

Support Guide for Coaches and Officials - Dress, Tack and Equipment Checks

Although not mandatory, it is **good practice** to carry out checks at rallies, training and at competitions, to ensure dress, tack and equipment is:

- Safe
- Well-fitting and clean
- Fit for the intended purpose
- Compliant with Sports Rules, for competition

Who checks, and when....

Ultimately, it is **Parents'/Guardians' and Members' responsibility** (for those over 18) to check that tack and equipment are safe and suitable. **Rule 6.30** of the handbook states that:

"All tack must be clean, in a good state of repair, properly fitted and suitable for purpose. Tack inspections are routinely carried out at events and the organisers may prohibit participation in the event if they consider the tack to be inadequate or unsuitable. Specific sport rules are detailed in respective rulebooks."

The following guidelines are intended to give practical advice on how and when to carry out tack checking.

At Rallies and Training:

During initial discussions at the start of every training and rally session, the **Coach should carry out a tack check**.

Any issues that Coaches discover should be discussed with the parent/guardian or Member, if over 18. Please remember, there may be a reason why something is the way it is, so discuss it with them and agree what needs to happen. **Coaches should not adjust tack themselves**; instead, they should ask the Member to dismount and then ask the parent/guardian, or the Member, if competent, to make the adjustment.

If any item of tack is deemed an immediate risk to safety, the Coach must ask the rider to dismount and leave the session until it can be resolved.

During the rally, if there are any concerns about the fit or effectiveness of the dress or tack, this should be discussed too, either at the point of noticing, if it's urgent, or afterwards if it can wait.

If the Coach is in training, or needs some support, a Branch Official who is knowledgeable and accredited, may carry out dress and tack checks.

Care must be taken when checking tack to ensure that there is no danger of touching riders in an inappropriate manner or place. If possible, the rider should be able to adjust their position with the help of verbal prompts, but some may not be able to do this and might need physical assistance to move their limbs, it is **important to ask permission** to move a limb before doing so.

Any tack advice or concerns highlighted by the Coach/Official should be noted on the rally paperwork.

For Test Assessments:

The test assessor or a nominated Official should check the tack before commencing with the riding element of the test.

Please follow advice for Coaches and Officials at Rallies and Training.

For Competition:

All competition participants should be checked whether they are Pony Club Members or not. It is important to **check for safety, fit and compliance with the rules**. If something doesn't look right, ask about it, it may be an oversight or someone else has tacked up incorrectly.

The tack checker role at Pony Club events, should be carried out by an experienced Volunteer who has a DBS and safeguarding training. The best point to do it, is when they enter the warmup ring, so it gives competitors time to correct anything that isn't right. If the tack checker does not have a DBS or Safeguarding training, the Member's Parent/Guardian or approved representative (e.g. team trainer) should be present, if they are under 18.

Correcting and replacing items of tack and equipment

If it is decided that any part of the rider's dress or horse's tack needs changing, for any reason, it is **vital that anything changed/borrowed fits correctly**. An example of this might be a rider's gloves, a bit or a girth. **Hats and Body Protectors should not be borrowed due to the need to have them professionally checked and fitted.**

If the required replacement/amendment presents too much of a change for the horse/rider to be safe, it might be sensible to abandon the session for safety reasons and ask them to practice at home before returning, so please consider changes carefully.

If a pony is ridden in a saddle that appears poorly fitting, work with the Member and their parents/guardians to resolve it. While it is important to address a poorly fitted saddle, **making sudden changes, such as switching to an unfamiliar saddle or adding or removing a pad just before a competition, may do more harm than good**. Each issue should be considered individually, always prioritising the welfare and safety of the horse/pony and rider. If you feel the fit is a welfare issue, and it cannot be reasonably resolved, they should retire.

Any replaced items of tack must be re-checked before being allowed to continue.

Keeping Records of Tack Checks

For any event, carrying out tack checks should be included in the risk assessment. For a competition, it is sensible to record tack checks. It doesn't need to be sophisticated; it can be as simple as using the start list and highlighting/ticking their name as they are checked. Should there be a claim in the future, evidence of checks may be useful to the insurers.

It is sensible to take notes of any requested changes or issues, this should be stored with all the event paperwork.

If someone repeatedly contravenes tack and equipment guidelines and rules, it should be reported to the DC who should arrange training and guidance to support them.

Crib Sheets/Notes for Checkers at Competitions

It is **sensible to provide a crib sheet or list of notes** and a clip board for tack checkers to refer to, in particular **specific sports rules and safety concerns** to remember to check. Each sport has different rules, so it's important that your tack checker is given the correct information to help them. They should also be easily identifiable so a hi vis tabard is sensible.

When not to do Tack Checks

If you feel that tack checks are not relevant or appropriate for your event, you will need to demonstrate this in your risk assessment. However, it is unlikely that many scenarios would warrant this. For example, even at a residential camp, where there are daily ridden sessions, children will be cleaning and potentially taking apart their tack, so they might easily have made an error.

At a competition, you may not need to check tack on the same horse and rider combination more than once. For example, a Member enters two show jumping classes on one pony, it might not be necessary to check them for the second class. However, if the duration between the classes is long, and they have untacked, you may decide that a second check is necessary. This is left to the discretion of the organiser.

Biosecurity

Please remember to maintain biosecurity during inspections and checks. **Avoid touching equipment or horses unless absolutely necessary.** This helps reduce the risk of spreading disease between horses and keeps everyone safe. A visual check is often enough, and when in doubt, ask the Parent or Member to assist. At a competition, if a bit needs to be checked but the mouthpiece is not visible and there is a suspicion it may breach the rules, ask the rider/parent/guardian to put on a headcollar and remove the bridle so you can inspect it. Do not put your fingers inside the horse's mouth. This is for both biosecurity and safety reasons.

For the majority of activities, **tack checking is a necessity for the purpose of safety and fair sport.** However, there are certain situations where a tack check may not be necessary, and this is determined by the event's risk assessment and the organisers' discretion. If a piece of equipment fails after being checked and an insurance claim was brought against the branch/centre or individual tack checker, this is the sort of scenario that would be covered by The Pony Club liability policy (subject to the policy terms and conditions). If a tack check is not performed and equipment fails, insurers are likely to question why a check was not undertaken and how this was addressed in the risk assessment. If a suitable answer cannot be given, it is much more difficult for insurers to defend The Pony Club, and this could result in costly claims.

Safety and Welfare Concerns

Whether at a rally or competition, the decision of The Pony Club's Coach, Volunteer, or Official is final. If they believe the safety or welfare of a Member or horse/pony has been or is at risk of being compromised in any way, they have the authority to stop and remove them. Failure to respect their decision is considered a breach of the Members'/Parents' Code of Conduct.