

Training – William Blane FBHS

Good morning ladies and gentleman. Once again I find myself talking at our Pony Club annual conference. In preparing for my talk I always find it difficult to decide what to talk about, as The Pony Club offers so much to all ages and competences of riders from our large branches like the Beaufort Hunt with over 320 members to the Coventry and District with under fifteen members. Similarly it is very difficult to compare the fantastic job our centres do for all their members with such diversity of facilities and locations.

The vision of The Pony Club is *

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

As Chairman of Training I am responsible for trying to develop the coaching, training and organisational skills of instructors, coaches, Members and volunteers.

Over the next couple of years one of The Training Committee's focuses is on our Pony Club Tests. The standards and contents of each Test are not altering. It is very important both for the candidates, coaches and examiners that there is a clear distinction between the levels of each Test and what is required for each one. To do this, we are starting to write more precise criteria for each level, both in the stable management and the riding. Examples of these are in the A * and AH Test syllabi. We have started with the B Test riding and a comparison between the care sections of the C+ and the B Test. There will be clear guide lines on what the candidates can be asked at each level. I hope that by really focusing on the difference between the criteria of the level of Tests both the candidates and the coaches will have a much better understanding of what is required. We are trying not to repeat ourselves in the questioning of the theory and practical side through the tests and are thus making a clear progressive pathway through the Test system.

I am hoping that in the future we can see video footage on our website of the riding level required for each Test. This would be a real asset for the Members working towards their Tests and also for parents encouraging their children to take Tests to understand the standard they are aiming to achieve. However with all Pony Club Tests it must never be forgotten that they are primarily a practical test based on safety and welfare of horse and rider.

The debriefing of candidates can sometimes be a cause for concern. Starting with the A Test, we have arranged a standard setting day for our senior examiners where they can spend time with a professional to help review and develop the questioning and debriefing of candidates. We are really pleased to be working with Nicki Fuller, a Sports Development Consultant on this.

I hope to follow this up in the future with small, local workshops developed with this input and help where I hope to help improve the quality of the debriefing of candidates at all level of our Tests. This again would be an ideal use of DVD footage of our tests level.

The debate on providing written or oral results for the tests within The Pony Club still goes on. I do feel that in the future a form of written report may be required in conjunction with oral confirmation and feedback. I am working at standardising an examiners record sheet for B test upwards which will be downloadable from the web site for all examiners.

The introduction of being able to retake a failed section in the AH Test within a year has been a real encouragement for our members. Not only has it kept the standard of the Test up as there is no room now for "borderline passes", but every candidate who has retaken their failed section has passed. All said they would perhaps have not have made the effort to take the whole test again. The training committee is again going to run A-H training days so please keep an eye on the web site.

I am delighted in the enthusiasm that seems to be being generated by the new B+ Test. This is not only a real asset in encouraging our members to work towards the A test but also as an incentive for our older members to keep training and schooling their horses. The training committee is taking standard setting days around the regions this year comparing the riding sections of the B-B+ and A test and I look forward to the feedback discussion and arguments these days are bound to generate!

Working alongside this I would like to remind you all of The Young Horse Eventing series. Open to Members and Associate Members aged 15 years or over with horses or ponies aged 5, 6 or 7 years, who compete at Level 3 (Novice) Eventing Competitions, 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 and ponies. There is no additional work for DCs or secretaries to do as the responsibility is on the competitors to fill in their results cards. If secretaries and DCs could download Result cards and leave them on a table in the secretaries tent I would be very grateful.

A Test training days are being run as usual at Talland, Huntley, Brampton and Warwickshire College so again please look at The Pony Club web site. These days have become very popular as they give the future A Test candidate a real insight into how the Test is run and the high standard that is required to pass this Test.

Our priority must remain to offer good training to all of our Members at all levels. All of our coaches need to be mentored and encouraged. We are holding evening jumping workshops for coaches through the regions again this year, and the focus will be on athletic jumping exercises. Although mostly a great success last year, it is felt that much smaller groups of coaches should attend these evenings so we can keep them much more interactive, focusing on much more discussion and participation and helping our coaches. I feel it is very important that we develop our CPD days into much more interactive days so our instructors can become a lot more involved with the day and we can mentor and develop their coaching skills.

Our Instructors Conferences are also of real benefit for gathering tips, ideas and inspiration. This year we have Olympic team coaches Chris Bartle and Eric Smiley working together to present the theme "Life is a Matter of Balance". Both these coaches came up through The Pony Club and understand the difficulties we all face as coaches and instructors in managing a ride of mixed abilities, ages and horses, not to mention ambitious parents. We will be at Bishop Burton College (Yorkshire) on Wednesday 3rd April and Bury Farm Equestrian Centre (Buckinghamshire) on Wednesday 10th April. Please encourage your instructors to come along to one.

It is very important to support and praise our young coaches. There is nothing more rewarding than watching a ride of D+ riders laughing, having fun and learning in a safe environment. The Pony Club Introduction to Coaching and Coaching Development For All days are held to encourage and motivate our young instructors. From now on training days for the Pony Club Coaching Certificate are being arranged through the regions by the Training Committee and Head office. Please look at the web site and encourage your young Pony Club coaches attend their local Coaching certificate training day. These training days are going to be followed by, this year, two Coaching Certificate assessment days. I really hope that our young instructors who pass our Coaching Certificate will be encouraged and used within their and local Branches.

Also for these young coaches I would like to introduce training and mentoring workshops focusing on them training being examiners. I would like encourage DCs to allow them to work alongside senior and experienced examiners so as to introduce give them experience in examining at the lower level tests.

For those who seek a professional qualification from within The Pony Club, I have been delighted with the uptake of The Pony Club UKCC level 1 and 2 qualifications. These are providing a real boost to the standard of coaching being delivered, especially in our centres. This year, we are holding a UKCC level 3 pilot course for our more experienced coaches. This will allow The Pony Club to maintain its

position as a leading training organisation in the industry. I hope these people will become our future coaches both for our Pony Club area teams, presenters of standard setting and CPD days and Members of the Training Committee.

I am always amazed and humbled by the dedication, effort and time all our volunteers give up for our members at all levels. When I first took my children winter Pony Club jumping, arriving in the cold and the frost on dark winter mornings, I used to look at the older competitors and looked forward to my children being older, having a lie in and competing later on in the day. Now I am lucky if we get back by 10 o'clock in the evening and wish they were younger again!

However what never changes is the core of enthusiastic, dedicated DCs, Area Reps and parents and helpers who arrive before we all do and go home after we do - so thank you for all your work from all of us from within The Pony Club.

With the development and progression of Training I would like to provide for our Members and coaches, I feel it is now the time to assess how all aspects of training can be best offered throughout The Pony Club to ensure there is sufficient support and help for our DCs, Area Reps and other volunteers to aid the excellent job they do. We must offer training for all of our members, from the new D test member, to the elite rider aiming and competing in the major disciplines or a new older member who has just started riding and who just wants help with their training.

The Pony Club Ambassador Scheme** has been created by the Training Committee. We are all very proud of the results of all our Pony Club Members who go on and inspire us with their competition success and medals. However there is a multitude of Pony club members who will never aspire to such heights and perhaps don't want to.

Every Branch or Centre can probably over the years remember the member who was invaluable within their Branch or Centre. I think that every Pony Club camp probably does or should have a best boy or most helpful camper award.

Occasionally one of these members will stand out. Not for being loud or pushy or showing off to their peers but for taking on responsibilities on their own bat. They show a genuine care and ability to help other members of their club centre or area. They show a pride in The Pony Club which they exhibit wherever they go. They take on responsibilities others walk away from. They might organise a junior show, involve themselves with badge training, or organise trips for their fellow members. Without these members, many Branches, Centres and Areas could not exist. We could probably find them organising painting jumps, putting up dressage arenas and show jumps and then putting them away again in the rain when most have gone

home, all without a complaint, yet still finding time to help a difficult loader, caring for both the child and the parents.

These members are as important to The Pony Club as our medal winners and as a youth organisation we are just as proud of them.

The Pony Club in association with Toggi is delighted to initiate a **Pony Club Ambassador Scheme** to acknowledge and reward these Members.

Full details will be sent out in the April bulletin to centres and branches so that these members can be nominated by their Branch, Centre or Area.

** The criteria for the ambassadors are

- 18 years old or over
- Actively supportive in the Branch/Centre/Area
- A Pony Club member for a minimum of five consecutive years
- Committed to The Pony Club aims and ethos.

All nominations should be sent to head office by May 31st. From those nominations a short list will be asked to complete a personal statement by July 1st. Pro forma questions will be supplied for their personal statement to be based on so all applications can be easily reviewed and compared. A panel of judges will then review the personal statements and from these select the winners.

We are delighted that Toggi have very generously given branded jackets for the winners, which will be presented at the Pony Club Championships in August at Cholmondeley Castle.

I am thrilled that we can recognise these members and I am sure that over the years you will see these jackets being worn with pride in many a Pony Club collecting ring, scoring tent, secretary's office and the Championships.