

THE FORM OF THE PONY CLUB A TEST & GUIDANCE NOTES

There are four phases to the Test, which may be taken in any order. There could be up to four candidates in each group.

Dressage Riding and Technical Knowledge

- Candidates will ride two or three schooled horses in the Indoor School or arena.
- They will be given the opportunity of assessing the horse from the ground, to include age, type, and muscle development, before evaluating, the basic way of going of these horses, prior to being asked to conduct specific movements.
- One or more horses will be in a double bridle.
- Candidates will be asked to prepare for and show movements, whilst knowing the preparation and aids to carry them out.
- Ride the movements required in the Test according to the standard of the horse.
- Candidates will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of the rules of the school, when riding more advanced movements.
- The assessors will ask the candidates to comment on the way the horses are going and performing the required movements and how the horse may be improved.

Jump Riding, Show Jumping and Cross Country, and Technical Knowledge

May be part on an arena and part on grass

- During this phase, candidates will ride three or four different horses.
- Having been allocated their first horse, they are allowed 5 - 10 minutes assessment, to include, assessing the horse from the ground, to include age, type, and muscle development, on the flat and over a few small fences. While doing this, they are expected to appraise the horse – the horse's strengths and areas for improvements, to be thinking what the horse's job could be, and how the horse could be schooled to give a better performance and ride.
- The discussion usually lasts for about 5 minutes, and the examiners expect to hear practical, common-sense answers, which would give them confidence that the candidate has the knowledge and capability of improving that specific horse, or any other that he/she might be given to ride. The exercises chosen must apply to the improvement of the horse ridden and the candidate must know why they have chosen those exercises and plan, generic improvement work will show a lack of sufficient experience on the part of the candidate.

- Candidates then change horses, following a short assessment period will be asked to jump a show jumping round. This is normally around 1.10m, depending on the horses available and the ground. The candidate will then discuss the way the horse jumped and talk about how this horse's jumping may be improved. Once again, the plan and exercises chosen must be specific to the horse ridden. Any distances mentioned must be in feet, yards, or metres, walking strides are not sufficiently accurate for this level of assessment.
- The third horse is jumped around a short cross-country course; the candidate will be assessed both over the fences and how they ride between the fences. This round may, or may not, be discussed.
- Occasionally candidates may have the opportunity to ride a fourth horse.

Lungeing

- Candidates will lunge for about twenty minutes.
- They are expected to know how to lunge for improvement, training, and education (poles will be available).
- Candidates will assess the horse and then lunge for improvement.
- A discussion will follow with one assessor of how that horse worked, and what exercises were used or may be used in the future to improve its way of going.
- The assessor will look to see that the horse improved whilst being lunged.

Training The Young Horse

This phase takes the form of a discussion with an assessor about the candidate's views and experiences of starting and preliminary training of a young horse. Consideration to the safety and welfare of both humans and animals is essential. Candidates will be asked where they considered learning theory when working with young horses

The Results

The results and assessors written feedback for each section, are sent from The Pony Club Office and take approximately 10 working days.

Only those 17 years or over are eligible for the 'A' Test.

Recommended minimum age: 18 years

Felt Colour – Navy Blue

Distinction - Felt Colour – Navy Blue. Distinction will be awarded to candidates who pass the Full A Test on their first attempt.

Honours – Felt Colour Purple. Honours will be awarded to a candidate who rides with exceptional effectiveness and harmony beyond the level required by the criteria.

On the first attempt, the A Test must be taken as a complete test, depending on the result the test may be taken in parts.

If all four sections are passed, the candidate has passed the A Test.

If one section is passed, the whole test must be retaken.

If the ridden sections are passed (Dressage Riding and Jumping sections) only the non-ridden sections need to be retaken.

If the non-ridden sections are passed (Lungeing and Training the Young Horse) only the ridden sections will need to be retaken.

If only one ridden section and one non ridden section are passed then the whole test must be retaken.

WORKING FOR THE A TEST 2023

This is written to explain the standard of work required to pass A Test, and to show the need for a long-term programme of preparation.

Preparation

- The preparation for A Test should be progressive and continuous.
- The years between B Test and A Test must be spent in conscious preparation. Intense or 'crash' courses are rarely successful.
- The B+ Test is a compulsory test for candidates as a steppingstone from the B to the A standard.
- The Pony Club organises several Test Training Days each year to prepare candidates for these Tests, you can find dates on The Pony Club website. Note: You may apply to take the A Test before the date of your AH Test but you will have to withdraw if you fail to pass the complete AH Test.
- Candidates must have had practical experience with horses as well as ponies.

To pass the A Test you must:

- Have a genuine desire for knowledge and a need to understand the reasons behind what you do.
- Be physically fit enough to ride several horses, without strain.
- Be competent and brave enough to ride young and un-cooperative horses.

- Have a correct riding position which has become natural, so that unhealthy habits do not emerge under stress.
- Apply the aids correctly. A rider cannot expect a horse to be accurate and responsive if the aids are not clear and consistent.
- Be practical; theoretical knowledge alone is not enough. It must be accepted by the assessors that you are practised and at ease with the tasks you have been given.

Be able to effectively ride horses that are no longer, or never have been, competition horses. Understand that these horses may be school horses, who are older, stiff, and are mentally or physically unused to going forwards in the same way as quality young or horses that are currently competing.

- Show the ability to get an improved performance out of all horses that you ride.
- Develop 'feel' for the way a horse is going and know when and how to make corrections. It is even more important to be aware of when the horse is going well.
- Expand the ability to suggest plans of work for each horse as an individual, rather than generic plans that will do no harm.

A suggested programme of training:

- On passing the B or B+ Test and whilst working for the AH Test read the Test Sheet for the A Standard. Make sure you fully understand all it implies.
- Work first on the areas that were weak in your B and B+ Test.
- Work continuously on your position in the saddle. Continue to ride as much as you can under the supervision of a coach.
- Continue with the progressive training of horses you work with, using lateral work and variations within the pace to improve suppleness.
- Ride as many different horses as you can and practise analysing what you think about them, using the Scale of Training as a template.
- Remember that jumping is a major part of the Test, so continuous practice on a variety of horses is essential to develop confidence and fluency.
- Ride trained horses and ride with a double bridle to become confident in its use.
- Gain competitive experience and learn to manage your nerves.
- Try to spend time helping in a good yard where there are plenty of horses at various levels of training including untrained horses.

- Find someone who is an experienced trainer and who uses and promotes correct Pony Club and BHS methods, offer your services as an assistant when they are managing and training a young horse.
- Be observant when looking at horses, so that you train your eye to recognise faults.
- Visit horse sales and shows with someone knowledgeable if you can, and make assessments of conformation, and its effect on future training.
- Read the list of publications mentioned on the Test Sheet.
- Help in your Branch / Centre assisting or coaching. Attend The Pony Club's Introduction to Coaching Courses Steps 1- 3.

Hints about taking the Test

- Dress tidily and cleanly, wear gloves and carry a whip appropriate for the section, bring a body protector and your spurs.

During the dressage and outdoor show jumping sections most candidates wear a competition riding jacket, for cross country they change into skins/jumpers.

- Arrive at the Test centre in plenty of time to walk the Cross Country and Show Jumping Courses before the briefing. (In some centres the cross country is a distance from the main test area, so extra time is needed).
- Keep your stirrups to a practical efficient length.
- Do not fiddle with spurs, taking them off and putting them on again. If you are confident that you can use them correctly, it is acceptable for you to wear them. However, their misuse can be dangerous and will be marked down.
- Look at the horse before you get on; check the tack, look at the teeth; conformation and outlook may tell you something about the horse before you ride.
- When you first get on a strange horse and start riding, look about you and 'feel' how the horse is going.
- In discussion, base your assessment of each horse on the Scale of Training.

Ensure that you understand learning theory and how it should be applied when training horses.

- If you do not know something, say so.
- If you make a mistake, admit it.
- If you get in a muddle when explaining something, say so, stop, and start again.

- Learn suitable distances in feet, yards, or metres, for ground poles and related distances, which can then be adapted to suit individual horses. (Walked paces are not sufficiently accurate for this exam).

- Avoid the 'pat' or 'book' answer. Do not try to display all your knowledge. Instead, think seriously about the horse and then in the simplest terms possible, explain what faults there are and how you would go about overcoming them.

For example:

Q. What do you think about the way the horse is going?

A. He is on his forehand and lazy.

Q. How would you go about improving him?

A. The real problem is he does not respond to my leg aids, to travel forwards. This is the first thing I would correct. Using transitions, I would increase the pressure of my leg aid and be very precise about the point that I released the pressure. This way the horse will begin to understand that they can remove my leg pressure by moving forwards. I can reinforce this response positively by adding a scratch with my fingers on their withers when they give the desired response. I would repeat this simple transition several times to ensure the horse had a clear understanding. When he learns to go with more energy, I can expect more activity from his hind legs and hindquarters; he should then become a more balanced ride. It should then be possible to work to improve him.

The 'pat' reply might have been:

A. He needs more schooling. I would do a lot of turns, circles, and transitions. Riding over undulating country might help.

This reply is correct, but it does not show in depth knowledge.

In the indoor riding, do not be afraid of riding the trained horse in a positive way. The trained horse is often a clever horse and knows better than most how to assess the rider's ability.

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