

# Island Horse Etiquette Respects the Strength of These Working Animals

By Sean Ely

Horses, not cars, are the primary form of transportation on Mackinac Island, but people should treat them with the same care and respect they would a prized automobile.

Island veterinarian Dr. Alan Sibinic believes these gentle but powerful animals need all the care and compassion that a classic 1967 Corvette would get, and the same "rules of the road" need to be kept in mind at all times, whether one is downtown or in Harrisonville.

"It's important to treat them like they are a vehicle with a motor constantly running," he said of horses. "You wouldn't let your kids run in front of a car, or climb under it."

Horses, like motor vehicles, are powerful, and that, he said, is the key to understanding the precautions to be taken when around them. Horses should be given enough room to maneuver.

Every animal species has its own language, Dr. Sibinic said, "and horses have theirs, and you have to be aware of it so the horse understands what you are asking of it. When you have that between you two, it's a whole lot easier. It's important to let them know you're there to comfort them, and not hurt them."

There are many things that residents and visitors should keep in mind when in the vicinity of a horse. The downtown area is filled with taxis, tour carriages, and horseback riders, and, while rare, a horse can get spooked, begin jerking its head, jump sideways, and try to flee



from danger.

Islanders employ a number of cautionary rules to keep horses calm and the streets of Mackinac Island running smoothly and carefree.

"Horses are predictable in their unpredictability," said Dr. Bill Chambers, a veterinarian and general manager of Mackinac Island Carriage Tours. "That's the key to the whole thing. Every horse has a different kind of temperament. Some don't mind you touching them, while some do. Some are shy

around their head, while some are shy at their legs and feet. Since we know this, let's simply observe them. They are heavy

Austin Ruddle rides Kiwoa on Market Street as Cindy's Riding Stable employee Alyssa Tucholski supervises Wednesday, June 13. Miss Tucholski believes visitors should be relaxed when around horses. A horse can sense if someone is scared or intimidated. They are gentle animals, and treating them with sincerity is important, she said.

horses that are in shape and ready to go to work. Let's let them do just that."

Teamster Jim Pettit, who has been working with horses for 26 years, concurs.

"The number one rule to remember," he said, "is don't touch the horses. The horses have blinders on, and if they get poked in the butt and can't see it, it can startle them, because most horses are timid. People always want to pet them, but it's important not to because they can and will bite. We don't want anyone getting hurt this way."

Mr. Pettit said it is crucial to keep one's distance from the

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horses. Someone might think they are a safe distance when riding by a parked carriage or dray, but a horse could swing its head violently to one side to grab a fly, which could result in someone getting clunked by the animal's long snout and metal bridle. Just like a human being, he noted, one should give the horses some personal space, some room to move around.

"People just need to remember."  
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