I was coaching in WA many years ago, I was asked to run some ad hoc training for their apprentice jockeys in safe tumbling skills. I became concerned about the large number of serious injuries and although I understand that racing and equestrian sports are high risk, something did not seem right. This prompted me to do some video review of falls—mostly racing and eventing, because there were many that were publically available.

After reviewing the first 10 videos, it became obvious to me that most riders had not been trained. I also analysed the fall times and with proper skills-based training riders have time in most falls (including the high-speed race falls) to

do something to significantly reduce their risk of catastrophic injury. Many riders hold onto the reins too long when falling and often impact the ground without protecting their head/neck and with arms and legs in the wrong position.

I noticed that some of the professional jockeys responded well in falls, doing exactly what I would teach—let go of the reins, arms in a Brace Position, land with good body shape then tuck-and-roll. After speaking with a number of jockeys, I found out that they have mostly been self-taught. Many of the apprentices have not yet learned how to protect themselves properly and this is why we are seeing so many of them (and also track-work riders) coming to grief. This is a real concern for me because most apprentices and eventers are high-performance athletes and can easily be trained. I know some jockeys/riders have done some basic gymnastic or martial arts training, which is a good thing, but this alone is not enough to give the best level of protection in a high-speed fall or a rotational fall. Proper fall safety training has some important differences to standard gymnastic or martial arts techniques.

I quickly got to work designing and documenting the skills and training methods, and after the first year published the worlds-first reference book on the theory, science and training methods. Feedback from the initial training that I conducted with riders in NSW and VIC was well-received, so I continued developing the program.

### **Who were your first contacts in the eventing world?**

I made contact with the CEO's of each State Equestrian Association, Equestrian Australia, and the State Pony Club Associations and offered to give a presentation to provide them with information about the science, training methods and the positive rider feedback that I had received.

A couple of the state equestrian associations and also the NSW Pony Clubs Association all agreed to meet with me to learn about the program. Recently I also presented a seminar for riders and instructors in WA. Following on from this I have done a number of Pony Club camps in NSW, a clinic at an equestrian youth expo in SA, sessions for some riding clubs in NSW and SA, and recently training in WA.

Following two tragic cross-country falls in NSW last year, I was invited by the Scone Horse Trials Committee to offer training to riders at each of their subsequent horse trials. Scone Horse Trials Committee have recommended fall safety training as one of the measures for improved rider safety for eventers.



A rider hangs onto the reins

If I had worked in the equestrian field my whole life, I would not have had the opportunity to develop the ability to carry out this task. Having said that, the skills and training methods are not standard gymnastics skills, so it is important that any coach who may be interested in teaching equestrian fall safety learns about the important differences, such as drills to let go of the reins when falling. Tumbling skills will be

I was also encouraged when I was contacted by a member of the US Eventing Association Safety Committee last year, Danny Warrington. Danny was a professional steeplechase jockey who transitioned into eventing and competed at 3\* level and also is a qualified riding instructor in the US. Danny had researched what was being done in equestrian globally in terms of fall safety and said "I couldn't find anything globally to match this program." So he and his wife Keli, an ex-competitive gymnast and qualified gymnastic coach, came to visit me last year to learn about the program and work collaboratively together. He also invited me to assist in a presentation to the USEA convention in Florida before launching his fall safety program in the US.

### Do you ride and if so in what capacity?

I have ridden horses on a number of occasions, but only pleasure riding so I am not a skilled horseman (other than on a pommel horse!). I have acquired a lot of knowledge about riding skills and practices in various equestrian sports over the past two years and spoken to a number of professional jockeys, riders of many disciplines, instructors and industry professionals. I have also consulted with a number of scientists (biomechanists, physicists and equestrian research professionals) and doctors working in or for equestrian industries. This consultation process, together with some training conducted for over 600 riders has enabled me to design and refine a worlds-best skills-based training program.

Fall safety skills are not riding skills or practices. To design a fit-for-purpose skills-based training program, fall simulation activities, appropriate learning progressions and educate riders' unconscious thought process to enable quick response action in an emergency is a highly specialised field of endeavour.

of limited benefit do the rider if they hang onto the reins and end up attached to or under the horse in a fall.

### What did you come into the horse world hoping to achieve and do you feel you are coming close to achieving that?

My hope has been and still is that jockeys and riders of all disciplines will have the opportunity to learn proper skills-based fall safety techniques, particularly before they engage in higher-risk riding activities. This needs more support from industry bodies.

Before doing water-sports you should be a competent swimmer, before sky-diving you need to learn a parachute landing roll, before learning a dive roll in gymnastics, you need to learn basic rolling skills. It doesn't make any sense to me why the same principal does not apply to riders where it is obvious that a rider will have to deal with a fall situation at some point (and for many riders on multiple occasions).

Fall safety training for riders, should be like putting a helmet on. It is just one of the things you need to do to reduce injury risk.

*In our next article with Lindsay we will find out more about his training methods and if you really can learn to fall of safely.*

**For more information on Lindsay's work and a list of his upcoming clinics go to:**  
[www.horsedriverfallsafety.com.au](http://www.horsedriverfallsafety.com.au)