



**LEONE
EQUESTRIAN
LAW LLC**

201-444-1644
info@equestriancounsel.com



Body Protectors: Do They Provide Perceived or Actual Protection?

By Armand Leone

The move to mandate protective vests — often called back or body protectors — in competition has been much discussed, but feeling safe and being safe are two different things. A body protector offers the promise of decreased injury from a fall, but evidence of their efficacy has been lacking.



Armand chooses to wear a traditional body protector when starting his three-year-olds.

Studying Vest Efficacy

I recently discovered an article in the [British Medical Journal \(BMJ\)](#). It featured a detailed analysis of an investigation into the risk reduction and benefit of wearing a body protector in equestrian sports. Safety vests showed protection in some areas but not others.

Traditional padded vests primarily protect the rib cage, back, and torso when hitting the ground from a fall. Padded safety vests provide extra protection, but when and at what price?

The study looked at injuries with and without a body protector and members' attitudes toward their use. While 75% of members owned and wore vests, most wore them only when jumping. The study found no statistically significant difference for injury with or without a body protector for both jumping and non-jumping disciplines with one exception: cross-country.

It is important to factor in that there are different risk profiles for the same rider on different horses, or even when doing different exercises on the same horse. The discomfort of wearing a vest must be compared to the added protection it affords.

For example, I own a traditional body protector and wear it as I deem appropriate for different horses at different times when doing different activities. Riding young three-year-olds has a different risk profile than flatting older horses. The risk-benefit ratio of wearing a protective vest changes from horse to horse, situation to situation, and from rider to rider.

[Read the full article on The Plaid Horse](#)

Bad Horses Make Good Riders: Why Skipping the Naughty Pony Stage Is So Problematic

By Armand Leone

Prior to 1950, American show jumping was a vastly different sport than the one practiced in Europe. In the 1970s, European-style grand prix jumping came to the U.S., and the sport had a meteoric rise. The Cleveland Grand Prix and the Tampa Invitational in Florida introduced width, water, walls, combinations, and banks, and the professionals had to learn how to jump them.

The riding was physical and tested the scope and courage of riders and horses. These days, I doubt many of our U.S. grand prix riders could jump a clear round over those courses. In fact, how many of our country's riders have even successfully competed in the Hickstead Derby or the Hamburg Derby in recent years? I would venture to guess you could count the answer on your fingers.



Armand and Jonker tackle the International Jumping Derby at Newport Rhode Island in 1985.

Our younger riders today don't have the necessary experience, toughness, and knowledge to jump those courses. Although our younger riders today ride well, they don't have the mental or physical toughness to jump what we jumped 40 years ago.

These top, up-and-coming young riders of today likely never had a Thelwell pony like we did as kids. Well-meaning and wealthy but misguided parents try to help their children by making everything too nice and simplified, and this ultimately stunts their potential as world-class riders.

Many elite riders today bypassed the Thelwell pony and never had to sort through all the backyard problems. Meaning well, parents who can afford to send their children on the show circuit often replace a problematic pony or horse instead of letting the rider work through the problems. Only riding good horses and never working through the problem ones causes a developing rider to be shallow. These riders will perform well when everything is good. It is when things go bad that the superficial riders fold. Learning how to ride bad horses was a necessary part of becoming a really good rider.

[Read the full article on The Chronicle of The Horse](#)

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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175 Rock Road, Glen Rock, NJ 07452 - 201.444.1644