



IRISH PONY CLUB
'A' TEST 2004



WORKING FOR THE 'A' TEST
AND
THE TEST SHEET

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WORKING FOR THE 'A' TEST

This pamphlet 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 by the candidate.

Objective

The 'A' Test is the highest award of the Irish Pony Club and provides a comprehensive examination in Horsemanship and Training Young Horses for Senior Members and Associates. Candidates must hold the Pony Club H Test and must be good all-round horsemen, with sound knowledge that has been acquired in logical sequence from their Instructors and Pony Club Publications and further reading. Passing 'A' Test is a really worthwhile achievement and provides the foundation to specialize in a branch of equitation. It is accepted by the B.H.S. as an exemption from their Stages III and IV Examination in Riding and Horse Care, subject to recommendation by the Irish Pony Club Training Committee and approval by the BHS Training and Examinations Committee.

Preparation

The preparation for 'A' Test should be progressive and continuous. It is an exam for the serious and dedicated rider who is prepared to devote thought, time and effort to improving their own riding and their practical knowledge of training young horses. The years between 'B' Test and 'A' Test must be spent in conscious preparation. Intense or 'crash courses' seldom result in success.

Note: You may apply to take the 'A' Test before the date of your 'H' Test, but you will have to withdraw if you fail to pass the 'H' Test. Candidates must have had practical experience with horses as well as ponies.

To pass 'A' Test you must:-

Learn to be practical. Know how to apply your knowledge both in the stables and on the horse. Knowledge alone is not enough. It must be accepted by the examiners that you are practiced and at ease with the tasks you have been given.

Have a genuine quest for knowledge and a desire to understand the reasons behind what you do.

Have a basically correct riding position which, through practice and discipline, has become natural, so that you will not drop back into bad habits under stress.

Discipline yourself to apply correct aids in a precise way. Untidy aids indicate an untidy mind. A rider cannot expect a horse to be accurate and submissive if he himself is inaccurate and undisciplined.

Develop the ability to put your actions into words, making yourself aware of what you are doing so that you can talk about it. Understand your own actions.

Know and understand the reasoning and logic behind the facts. Do not accept what you are told at face value, but argue it in your own mind until the answer becomes the right solution.

Try to develop the ability to get an improved performance out of whatever horse you ride.

Develop 'feel' for the way a horse is going in both outline and pace, and know when and how to make corrections if he is going badly. It is even more important to be aware of when the horse is going well; only when you are sure the horse is going in a correct way can you then analyse the reasons why and be able to re-create the 'good' on another occasion. This is positive thinking.

Be physically fit enough to ride without strain (Riding Fit).

A Suggested Programme of Training

On passing 'B' Test and whilst working for H Test, read the Test Sheet for 'A' Standard. Make sure you fully understand all they imply.

Work first on the areas that your 'B' Test Examiners may have criticized you on.

Work continuously on your position in the saddle and never become complacent about it.

Ride as many different horses as you can and practice putting into words what you think about them (Assessment). 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.

Try to spend time helping in a good yard where there are plenty of horses at different levels of training including untrained horses.

Be observant when looking at horses, so that you train your eye to recognize faults.

Visit horse sales, with someone knowledgeable if you can, and make assessments of conformation.

Continue with the progressive training of your own horse. If you have had the same horse for two or three years, you will probably have begun early lateral work and variations of stride, etc.

Find someone who is an experienced trainer and who uses and accepts BHS methods, and offer your services as an assistant when they are handling and training a young horse.

Continue to ride as much as you can under instruction. Always ask the advice of your Branch chief instructor.

Help in your Branch as an assistant and then as a junior instructor.

Develop a common-sense approach and try to simplify.

Gain competitive experience and learn to handle your 'nerves'.

Re-read all Pony Club publications mentioned on the Test Sheet.

Ride with a double bridle and become confident in its use.

Ride trained horses.

Hints about taking the Test

Dress tidily and cleanly, wear gloves and carry a stick or whip.

Arrive at the Test centre in plenty of time to walk the Cross Country and Show Jumping Courses.

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.

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 it's head.

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.

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.

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 re-enforce 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 hind-quarters; 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 pull the rider's legs.

TEST SHEET

STANDARD REQUIRED

RIDING

Candidates must:-

- Have a secure, independent seat, a correct position and a good standard of riding at all paces, including gallop and over fences.
- Ride effectively, with confidence, knowledge and understanding.
- Apply the correct aids with co-ordination.
- Be able to ride a course of fences, at all appropriate paces, and also to ride young, untrained, awkward or refusing horses effectively and with understanding.
- Be able to ride a course of fences with an understanding of the correct approach to take.
- Have knowledge of trotting poles, different types of fences and related distances.
- Be able, with some supervision, to carry out the basic training of a young horse, and to correct faults in an older horse. To understand the reasons behind what they are doing.
- Understand what is meant by balance, rhythm, tempo and pace, and the terms 'acceptance of the bit', 'engagement of the hind-quarters' and 'impulsion'.
- Show that the application and knowledge required for previous tests has been developed further.
- Ride a trained horse of Elementary Dressage Standard with harmony and feeling.
- **Be able to express their knowledge to the examiners.**

HORSEMANSHIP

Candidates must have already passed H Test.

FORM OF THE TEST

There are three phases to the Test:-

The Outside Riding

During this phase, candidates have the opportunity of riding three or four different horses. Having been allocated their first horse, they are allowed 5 -10 minutes to try it out, on the flat and over a few small fences. While doing this, they are expected to assess the horse - its good and weak points, to be thinking for what work it is most suited and how it could be schooled to give a better performance and ride.

Candidates are then asked to ride the horse in front of the examiners at all paces, jump a few selected obstacles and talk to the examiners about the horse and the way it goes. The discussion usually lasts for about 5 minutes, and the examiners hope 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 onto at least two more horses, and, depending on the facilities available, jump a short cross-country or show jumping course on each horse.

Inside Riding

Candidates will continue the examination in the afternoon by riding two or three schooled horses in the Indoor School.

They will be given the opportunity of trying out these horses before being asked to carry out specific movements.

One horse will be in a double bridle.

Depending on the standard of the horse, candidates may be asked to:-

Ride in Medium Walk; Working and Medium Trot; and show some shortening of stride, working towards collection.

Show transitions and halts.

They will be required to do some school movements such as:-

Circles, loops and serpentines of specific size.

Changes of rein.

Change of leg through trot or walk.

Counter canter loops.

Turn on or about the forehand.

Leg yielding.

Shoulder in.

Half Pirouette at walk or turn about the hindquarters.

Candidates will be expected to have knowledge of school riding and discipline.

The Examiners will probably ask the candidates to comment on the way the horses are going and performing the required movements.

The Examiners will be looking at:-

Whether the Candidates are applying the aids correctly; if they can 'feel' when the horse is going correctly; do they know the reasons when problems occur; does the horse go better for them at the end than it did in the beginning?

Training The Young Horse

This phase takes the form of a discussion with one or two examiners and **practical lungeing of a horse.**

Candidates are expected to know the principles of **lungeing for improvement, training and education (poles will be available)** to include backing and preliminary training of a young horse using the **equipment and methods** recommended by The Pony Club and explained in 'Backing Breeding and Bringing on Young Horses'.

Felt Colour – Blue

Honours – Purple