

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Pony Club Training

Good morning ladies and gentleman. I feel very privileged to stand here again for the second year as Chairman of Training of The Pony Club. During my first year I have realised how much more I have to learn about everything The Pony Club offers for our youngest to our oldest Members. I am still finding things on the website, in the Yearbook and in all the rule books that I did not know even existed. However, I have come to realise that The Pony Club can't exist without its rules, although I have also realised that the interpretation of the rules sometimes seems to vary!

When asked to do this presentation I started to tremble like a D Test candidate or competitor representing their Pony Club at Area level and fully understand how nervous our Members can get. Last year the conference was at Cheltenham. There was a fire alarm during the night before the conference in the hotel we were staying at. Everyone else stood in the car park with their valuables - I stood in the car park in my dressing gown and pyjamas clutching my conference speech - I was not going to lose that!

As I get older my children think I am a dinosaur and a real Victor Meldrew with one foot in the grave. I am excited about London 2012 and the Olympics and look to our riders with anticipation and pride. I know how important The Pony Club is and I hope always will be in enthusing and motivating our future Olympic riders. I was delighted that people who moaned about the Olympics and how much it was going to cost got binned in Room 101! Championships are very important; whether Pony Club Novice, Intermediate or Open or World or Olympic Games.

The future of The Pony Club must still revolve around the correct training of the horse and rider based on sound, practical stable management. This is dependent on the quality of our young and experienced instructors and coaches. I truly believe that our young Members and Centre Members are a very important part of our Pony Club. I feel it is very important for these Members to be taught by our older Members from within the Branches. The excitement and fun that these Members get from this interaction with our young instructors is very rewarding

This year I was embarrassed when doing a talk on feeding to our top ride at camp. We were lucky to have a week of good weather and I was talking about additives and the use of salt and electrolytes. I asked my ride what the most common and important additive they used in their feed was and came to my daughter Alice hoping she would give the correct answer. After a pause for thought, she turned round to the ride and answered in a loud and very confident voice; "Bute"! I hasten to say we have old, non-competitive ponies who would be unusable in the summer without the occasional sachet of Bute to keep them comfortable.

I think it is really important to keep reminding ourselves of the objectives of The Pony Club:

- To encourage young people to ride and to learn to enjoy all kinds of sport connected with horses and riding.
- To give instruction in riding and horsemastership and to educate Members to look after and to take proper care of their animal.
- To promote the highest ideals of sportsmanship, citizenship and loyalty to create strength of character and self-discipline.

Last year was a difficult year due to the tough economic climate and saw a drop in the overall Membership. However for the first time for a few years there was an increase of the Membership of the over sixteen year olds. I am very encouraged by this and am always open to new suggestions for our older Members.

This year we have introduced new initiatives for the older Members to encourage them to stay within The Pony Club. The Training Committee has introduced a new Test - the B+. I can hear groans already – not another Test! This is not a compulsory Test. This Test will be a real asset and a valuable goal for our B Test holders to aim at and continue training for. I hope it will both help the Pony Club Member who perhaps does not want to take the A Test but would like to still continue their training and also as a stepping stone towards the A Test. The Test concentrates on the correct schooling of the horse. The candidates will ride three horses both on the flat and over fences and for me, very importantly, ride in a double bridle. There is also an un-mounted theory section discussing both training on the flat and over fences to include bringing on young horses, relating training exercises to the Scales of Training, the schooling of their horses, Show Jumping and Cross Country jump distances and speed and pace.

Last year saw the highest percentage of A Test passes achieved. I am determined to keep the standard of the A Test achievable but very high. The A Test is still one of the most internationally prestigious exams in the horse world and if asked, a successful candidate will still hold their A Test pass as one of the peaks of their achievements above other exams.

The Training Committee have five training days organised for this year. There are two kinds of training days:

A Test Brush up days are provided specifically for candidates who will be taking their A Test imminently. They provide the opportunity for you to practice your exam technique in an A Test situation, discuss any last minute points with an A Test examiner and identify any areas that may need a little more 'polishing' before the day.

A Test Training Days: If you are currently working towards the standard required for the A Test, would like some advice on which areas you still need to work on, what the Test involves and what is expected from you, or would just like some more practice, you should apply to attend a Training day. These days are arranged with plenty of time before the next A Test so that you have plenty of time to work on any potential weaknesses. An A Test examiner will be on hand to observe, help and offer guidance on how best to progress with your training.

We have re written the AH Test for 2012. It is basically the same syllabus but has been brought up to date with modern thinking. The AH Test has now become slightly modular: if a candidate fails one section of the Test they are now able to retake that section within a year. I hope this will keep our Members who fail one section and are disappointed at the time to stay within The Pony Club and not lose interest due to the demands of everything else in their life. As with the A Test, training days for the AH Test are being run this year through the country. These are not to replace the excellent training that many Areas offer but to help the candidates who feel they would like extra training. I feel that this will

actually keep the standard of the Test up. As with the other Tests we have posted questions on the website that will help to indicate the standard required.

I am delighted with the introduction of the new Young Event Horse Series. This is open to Members aged 15 years or over with horses or ponies aged 5, 6 or 7 years, who compete at Level 3 (Novice) Eventing Competitions. There are no qualifying events. Points are gathered at any Pony Club Level 3 One Day Event. This competition has been designed to promote the correct training and provide an opportunity for older Members to bring on and compete their young horses. I envisage this being a real shop window for and opportunity for our Members who have moved onto a young horse or pony. I hope this competition takes off and is well supported so please go away from this Conference and enthuse your Members to participate as I personally see this eventually as a fantastic Championship in its own right which will really be a shop window for our Members' ability to school and train young horses.

The HSBC Eventing training days are a real boost to our Members and many of the participants went on last year to our Pony Club Open, Intermediate and Novice Championships and British Eventing. The standard of the horses and ponies I see on these days varies so much within the areas from riders aiming at BE Under 18 and Pony Trial teams to very keen riders on competent hairy ponies. With the cost of competing, transport and entries, I have realised that parents and Members would rather spend their money on good coaching and training and will travel long distances to attend quality training days. I have realised the importance of the motivation and inspiration top riders and coaches give our Pony Club Members and know we must offer this training from within The Pony Club. For the future I am looking at ways at introducing similar days for both Dressage and Show Jumping throughout our Pony Club Areas.

For our younger Members we have introduced an equitation competition. This is very much a competition for use within the Branches and Centres and is not an Area competition. It is a great competition for our younger Members and gives a real goal to aim at as an end of camp activity or after a series of rallies. It focuses and is marked on the rider's position correct use of aids and influence on their pony.

This competition comprises of one Equitation Test and one Show Jumping round, both of which are marked on the rider's position and influence on the pony. It is great for at the end of camp, after a sequence of rallies or in the Christmas holidays, so they can see how their riding is coming along!

There are two levels / classes:

Level	Equitation Test	Show Jumping height
D	D Level (Walk & Trot) Equitation	55 cm maximum
C	C Level Equitation	65 cm maximum

Score sheets for the Equitation and Show Jumping phases are available from The Pony Club shop.

It is very important to motivate and inspire our younger Members. The Pony Club publications are the best. For our younger Members there is a wealth of fun drawings activity and sticker books and a new publication being published Design and Doodle. These are such a great educational tool are fun and brilliant for rallies, camps, quizzes and rainy days. The Compass Pony Guide is a fun educational manual for our young Members. Please have a look at the new Pony Club manual and look at the Stablemates books. I know that the knowledge and fun we can give our Members from 4 to 25 years (and older) through our extensive range of publications would put most schools and colleges to shame.

This year's theme for Pony Club Instructor Continual Professional Development (CPD) is Show Jumping. Following the success of last year's Cross Country Coaching workshops, the Training Committee are putting on Show Jumping Coaching Workshops, which will each last three hours and be presented by two top class Pony Club coaches. The topics covered will include helping riders to:

- Develop a correct position
- Improve their course walking and working in
- Understand the importance and effect of the canter
- Improve the horse's adjustability and quality of canter
- Learn how to ride course builders' challenges

These workshops are for our Pony Club instructors and coaches and participants are limited, as the idea is to get a very interactive evening with lots of feedback and discussion. Please see the web site for details of how your instructors can register for a place.

I fully support the use of specialised accredited coaches from the other BEF disciplines. I am very enthusiastic about our areas senior and B Test camps that take place often at specialised training venues using accredited coaches from dressage, eventing and show jumping. These bring together Members from wide areas and give them a real opportunity not only to train but to develop friendships that will last a life time. I believe it is essential that we offer top level coaching within The Pony Club to encourage our Members to keep training within our club using accredited trainers and coaches that are Pony Club friendly. The Visiting Coaches list was I felt outdated and not used enough. The list has been made more user-friendly and I hope useful. There are now three sections of Visiting Coaches:

Pony Club Specialist Coaches

- Coach at all levels / disciplines within The Pony Club.
- Can deliver standard setting days for examiners and instructors.
- Can deliver standardised or bespoke Pony Club coaching and/or UKCC courses.
- Travel expenses will be paid by The Pony Club office.

Discipline specific Coaches

- Will coach the discipline that they specialise in (Dressage, Eventing etc.)
- Travel expenses will be paid by The Pony Club office.

Recommended Coaches

- Will teach/coach at rallies and camps basing their content on The Pony Club training principles.
- Will be listed by Pony Club Area.
- Travel expenses up to £50 per visit will be paid by The Pony Club office per eligible visit

I have received a lot of queries about whether or not certain instructors can be used at Pony Club activities. In order to teach for The Pony Club, instructors must:

- Have attended a Pony Club Instructor CPD (accreditation) course in the past two years OR
- Be present on the current BHS register of instructors (can be viewed on the BHS website) OR
- Have achieved UKCC Level 1 or 2 with The Pony Club (*these instructors must have received their certificate and their assessment must have been taken in the past two years*).
- In addition, accredited coaches for another BEF discipline body (British Eventing, British Dressage, British Showjumping, UK Polocrosse Association etc.) may be used in The Pony Club but only for the discipline that they are accredited in.

If the instructor you wish to use does not fulfill at least one of the above requirements, they cannot be used for Pony Club activities. In exceptional circumstances, you may apply for permission to use this person for a limited period of time - please email the Pony club office in this situation.

So how does this all relate to my title 'Back to the Future'?

I feel as a club we must make a stand and not be bullied and made to alter what we believe is the best education for our Members. Health and safety is there to help us not to rule us. It is there to insure we have taken every reasonable care and precaution in our responsibility to our Members. We have assessed the hazards and risks and tried to act on any problems we see. It is not there to prevent our Members having fun and building on their confidence, balance and instinct.

I strongly believe and know that it is a mistake to specialize early in a rider's career. It takes over ten years to produce a top sporting performer and athlete. No other equine organization offers the wide range of activities that The Pony Club offers. I know time is our worst enemy but it is essential that our Members to have the opportunity to have a go at most of them.

It is the participating in all these sports that develop the motor reactions, speed, suppleness, stamina and strength needed for later specialisation and the winning of medals and specialisation should not begin till at least fourteen years.

However these all have two things in common - we ride outside on grass and we ride with others. I have recently been questioned by examiners at B Test who ask whether they can examine candidates before they have seen them ride indoors to see if they are safe before letting them go outside. We have seen these Members, who have been riding and will continue to ride outside, since 4 years old!

More and more Pony Clubs use outdoor and indoor schools for rallies camps and training. I do fully understand the need for this in some areas especially due to the influence of towns, roads and modern farming and realise older Members do not want to ride their horses on rough hard going. What surprises me is how competitors will compete on hard ground but find mud dangerous. However I feel that individual group hourly sessions are not the best way forward for all our Members and please do encourage branches to keep holding day rallies where Members can ride, do stable management and have fun within their peer group.

Times have changed so much. When I was a child in Cheshire on a farm I used to canter down the grass verges to see the local steam trains go by and wave at the guards. Now my children canter over the Welsh beacons and wave at the low flying pilots often flying below them in the valleys but we still all have the same thing in common – we canter about, having fun.

Riding is a risk sport and accidents will always unfortunately happen. It is very important that riding is always fun as well as safe. We must make sure our Members do have correct fitting tack that is safe, that their hats and body protectors do come up to regulations. That the correct dress code is worn – no hoodies, earrings or studs, and long sleeves are worn. Please read the rule books.

Eric reminded me when as a young Pony Club member he rode in The VC race for 2 people , one pony, no saddle. One person on the pony, the other person at the far end of the ring. Across the middle of the ring is a row of hay bales. The person on the pony gallops to the other end, over the bales, picks up the person behind her and gallops back, over the bales. It nearly always ended in both riders falling off, usually because the pony bucked but often when you stopped at the end and were laughing so much!!! and he never heard of anyone being hurt?!

Falling off is important! The time spent as a young rider falling off ponies whilst having fun teaches instinct, how to role and keep out of trouble and as important how to get up and re-catch your pony. A small child on a pony does not have far to fall, does bounce and probably is not encumbered by a body protector. It also does not hurt as much at that age!

So please keep reinventing the wheel. Loads of exercises for all level of riders –windmills, touching toes, round the world, half and full scissors and thread the needle. Grids -without stirrups and reins -Bare back riding – Blanket rides – swapping ponies and horses - Beach rides and swimming and of course hunting within the law.

So this brings me back to the start of my talk. We have to educate and help our young instructors and coaches that have come up through The Pony Club as Members and

understand what The Pony Club is about. It is very important for instructors to attend CPD days to help them develop.

Please do, as Branches and Areas, hold and encourage Members who teach at Pony Club to attend the Introduction to coaching and coach development days. Look at holding UKCC Level 1 or 2 courses within your area. Plan ahead and look at encouraging them to take the Pony Club Coaching Certificate and encourage our Members to take their Tests.

Remember riding is a risk sport and accidents will always happen. Do your risk assessments and take every reasonable care to ensure the safety of your Members and their ponies but remember the falls, disappointments, team spirit, and wins as a Pony Club member you had, prepared you for the future.

I hope in the Autumn and next year we have a selection of Equine Olympic medal winners who will go round and talk and inspire our Pony Club Members and these Members will also remember how the Pony Club gave them fun friendship and the platform from which they built from and achieved their success.

Finally, everyone here is a volunteer and give up a lot of time for free, and although we try our hardest, it is not always that simple to make the right decision.