



A STANDARD

The A Test is the highest award of The Pony Club, and provides a comprehensive assessment of Horsemanship and Training of Young Horses.

Candidates should have passed all previous Pony Club Tests, but must have passed B, Lungeing and AH. These Tests will have provided a staircase of knowledge and progression to underpin the work and riding that will be observed. This progression will have been supported by further training and practice with different coaches and with varied horses, as well as undertaking a wide range of reading, to give the breadth of knowledge required for this Test.

OBJECTIVE

The candidates should be able to:

- Show a secure, correct, balanced seat on the flat and over fences.
- Improve all horses they work, including young, awkward or refusing horses.
- Be able to support the practical work shown with logical theory relevant to the individual horses.
- Give the assessors confidence that a horse left with the candidate would improve in its way of going.

The assessors will be looking for the following criteria:

Outside riding

1. Show a correct, balanced, independent and secure position.
2. Choose a suitable length of stirrups for riding outdoors.
3. Show effective, co-ordinated aids, producing an appropriate response from the horse.
4. Show consistent and allowing rein aids.
5. Work a horse in showing a logical and progressive plan. Assess a horse specifically and accurately.
6. Offer individual and appropriate further work programmes for all types of horses and competitions.

Over fences

7. Set stirrups at a suitable length for jumping.
8. Show a correct, balanced position over the horse's centre of gravity, in approach, over a fence and on landing.
9. Show a secure lower leg position.
10. Show a hand/arm position which allows the horse natural stretch over the fence.

11. Adopt a forward rhythmical pace.
12. Maintain rhythm to and away from fences.
13. Present a horse to the fence in a way that allows him to jump easily.
14. Ride a smooth track between fences.
15. Ride with ease and competence allowing for bold riding around the course.
16. Use a whip proficiently if necessary.
17. Accurately assess the horse and its way of jumping.
18. Offer a specific training plan to improve the horse's jumping.
19. Show a clear knowledge of distances between related fences, doubles and grids. This should relate to the horse ridden, and be given in feet, yards or metres.
20. Comment on the value of grid work, both theoretically and in relation to the horses ridden.
21. Demonstrate effective, logical use of fences in assessment of the horse and in developing work.
22. Offer a plan to take the horse ridden forwards to jump a course of 1.10m.

Cross country

23. Adopt a correct, balanced position appropriate for undulating ground.
24. Maintain a secure lower leg position.
25. Demonstrate effective aids, coupled with a bold attitude.
26. Maintain a rhythmical balanced pace, both in between and on approach to fences.
27. Ride at a speed suitable for the ground and training of horse.
28. Approach fences so as to give the horse the best opportunity to jump well.
29. Use a whip effectively if required.
30. Give a clear assessment of the round ridden.
31. Understand how to ride a horse to specific types of fence e.g. rail & ditch combination, skinny, water, corner, bounce etc.
32. Outline a plan to improve the cross country performance of the horse in order to compete in Pony Club Open Eventing.

Indoor riding

Correct classical position

33. Show a secure deep seat and leg position.
34. Demonstrate effective aids.
35. Maintain a consistent, correct contact.
36. Ride horses forward in balance.
37. Ride school figures accurately, appropriate to horses' balance & level of work.
38. Show logical progressive work programmes based on the Scale of Training.
39. Accurately assess each horse's way of going.
40. Present suitable specific programmes of improvement for the horses ridden.
41. Have a clear knowledge of the aids for all movements required in the Test (see below).
 - a) Direct transitions
 - b) Turn on the forehand

- c) Leg yielding
- d) Travers
- e) Shoulder-in
- f) Counter canter
- g) Simple change
- h) Rein back
- i) Walk pirouette
- j) Variations within the pace appropriate to horses' level of training

- 42. Show a clear understanding of the preparation needed for all movements required in the Test (as in point 41)
- 43. Be able to ride all the movements required in the Test (as in point 41), and know when to use them.

Lungeing

- 44. Handle the lunge line and whip safely and effectively.
- 45. Show suitable use of side reins.
- 46. Work the horse forward and in balance.
- 47. Show logical progressive work based on the Scale of Training.
- 48. Work in all paces as appropriate.
- 49. Work the horse on suitably sized circles.
- 50. Use poles appropriately.
- 51. Work the horse to show improvement.
- 52. Accurately assess the horse's way of going.
- 53. Discuss the work carried out competently and confidently.
- 54. Discuss training aids which may be useful for the horse worked.
- 55. Suggest appropriate ongoing training.

Training the young horse

- 56. Show a sensible knowledge of handling young stock.
- 57. Present a safe and logical approach to lungeing and long reining.
- 58. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of long reining.
- 59. Discuss the appropriate tack for the purpose for which it is going to be used.
- 60. Suggest a safe and practical backing routine.
- 61. Suggest a safe and suitable initial riding plan.
- 62. Give appropriate ideas for widening the young horse's education.
- 63. Outline a plan to introduce a horse to jumping.
- 64. Outline possible problems when introducing horses to jumping.
- 65. Give a logical programme to introduce horses to cross country fences.
- 66. Ensure the working area and equipment is safe and used appropriately.
- 67. Understand the safety implications related to helpers and other horses.
- 68. Discuss practical time scales for the various stages of training young horses.
- 69. Show awareness for the safety of helpers.

THE FORM OF THE TEST

There are **four** phases to the Test:

The Outside Riding

- During this phase, candidates will ride three or four different horses.
- Having been allocated their first horse, they are allowed 5 - 10 minutes assessment, on the flat and over a few small fences. While doing this, they are expected to appraise the horse - its strengths and areas for improvements, to be thinking what its job could be, and how it 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 particular horse or any other that he/she might be given to ride.
- Candidates then change horses, and 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.
- 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.
- Candidates may have the opportunity to ride a fourth horse.

Inside Riding

- Candidates will ride two or three schooled horses in the Indoor School.
- They will be given the opportunity of assessing these horses before being asked to carry out 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 aids to carry them out.
- Ride the movements required in the Test (as in point 41) appropriately to the standard of the horse.
- Candidates will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of the rules of the school.
- 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.

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 backing and preliminary training of a young horse.

The Debrief

This is the last session of the day, where the candidate is given their result. Each candidate is debriefed individually, with the opportunity to talk to every assessor. If a candidate has not been successful this is the occasion to receive constructive ideas towards improving their level of horsemanship.

Through disappointment, it is easy to absorb only part of the conversation, and then at a later day feel they have failed due to some minor point. This is never the case, so the following points may assist the candidate to understand the reason for the lack of success:

- Attend the debrief accompanied by a supporter.
- Take notes.
- Ask questions if you are unclear on any topic.
- Look at the big picture, possibly the seat was not established, which will affect every horse, rather than, 'I rode the double badly'.
- Regard the debrief as an opportunity for a clear assessment on where to improve your riding.
- Remember, some top riders failed the A Test the first time, so it is not the end of a promising career.

READ

The list below is by no means comprehensive. At this level candidates are encouraged to read many publications, articles and attend conventions with a wide variety of speakers.

Pony Club Publications:

- The Manual of Horsemanship
- A Young Person's Guide to Eventing – Gill Watson
- To Be A Dressage Rider - Jane Kidd
- A Young Person's Guide to Show Jumping - Tim Stockdale
- Look... No Hands! Straightforward Cross Country - Eric Smiley
- The Pony Club Guide To Endurance Riding – Nicola Parsler
- Vital Statistics: A Guide to Conformation – Maggie Raynor
- Body Basics: A Guide to the Anatomy of the Horse – Maggie Raynor
- Fit for the Bit: A Guide to Care of the Horse's Mouth – Maggie Raynor and Antony de Csernatony
- All Systems Go! A Guide to Equine Fitness - David Marlin and Maggie Raynor
- The Pony Club Guide to Bits and Biting – Carolyn Henderson

Suggested further reading:

- British Dressage Rules (FEI Definitions of Paces and movements)
- The Complete Training of Horse and Rider in the Principles of Classical Horsemanship - Alois Podhajsky
- Complete Horse Riding Manual - William Micklem
- Training Show Jumpers – Anthony Paalman
- Kottas on Dressage - Arthur Kottas
- 101 Dressage Exercises for Horse & Rider – Jec Aristotle Ballou
- The Basic Training of the Young Horse - Ingrid and Reiner Klimke
- Cavaletti for Dressage and Jumping – Ingrid and Reiner Klimke
- 101 Jumping Exercises: For Horse and Rider – Linda Allen

INTERNET RESOURCES

- www.ponyprepplus.org
- www.dressage-academy.com

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

Recommended minimum age: 18 years

Felt Colour - Blue

Honours – Purple

WORKING FOR THE A TEST 2016

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 recommended to candidates as a stepping stone the B and A standards.
- The Pony Club organises several B+ and A 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 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 without strain.
- Be competent and brave enough to ride young and awkward horses.

- Have a correct riding position which has become natural, so that bad habits do not emerge under stress.
- Apply the aids correctly. A rider cannot expect a horse to be accurate and submissive 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.
- Know and understand the reasoning and logic behind the facts.
- 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 or 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 your own horse, using lateral work and variations within the stride 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 handle your nerves.
- Try to spend time helping in a good yard where there are plenty of horses at different levels of training including untrained horses.
- Find someone who is an experienced trainer and who uses and accepts correct Pony Club and BHS methods, and offer your services as an assistant when they are handling 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.
- 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. Consider taking The Pony Club Coaching Certificate.

Hints about taking the Test

- Dress tidily and cleanly, wear gloves and carry a whip, bring your spurs.
- Arrive at the Test centre in plenty of time to walk the Cross Country and Show Jumping Courses before the briefing.
- Keep your stirrups to a practical workmanlike length.
- Don't 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.
- Look at the horse before you get on him; check the tack, look at the teeth; conformation and outlook may tell you something about the horse before you ride him.
- When you first get on a strange horse and start riding, look about you and 'feel' how the horse is going. This is more relaxing and more reliable than looking at its head.
- In discussion, base your assessment of each horse on the Scale of Training.
- If you don't 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 for ground poles and related distances, which can then be adapted to suit individual horses.
- Avoid the 'pat' or 'book' answer. Don't 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 laziness; he doesn't respond to my leg aids. This is the first thing I would correct. I would reinforce my leg aids with my stick until he became obedient. 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 not incorrect, but it does not show real knowledge.

In the indoor riding, don't 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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