

Building Confidence Through Sport:

Pony Club Triathlon Have-a-Go Sessions Inspire the Next Generation

Throughout the summer, **Pony Club Triathlon Have-a-Go Sessions** brought fun, friendship and new sporting opportunities to Centre members across the southeast. Hosted at affiliated centres and designed to be welcoming, **inclusive and pressure-free**, the sessions introduced children and young people to the three disciplines of triathlon: riding, running and shooting.



With the support of Area 13 Centre Coordinator **Sally Blackmore**, volunteers, coaches and centre staff, participants were encouraged to step outside their **comfort zones, develop new skills and discover a sport many had never encountered before.** While the sessions focused on learning and enjoyment rather than competition, they also demonstrated how Pony Club Triathlon can help young people **build confidence, resilience and a lifelong love of physical activity.**

The first stop on the programme took place on a sunny day in May on the **Isle of Wight**, where members from **Kittbridge Hollow** and **Fairfield's Riding School** gathered for a day of sporting adventure.



Under the expert guidance of **Andrea Hurley**, participants were introduced to air pistol shooting, a completely **new experience** for many of those attending. The challenge quickly proved popular, with several parents becoming just as enthusiastic as the young riders. Running activities followed, with plenty of **laughter** as participants discovered who could sprint the fastest before heading to the arena to tackle a jumping round aboard some wonderful ponies The day concluded with team activities, a picnic in the sunshine and even a visit from a burger van, creating a relaxed and sociable atmosphere that perfectly reflected the spirit of the programme.

From the Isle of Wight, the initiative moved to the heart of London in July, with a visit to **Ebony Horse Club** in Brixton.



Making **creative use** of the centre's facilities, volunteers and staff transformed the arena into a large obstacle course featuring weaving challenges, stepping stones, gates, hula hoop tosses, slip rails and even working equitation equipment. Participants **worked together** in pairs, one leading while the other rode, **developing teamwork and communication** skills alongside their riding ability.

Outside the arena, bean bag target activities proved unexpectedly popular, with members determined to **keep improving their scores.** After lunch and triathlon-themed activities, attention turned to **stretching, conditioning and running** exercises before teams competed for overall honours based on target scores, race results and obstacle course performance.



Despite soaring temperatures, **enthusiasm never faded.** The day finished with a spirited on-foot jump-off through the obstacle course, and every participant left with a rosette, goodies and a huge smile.

The final event of the summer took place at **Quarry Farm** on a beautiful autumn day. Andrea Hurley once again provided shooting instruction, helping participants test their **accuracy and concentration**. Several coaches joined in the fun and one particularly impressive member achieved an outstanding score of **480 out of 500**.

Running and riding activities followed, with Sally Blackmore ensuring participants were fully engaged, even introducing conditioning exercises and planks into the programme. By the end of the day, members had **challenged themselves, developed new skills and, most importantly, enjoyed the experience alongside friends and fellow riders**.

















More Than Just Riding



For many young people, Pony Club Triathlon offers an opportunity to explore sporting disciplines beyond riding while remaining within a familiar and supportive equestrian environment.

Sally Blackmore believes this is one of the sport's greatest strengths.



"Young riders are able to have a go at other sports, so they learn additional skills beyond riding. The structure of our Have-a-Go days also helps them develop valuable skills such as **teamwork and communication**."

She also highlighted the importance of introducing young people to opportunities they may **not otherwise encounter.**

"These days **widen members' horizons** and knowledge of other sporting opportunities that are open to them as Pony Club members. For Centre members, they instil a sense of teamwork and being part of something fun that is a little out of the ordinary."



The flexible nature of the sessions means they can be **adapted for a wide range of ages, abilities and facilities**, making them **accessible** for centres across the country.

"The events are **very inclusive** and can be tailored to meet the needs of many members. They create a fun and exciting day that centres can use to promote Pony Club activities and potentially attract a wider range of participants. They also encourage members to **consider opportunities** such as Winter Triathlon competitions."










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Why Confidence Matters

The benefits of programmes such as the Pony Club Triathlon Have-a-Go Sessions extend far beyond sport itself.

Research from **Women in Sport** found that 43% of girls who once considered themselves sporty **disengage from sport during adolescence**. Fear of judgement, reduced confidence and concerns about being assessed by others were identified as major reasons for leaving sport behind.



43%

of young girls disengage with sport by adolescence

This evidence highlights the importance of creating environments where **participation, enjoyment and personal development** are prioritised alongside performance.
That principle aligns closely with the concept of **physical literacy**, defined by **Margaret Whitehead** as developing the confidence, competence, motivation and understanding needed to remain physically active throughout life.



Physical literacy is not simply about learning movement skills. It is about helping young people **feel comfortable being active, willing to try new challenges and motivated to continue taking part in sport** throughout adolescence and adulthood.

Research by Stodden and colleagues describes a "**positive spiral of engagement",** whereby movement competence leads to confidence, **confidence** encourages **participation**, participation develops **fitness** and positive experiences encourage **continued involvement** in sport.

Further evidence from UNESCO suggests physically literate young people often demonstrate **stronger resilience**, **better concentration**, **improved social skills** and greater long-term **engagement** with physical activity.

In this context, the Pony Club Triathlon Have-a-Go Sessions offer **much more than a sporting introduction.** They create **opportunities** for young people to **experience success, support one another and build confidence** in an environment where trying something new is **celebrated**.















Looking Ahead



For Sally Blackmore, the greatest reward comes from seeing members discover new abilities and encourage each other throughout the day.
"I absolutely love meeting the centre members, staff, coaches, horses and ponies. Watching them have lots of fun trying out new activities, gaining confidence and encouraging each other is wonderful to see."

Her hope is that every participant leaves with more than just memories of a fun day.

"I hope members feel that they have learned new skills and reinforced existing ones, which **creates confidence.** Having the opportunity to try something different within the comfort of their own centre and **alongside friends** is incredibly valuable. Hopefully the coaches take the same away too."

As Pony Club Triathlon continues to grow, initiatives such as these demonstrate how **sport can provide far more than competition**. By focusing on confidence, enjoyment, teamwork and personal development, the Have-a-Go Sessions are helping young people **build the foundations for lifelong participation in sport** while creating lasting memories along the way.

Sources

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