The Welfare Of Horses And Ponies At Pony Club Events

Introduction
These rules are to be read in conjunction with The Pony Club Health, Safety and Safeguarding Rules, which are published annually, and the British Horse Society (BHS) Guidelines for the Welfare of Horses and Ponies at Events. By attending a Pony Club event Members are bound by the rules of The Pony Club and must comply with any instructions given by event officials. Failure to do so could result in being sent home or banned from future events.

Under the Animal Welfare Acts, every owner or the person responsible for an animal has a duty of care to ensure the animal’s wellbeing. It is therefore an offence not only to cause suffering or ill treatment but also to fail to take adequate measures to protect the animal’s welfare even if it is not yet suffering.

Throughout these rules, the term “horse” will be used to describe horses and ponies irrespective of size or gender.

Health
- Horses attending Pony Club events must be in good health and fit enough to cope with the demands of the event and any associated travelling. The horse must be a suitable mount for the rider.

- Horses attending ridden events should be over 4 years old. Pregnant mares should not be ridden at events unless accompanied by a veterinary certificate and mares over 6 months pregnant are not permitted.

- Health and welfare are inextricably linked. Owners must act responsibly and not attend an event if their horse has been in recent contact with a disease outbreak even if their horse appears to be in good health. As a general rule, a period of at least 2 weeks free from exposure to known infection would be considered reasonable.

- Strangles, equine influenza (flu), herpes virus and ringworm are common diseases that are spread by contact which includes tack and food utensil sharing with other horses. Members attending Pony Club events may be required to make a written declaration that their horse is apparently healthy and has not knowingly been in recent contact with infectious disease. The Pony Club reserves the right to send home any horse showing signs of disease or coming from known infected premises.

- Owners are strongly encouraged to have their horses vaccinated against equine flu. Annual vaccination is necessary to maintain adequate levels of immunity and vaccination is routinely combined with tetanus vaccination, which although not transmissible between horses, is frequently fatal and considered an essential of responsible horse ownership. Event organisers may insist on evidence of up to date flu and tetanus vaccination which must be recorded in the horse’s passport.
• In the interest of preventing spread of disease, owners should avoid tack sharing and horses should have their own feed and water buckets. Event organisers should ensure that clean fresh water is available from a tap rather than using communal drinking troughs.

Medications
Horses that are apparently fit and healthy but receiving veterinary treatment with prescription drugs may be allowed to attend Pony Club events. Some medications are required for the ongoing health and welfare of a horse / pony which is otherwise fit and capable of normal work. An example of this could be treatment for Cushing’s disease. At events such as Championships and Polo competitions, dope testing might be utilised in accordance with FEI rules. Under these rules, drugs are grouped into lists of banned and controlled substances. Controlled substances, such as drugs commonly used in the treatment of Cushing’s disease, are allowed at FEI events provided a veterinary certificate states that the ongoing medication is for a diagnosed condition and necessary for the continued health of the horse. An owner of a horse on prescription medication (this includes phenylbutazone) must inform the event organisers in advance so that proper certification can be provided if deemed necessary. The event organisers may ban a horse from attending if it is receiving analgesic or anti-inflammatory medication (e.g. phenylbutazone), or if participation in the event is, in the opinion of the organisers, likely to be detrimental to the horse’s health and welfare.

Transport
• The welfare of horses being transported is protected by specific legislation in addition to the Animal Welfare Acts.

• The horse must be fit to travel and the transport (horsebox or trailer) must be roadworthy, clean and fit for purpose. Common faults are weak floors and ramps, illegal or underinflated tyres and poorly maintained couplings.

• When travelling the horse must be accompanied by a person suitably experienced in transporting horses. Preferably they should be familiar with the horse being transported.

• It is a legal requirement that a horse travelling to an event is accompanied by its passport. This applies even if the horse is hacked to the event.

• A travelling kit appropriate to the length of journey must be carried. This must include feed, water, clean buckets, rugs and a first aid kit containing a minimum of: a thermometer, cotton wool, gamgee, non-adherent dressing such as Melonin, self-adhesive bandages, adhesive tape and blunt ended scissors. When a horse is hacked to an event, provisions must be made for access to these items including a headcollar or halter.

• Horses should only be left unattended in a horsebox or trailer if they are known to be comfortable and relaxed in that situation. Ventilation and access to the horse must be maintained.

• Tethered horses should be supervised. When tethering a horse to the outside of a box or trailer, a quick release knot and a breakable / cut-able tie must be used and the tethering rope should be of a length to permit natural movement of the head and neck but not so long as to invite entanglement.
Tack and Rider Aids

- Individual disciplines have their own rules on suitable tack (see specific Discipline rulebooks for more information). 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. Harsh bits and overtight nosebands are common faults.

- A horse must not be reprimanded by repeated yanking on the bit.

Spurs

- The Pony Club rules govern the design and wearing of spurs which can be a useful aid for the more experienced rider who knows how to wear, apply and use them. They are not a fashion accessory. Spurs must not be used to reprimand a horse by inflicting pain.

Whips

- Individual disciplines have their own rules on the carrying and use of a whip (see specific Discipline rulebooks for more information). A whip may be used to encourage a horse forwards if it is not responding to the rider’s natural aids of seat and legs. The whip must not be used to make a tired horse perform. To encourage a horse forwards, the whip should be applied behind the girth or on the shoulder. The whip may also be used to reprimand a horse in which case it should be applied to the rump. In no circumstances must the whip be used on the horses head or neck.

- Excessive use of the whip or its use in anger or frustration is strictly banned and transgressors can expect to be sent home or banned from Pony Club events. It may also result in action under the Animal Welfare Acts. Use of the whip more than twice at any one time or use with such force as to leave marks or break the skin is considered excessive and is intolerable.

- Timing in the use of the whip is important and must be immediately at the point of which the horse is disobedient. Any delay merely confuses and frightens the horse.