

# Spurs

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*If you are going to use this presentations information as a training guide for your branch or centre coaches before they train members. Please remember it is important that they completely understand the detail of the content so that all areas are covered thoroughly.*



# ‘The Pony Club takes the health & welfare of horses and ponies extremely seriously. We focus on the highest standards of equine welfare and veterinary care’.

The policy regarding the use of spurs has been updated: Members wishing to use spurs to enhance the leg aid must be able to ride with a still and stable lower leg, coupled with a thorough understanding of spurs and how to use them correctly.

From 1 January 2025 members wishing to wear spurs must have successfully completed the C+ Riding Test or the Spurs Test 2024.

This decision has been made as part of the Pony Clubs campaign to further educate members and their parents. Already within the pony club spurs are not permitted in many activities: racing, mounted games, endurance. Polo they must not exceed 3cm and various other activities and disciplines are looking to ban them



September 2024

## The Pony Club Guidelines on the Use of Spurs

Members wishing to ride with spurs at Pony Club activities must have achieved the C+ Riding Test or The Spurs Test.

It is important that spurs are only worn by riders who have a stable lower leg and who are able to use – or not use – the spur intentionally.

### Minimum expected requirements that should be discussed by the rider and coach

- If wearing spurs, the rider must:
  - Have achieved the C+ Riding Test or The Spurs Test.
  - Have still hands and a seat that is sufficiently independent that they can maintain a quiet, stable, still leg position.
  - Understand that spurs are a refinement of a leg aid.
  - Be able to use their seat, hand, and leg aids individually.
  - Be mindful of the impact spurs may have on the horse/pony they are riding.
- If wearing spurs, the spurs must:
  - Comply with the maximum dimensions defined in the rulebook for the sport in which the member is participating.
  - Be fitted correctly, with the shank pointing slightly downwards.
  - Only be used as an additional aid, to back up and refine the leg aids.
  - Never be used to punish the horse.
- If the pony/horse needs a strong bit for control, spurs are unlikely to be an appropriate aid.

### Misuse of spurs

Failure to meet the minimum expected requirement constitutes a misuse of spurs, as does evidence of spur-induced rubs or injuries. A rider misusing spurs will be required to remove their spurs and should only resume wearing spurs when they have demonstrated to an accredited Pony Club coach that they can meet the minimum expected requirements consistently and understand that the misuse of spurs is never acceptable.



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Resource Hub



# Learning Objectives

**This Test may only be examined by a C+ Test assessor or above.**

All those involved with this Test should be aware that it involves an important practical ridden element.

Candidates should be aware of the full welfare implications associated with the use of spurs and be able to demonstrate how to ride correctly whilst wearing them.

Spurs Test to be assessed by a C+ or above assessor ideally from a neighbouring branch/centre who has no conflict of interest, or knowledge of the members sitting the test.

The test must include a riding element demonstrating a stable lower leg and an awareness of the aid application. This should be first assessed without spurs and then the second part of the ridden section could include putting on the spurs correctly and riding basic school figures and a couple of small jumps. The underpinning theory knowledge is essential.

**This puts an onus on the spur test assessor. Have you considered how this might affect you?**

**The new Spur Test 2024 syllabus can be found on the Pony Club Website**

<https://resources.pcuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Spurs-Test-Syllabus-v21.5.1.pdf>



## THE SPURS TEST

### Learning Objectives

**This Test may only be examined by a C+ Test assessor or above.**

All those involved with this Test should be aware that it involves an important practical ridden element.

Candidates should be aware of the full welfare implications associated with the use of spurs and be able to demonstrate how to ride correctly whilst wearing them.

### Syllabus

- 1** To understand the welfare issues that might occur with spurs. To know that any use of spurs which compromises the well-being of the horse will never be tolerated in The Pony Club. Spurs must only be used to give a more precise leg aid and to facilitate better communication from rider to horse. They are not to make the horse go faster.
- 2** To understand the reasons why a balanced independent position is required and be able to demonstrate that position with a still and stable lower leg.
- 3** To know how to ride with spurs in an educated and empathetic way.
- 4** To understand that not all horses or ponies will be comfortable being ridden in spurs.
- 5** To know the rules regarding spurs in all main Pony Club activities.
- 6** To know the distinct types of spurs, which are permitted and which are not, and why.
- 7** To know how to fit spurs correctly and care for them, removing them when not riding.
- 8** To understand and acknowledge that The Spurs Test does not grant the permanent or irrevocable right to wear spurs. If they are used

THE SPURS TEST

## Objective

**To be aware of the full welfare implications associated with the use of spurs, and how to ride correctly whilst wearing them.**

- Understand the welfare issues related to the wearing of spurs.
- To know that any use of spurs which compromises the well-being of the horse will never be tolerated in The Pony Club.
- Spurs must only be used to give a more precise leg aids and allow for better communication from rider to horse. They are not simply to make the horse go faster.

As coaches and assessors, at either Branch or Pony Club Centre training, we need to challenge why they feel the need to wear spurs. They should advise and encourage dialogue that would promote a reasoned choice. What are they trying to achieve and should show some understanding of their responsibility towards the horse/pony and his long-term welfare



**How do you deal with instruction given by the 'home coach' that conflicts with Pony Club policies?**



## Reminder of the five domains

The animal welfare act 2006 states that the duty of a person responsible for an animal is to ensure its welfare. As Coaches we need to remind members of the potential welfare issues regarding the incorrect use of spurs.

The misuse of spurs would contravene two of these . **Mental state**. Causing stress distress and confusion

**Health**. Cause pain and injury



## To understand that not all horses or ponies will be comfortable being ridden in spurs.

Some horses and ponies are much more sensitive than others they have different thicknesses of coat and skin. Bruising can be caused by the use of spurs which we are unable to see.

Visible injuries could be:

- Loss of hair
- Rubbed patches
- Grazes
- Open wounds

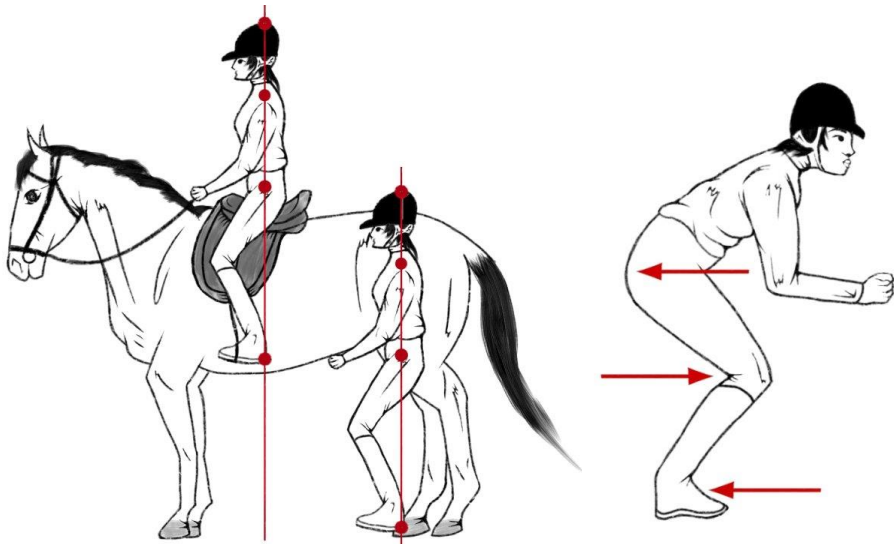
Any of these is of course in breach of the freedom from pain.

Discuss with members how horses and ponies may react if they dislike being ridden in spurs. Also, various ways of protecting the skin.

When Coaching you could ask members to pretend they are a pony & use the spurs on themselves to feel the effect.







**To understand the reasons why a balanced independent position is required and be able to demonstrate that position with a still and stable lower leg.**

Remember what you are looking for in the two basic positions. These should be taught and reinforced at every opportunity when coaching.

Vital when you are assessing.



When riding on the flat the rider should sit in the deepest part of the saddle with a longer stirrup. There should be a line from ear, shoulder hip to heel.

When show jumping the rider needs to shorten the stirrups about 2 holes to change the centre of gravity so they can remain in balance in light seat and over the fences.

For both, the lower leg must be secure when wearing spurs.



# To know how to ride with spurs in an educated and empathetic way.

A secure, correct lower leg position

Independent hands

Secure seat

Coordination of aids without losing balance or gripping up with the leg.

Use the leg aids effectively without a spur

Explain that if their seat is only stable due to gripping with their lower leg, knee, thigh or keeping balance with the reins. They are not ready to wear spurs.

Some will be unaware that they are unbalanced with an unstable leg, or that their toe turns out or down resulting in constant use of the spur.

Discuss the confusion in what they are asking, its unjust and will possibly result in injury to the horse or pony.

Spurs are used to encourage a quicker reaction to your leg aid and help you to refined them.

If used correctly spurs can be an additional aid to help the horse or pony react with more precision without increased leg pressure. A secure, correct lower leg position is essential.

It is important that members understand the level the horse or pony is working at, whether it's their own or one they ride at a centre. Is it ready to be ridden in spurs?

They should know that the horse or pony must be comfortable with the rider's legs gently lying on their sides and move forward when leg aids are applied.

Apply the scales of training: working in a rhythm with suppleness and connection to a contact.

Members should understand that spurs should not be used all the time.



# Various insecure leg positions and the effect if wearing spurs



**Heel too far forward**



**Toe turned out**



**Leg too far back**



**Heel up**



# The Four Quadrants of Operative Conditioning



**Positive Reinforcement**  
Asked to pick up leg,  
treat given on response  
Give a Reward



**Positive Punishment**  
Does not move forward  
from leg, whip used to  
encourage a reaction



**Negative Reinforcement**  
Apply pressure to move  
forward loosen when  
they respond  
Pressure and release



**Negative Punishment**  
Horse that is mugging  
you for treats Turn away  
Remove what they want

Educate members when you are coaching that riding with an unsteady lower leg position of which they are unaware. Then to wear spurs will result in the use of numerous aids which will be:

- ❖ Unpleasant.
- ❖ Haphazard.
- ❖ Poorly timed.
- ❖ Inappropriate.
- ❖ Constantly jabbing.

Regardless of whether the horse or pony is obedient or not.

Teach them about the ethos of the correct training of a horse or pony.

This scenario would inevitably result in good behaviour being punished (consistent positive punishment) which is unfair and of course its cruel.

Constantly trying to correct your lower leg can also be tiring for a rider.





# The correct way to use spurs

Reinforce the need for a still and stable lower leg with a secure seat.

Ensure the horse or pony is ready to work in spurs. Calf flat against the horse's side with toe pointing forwards.

Enables movement of the leg to gently nudge the heel to use the spur.

Even in trot and canter the leg must be level against the horse's side so you can use it when required and to prevent constant use of the spur.

Remember the reasons for using spurs e.g. Better precision of the aids particularly for more advanced dressage movements.

# Why are we using Spurs?

**Response:** Firstly, to achieve a better reaction to your leg aid. Sometimes a horse or pony may become dull to the leg.

A spur used for **response** helps to remind them the leg has been applied and would like a **response**

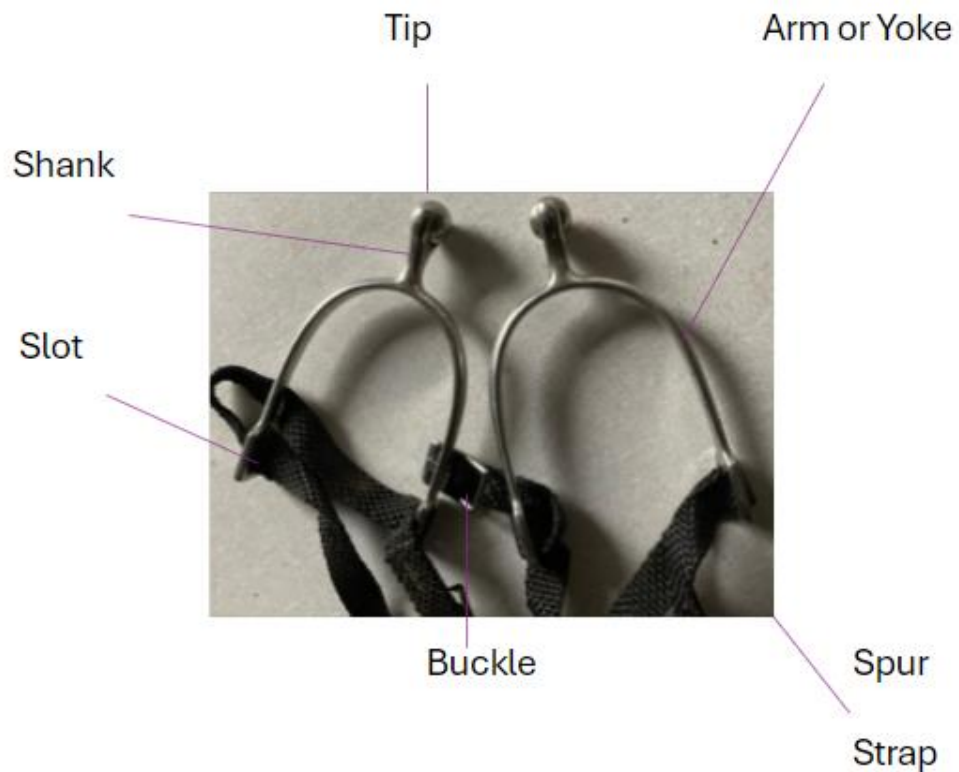


**Reinforce:** Spurs may help to **reinforce** a specific aid. E.g. the horse or pony unresponsive after you use the leg or insufficiently forward

A spur could then **reinforce** that the leg means move more forward.



**Refine:** More advanced riders use spurs to give more subtle aids to get a precise reaction. E.g. when asking for shoulder in some horses or ponies may lose their quarters. A quick nudge with the spur may help to move them over resulting in a more correct movement. This enables the rider to use a more **refined** aid.



**The Yoke** or Arm is the part of the spur that wraps around the heel of the boot.

**The Shank** extends from the back of the yoke to the Tip which is the part that touches the horse.

**The Shank** is measured from the back of the boot to the end of the Tip.

**The Rowel:** a rotating disc or wheel – illegal.

**The Ball** – a smooth rotating ball, sometimes attached to the shank depending on the design.

**Spur straps** go through the slot to hold the spur in place.



**Rowel Spur**



# Know the distinct types of spurs, which are permitted, which are not, and why.



- **Dummy spurs** – These spurs are generally used by more novice riders or in showing when the correct dress includes spurs, but you don't want the effect of them. They are just a U-shaped arm around the rider's heel.
- **Round Neck Spurs** - These spurs are ideal when you are introducing the use of spurs or riding a sensitive horse or pony. The widened smooth yoke is more gentle spreading the contact which minimises discomfort and potential damage to the skin.
- **Round end** – These spurs have a rounded end to them and are probably one of the most gentle. The end is a small metal ball shape.
- **Waterford** – Similar to the round end spurs, the ball on these is larger but still a fairly gentle spur.
- **Rubber roller ball** – Are gentler than a standard spur the ball rolls against the horse's side rather than jabbing. They are more beneficial to sensitive horses and can reduce spur rubs.
- **Prince of Wales** – The most common of all English spurs, has a flat end that's slightly sharper than the round ended spurs. These spurs must be used facing down.
- **Swan neck** – Looking like the neck of a swan, the shaft of these spurs goes upwards then levels out. The longer neck makes them a popular choice for dressage riders who can give their horse commands with barely noticeable movements.
- **Rowelled** – More common in Western riding , these spurs have a rotating toothed wheel known as a rowel. Rowelled spurs are becoming more common in British riding with various types of roller.
- A disk roller is less severe

# To know how to fit spurs correctly and care for them, removing them when not riding.



- The band should rest so that the shank is horizontal to the ground with the tip pointing downwards.
- Have the buckle done up on the outside with the loose end of the strap pointing downwards.
- They should sit just at the top of your heel.
- Be secure and tight enough so they don't move or slip down.
- Spurs should not be worn when dismounted, they can cause a trip hazard and are especially dangerous when using a lunge line or loading. They also cause rub marks on boots.

Coaches have to be more meticulous when members are wearing spurs. Even at B test and above we see incorrect fitting.

During the tack check look thoroughly at the spurs, if not fitted correctly then adjust and educate.

There also needs to be more onus on coaches to teach members about spurs.



# Putting spurs on correctly





# Care of spurs

British spurs are usually made from stainless steel with either leather or synthetic straps.

It is important to clean them regularly especially if they have a roller ball so that it does not get clogged and stuck. This will also make them last longer.

Wiping them with a damp cloth each time you use them will help reduce a build-up of grease on the yoke.

To thoroughly clean regularly, take them apart by removing the straps. Wash the metal parts with warm soapy water then rinse and dry. Then polish with a dry cloth.

The leather straps can be cleaned like any other piece of leather. Warm water and sponge to wipe off dirt, then saddle soap to keep them supple. You can also use boot polish to help maintain the colour.

Synthetic straps can be gently washed in warm soapy water then rinsed and allowed to dry.

Always check for any damage particularly the leather straps, metal edges and any plastic.

When storing, link them together so you don't lose one and hang them up or keep with your riding boots.

Remember when you put them back together to have the shank pointing downwards.



# Know the rules regarding spurs in all main Pony Club activities

Each Pony Club sports activity has its own Rule Book. These can be found on the Pony Club website. Please check these before participating so that you are wearing the correct dress.

## Dressage & Show Jumping Rules

**Spurs** – If you have achieved either your C+ test riding or the Spurs test you may wear spurs at Rallies and other events. Any misuse of spurs will be reported to the DC/Centre Proprietor, Area Representative and Training Chairman; any reported riders will be recorded and monitored.

Sharp spurs are not permitted. Only blunt spurs, without rowels or sharp edges, and spurs that have a smooth rotating ball on the shank may be worn.

If the spurs are curved, the curve must be downwards, and the shank must point straight to the back and the length must not exceed what is stated in the rule book for that discipline (most are now discussing 2.5 cm).

The measurement is taken from the boot to the end of the shank.

- Spurs must only be used to enhance the normal leg aids and allow for better communication from rider to horse.
- Spurs must never be used to vent a competitor's anger or to reprimand the horse.
- Use of the spurs which causes injury e.g. blood, broken skin or a weal, is always classed as misuse.
- Misuse of the spurs anywhere at an event will result in disqualification.

## Mounted Games

Whips and spurs are not allowed.

# What this means to the Coaches

- **Responsibility** - to include spurs check, during all tack inspections
- **Invite dialogue** - don't just instruct the members but encourage them to make a reasoned decision
- **Duty** - to advise on and even remove spurs if they are used tactlessly
- **Obligation** - to make all interested parties aware of the potential damage and welfare issue that spurs could be causing
- **Maintain** - the Pony Club's highest standards even if this results in an awkward conversation





# What this means to assessors

## The Spurs Test

- Prior to riding you may choose to do the dismounted discussion to assess underpinning knowledge.
- In the riding- commence without spurs. Warm up in all 3 paces, school movements and transitions.
- Focus on the aid application – pressure and release.
- Rider awareness of the stability of their lower leg and balance through the seat.
- Ride without stirrups in all 3 paces.
- See them jump a few fences (approx. 70cm)
- Check each member can put spurs on correctly.
- Repeat working on the flat and over fences with spurs.
- Each section should take 20 – 25 minutes.
- 4 riders to be assessed at a time.



# What this means to assessors in the C+ Test

## C+ Riding Tests from now.

- All candidates must be tested on the theory & use of spurs.

During the **dismounted discussion** follow the current September 24 updated syllabus:

- 7. Understand the welfare issues surrounding the use of spurs
- 13. Cover the outline of The Spurs Test

During the **Riding** those wearing them must be tested on this, if they are not wearing spurs, they do not have to demonstrate it.

28. If spurs are worn, explain the reasons why, in detail and with understanding.

- Focus on rider awareness of their balance through seat and stability of lower leg.
- Asses the application of leg and hand aids with a demonstration of the pressure and release.
- Be mindful of the fact once a candidate has passed their C+ Riding they will be entitled to wear spurs.
- Take a set of spurs with you so that members not wearing them can discuss the parts and their knowledge of them.





**To understand and acknowledge that The Spurs Test does not grant the permanent or irrevocable right to wear spurs.**

**If they are used inappropriately, incorrectly or over-zealously, coaches and officials can remove them and withdraw The Test.**

*In this day and age of social licencing, the use of spurs is not a rite of passage nor a tradition to be continued regarding correct turn out.*



# Frequently Asked Questions

## Q.1 What age do you have to be to take The Spurs Test?

There is no minimum age to take the test, however members should be able to understand the potential welfare implications of any misuse of spurs.

## Q.2 Do you have to Jump during The Spurs Test?

Ideally members will be assessed jumping, but if a member is discipline specific such as polo or dressage it should be possible for them to be assessed according to their sport. So, for example a dressage only rider might be asked to demonstrate some leg yield, a polo player might be asked to demonstrate riding at speed and turning.

## Q.3 What are the requirements of the Assessor?

Assessors must be on the Assessor Database and at least C+ level.

## Q.4 How long should The Spurs Test take?

It should be possible for an assessor to test a small group of riders in an hour/hour and a half, to include theory and riding.

## Q.5 Do we have to use an **external** Assessor?

Amended 13/11/24 - **Yes** you must use an external Test Assessor for The Spurs Test.

## Q.6 How is the Spurs Test identified?

Members will be issued with a yellow hat tag to show they have passed the test. Members with C+ and above may also wish to have a tag in case they are not wearing their badge (eg XC).

**Reasonable adjustment** – The Pony Club’s Reasonable adjustment policy is available for those with specific needs; however, the welfare of the horse will always be a priority.