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## Picking up skills on horse riding

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THE transition of power has taken place, and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is Malaysia's new Prime Minister. Congratulations and good luck to him.

As for our beloved Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, tributes are pouring in from all quarters. I don't want to be left out of the fray, so here is mine, which is a slightly different tribute. Instead of writing on his contributions to the country, I will be writing about his favourite hobby: horse riding.

The first step is to determine where to ride. If you are rich enough, you might have your own stable with your own horses. If not, there are many places you can go to ride or take lessons on riding. In the Klang Valley alone, there are a few spots like the Bukit Kiara Equestrian Club, Mines Equestrian Club and Titiwangsa Lake Gardens.

Next would be to decide what to wear. Although the average riding uniform looks stiff and uncomfortable, it is actually designed for comfort and safety.

Breeches or jodphurs are stretchy, allowing you to lift your leg up to the stirrup easily. They often have knee patches of suede or faux-suede. These give you a little added security in the saddle while at the same time give your leg some protection from the stippup leathers. Riding boots protect the lower leg and support the ankle.

Shorts are a definite no-no. I'm sure if you ask Dr Mahathir, he will advise you that after an hour in the saddle, your inside leg will be rubbed raw without the protection of long pants. Jeans are the best alternative to breeches. If you've got stretch jeans, preferably without a seam on the inside leg, you're in great shape for your first horseback ride.

On your feet, you'll want shoes with a good shank to give your feet support in the stirrups. A small heel will lessen the chance that your foot will slip all the way through the stirrup. It goes without saying that slippers and sandals are not suitable. Sneakers are not really a good choice either since they do not offer the arch support needed.

As safety is always an important element in any sport, so the helmet is a must. If you take a look at all the riding pictures of Dr Mahathir, he is wearing a helmet in every one. What better role model than our longest-serving Prime Minister?

As you begin your first lesson, don't be surprised if much of it is spent on the ground. Horses can be unpredictable animals, and a good instructor will spend time teaching you about the correct handling of horses before even allowing you to get on. You'll learn about haltering and leading, grooming and tacking up. All these are part of horsemanship, and the more competent you are around horses, the better relationship you will have with them.

Early lessons will be geared towards giving you the skills you need to become a good rider. What you will learn is the correct way to mount, the correct position, and the aids which you will use to communicate with the horse.

One of the most important lessons instructors like to give is the lunge. This is where the horse circles around the instructor on an extra long lead line called a lunging rein, or longing rein. This gives the instructor control of the horse, and allows the rider to concentrate on

learning about balance and co-ordination without having to worry about controlling the horse.

The process is especially helpful when you're trotting for the first time. Just like driving a car, horseback riding can seem very complicated and it's much easier if you only have to think about one thing at a time, until it all becomes second nature.

So if you want to be like Malaysia's most prominent personality, why not give horse riding a try. If you want to learn more about it, visit these sites: New Rider ([www.newrider.com](http://www.newrider.com)), Horse Country ([www.horse-country.com](http://www.horse-country.com)), TrailSource ([www.trailsources.com/horse/](http://www.trailsources.com/horse/)), Horse-Riding.Net ([www.horse-riding.net](http://www.horse-riding.net)), Equine World ([www.equine-world.co.uk](http://www.equine-world.co.uk)), Equiworld ([www.equiworld.net](http://www.equiworld.net)) and HorseMatters.Net ([www.horsematters.net](http://www.horsematters.net)).