

Chapter 22

RALLIES – teamwork in action

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***D**id you know that the term “rally” is used because they are more than just a competition – they are educational experiences as well? Rallies are where the Pony Club values of teamwork, leadership, horsemanship and stewardship all come together.*

Competitive Rallies

Pony Club competitive rallies provide an opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in an atmosphere of cooperation, fun and teamwork. A competitive rally allows Pony Club members to test their skills against others. In addition, rallies are educational experiences that expose participants to new ideas and ways of doing things. Rallies teach members about themselves, about support of and reliance on a team, about sportsmanship, and about the personal growth involved in winning and losing. Competitive rallies may not be required at the D and C levels, but they are an important part of the Pony Club experience.

Competitive rallies can be unmounted, as in Quiz where teams compete in a knowledge “bowl” or “bee.” Other USPC competitive rallies are mounted and involve teams of three, four or five riders, and, in most disciplines, an unmounted Horse Manager. In mounted rallies Horse Management is judged and is a vital part of the team’s final score.

Competitive Rallies, continued

Competitive rallies can be small and informal, such as a D rally within a single club or they can be low key with inter-club competitions where D-rated members compete with plenty of encouragement and help from older members and officials.

Rallies can also be larger, more formal and more competitive, such as regional rallies. Here, teams of Pony Club members try their skills without outside help but with the advice and support of judges and officials. The top level of USPC competition is the annual USPC Championships. Teams representing their region compete in what are often hotly contested competitions. Teamwork and cooperation are stressed, and no outside assistance is allowed, with the exception of coaching in restricted situations.

All Pony Club competitive rallies are hard work. They are a culmination of many hours of dedication and hard work by a team of adults who prepare for and oversee the competition. Pony Club members and the adult organizers usually come away from a rally exhausted, but with a sense of satisfaction for a job well-done.

Team Selection

Rally teams are usually selected by the DC, often with input from the instructor. There are different philosophies about competition and different methods of team selection.

Some clubs operate under the premise that the point of competition is to win. The strongest candidates are selected if those individuals also demonstrate good sportsmanship, good attendance, a commitment to hard work, and a good attitude. Horse management and the individual's ability to be a good team member are major considerations.

Other clubs opt for the "equitable distribution" theory. This works especially well for mixed rating rallies, such as Dressage. A team can be comprised of, for example, an H-A, two Ds and a C, thus embodying the Pony Club philosophy of older members giving back and encouraging the younger ones.

Another option for competitive rallies of one level (D or C) is simply to draw names. The first four are team one, the second four team two, and so on. To ensure that experienced members are spread around for the position of team captain, appoint the captains and draw for the other spaces.

All of these methods of team selection are acceptable but the criteria for team selection should be explained to members and parents early in the year. The DC must also be consistent in judging who meets the criteria. While it is reasonable to

take members' wishes into consideration, the ultimate decision lies with the DC. Allowing children to choose their own teams too often results in cliques and popularity contests, and is the least desirable method of determining teams.

If clubs have other members who are safe and capable and who want to go to rally, sending additional teams is desirable. Under normal circumstances, no child who is qualified and safe, and who wants to rally, should be left at home.

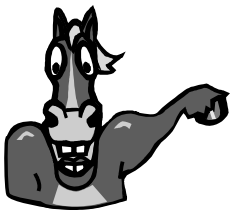
Common sense dictates that a DC with a child in Pony Club should be careful to avoid the impression that his or her child has a voice in team selection or that the child has the "inside scoop." Always be discreet with regard to your own child.

Inter-Club or Mixed Teams

Imagine this dilemma – a small club with only one C who is brand new. The C rally is approaching, but your C-1 is terrified of going on a mixed team. You hear, "I don't know anyone! I'll mess up and they won't like me!" How do you reassure this member in a meaningful way?

Interestingly, another club with over 50 members has the same problem. The DC has 16 Cs, all of whom want to rally. One will have to go on a mixed team and everyone will be in an uproar.

For both, the long-term solution is communication. Both DCs should call the rally organizer (*early on!*) and explain the difficulty. If the organizer is willing (and most are, if given enough lead time), they may plug these members into short teams known to the organizer, ensure the team captain calls all the mixed team members to welcome them and to specify what to bring, and alerts the DCs of the short teams that they need to encourage their members to be especially welcoming.

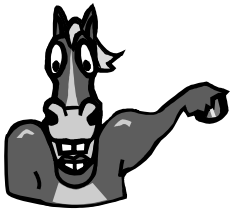


TIP: Some clubs factor the willingness to go on a mixed team into a Good Sportsmanship Award. Once the fear of the unknown is broken, it becomes just another facet of the Pony Club experience.

Horse Managers

Every competitive mounted rally team (except Games) needs a Horse Manager (HM), and this is the most important team position. Although the entire team is responsible for Horse Management, it is the Horse Manager who is the organizer for that team effort.

An often heard DC complaint is “I can’t get enough HMs!” In far too many clubs, it is regarded as a drudge job. Sadly, parents have been known to say, “I’m not having my child clean up after everyone!” Yet, every HM can make or break a team. Rallies have been won and lost because of Horse Management. As DC, you must educate your parents and members.



TIP: Some clubs defray all or part of the cost for the Horse Manager.

Some clubs require that all candidates for upper level ratings have team Horse Management experience. It is an expected part of Pony Club. The HM is in a key position to boost team morale. Far from being a gofer, the HM may be the team captain and must be capable of handling the riders’ mounts. Wise DCs build *pride* into the HM position.

Some pitfalls to avoid: If you have an inexperienced, first-time riding team, do not also have a young, totally green Horse Manager. You can, however, have a young, new member as HM when the riders are older veterans, at a mixed rating team rally, for example. Explain to the riders that helping the HM have a good experience is an added responsibility for their broad shoulders. Pony Club members respond well when they know that they are needed!

Rally Preps

Prep sessions for competitive rallies, both mounted and unmounted, are a critical part of preparedness that may save many a frantic phone call or Email. If your club has an overall Rally Team Coordinator, that person can organize the prep sessions, file the rally team entries, and be the club’s communications link with the team members.

UNMOUNTED PREPARATION

One or more sessions can be unmounted and devoted to dividing up the list of required equipment and determining who brings what. These meetings should be led by an experienced upper level member or someone who has attended a Horse Management seminar.

The DC or Rally Team Coordinator (RTC) should have a copy of the assignments. The night before the rally when you miss the message on your machine or Email that a member suddenly can't come (it does happen), it will aid you immensely to know exactly which equipment has to be reallocated.

Also at this session, determine who will do the stall cards and where the club's banner was stored after the last rally. Is there one for each team? Your club may be fortunate enough to have special sets of "rally only" club equipment. Do you have enough for each team? Who is going to bring it back and put it away?

The DC (or RTC) must be familiar with the rules, ensure that all team members have copies of the current relevant rulebooks and *know* the rules. All rallies do not have identical rules and/or scoring.



TIP: Rally Organizer Guides and discipline rulebooks are available through the Bookstore. Rulebooks are also available on the Web site.

The DC (or RTC) should stress that safe, neat, workmanlike attire is expected at the rally. This includes neatly fitting slacks or shorts, proper footwear *tied*, and hair pulled back. Halter or tank tops are not appropriate.

The DC (or RTC) should also emphasize that appropriate turnout attire is expected of all competitors (including the HM) at the awards ceremony. In very hot weather, the jacket rule may be waived by the organizer. In that case, riders should be prepared to ride in whatever the *USPC Horse Management Handbook* specifies.

Clarify exactly what the responsibilities of the captain entail, i.e., lodging inquiries and protests (if necessary), motivating the team, etc. Also, while everyone is present, make sure that everyone understands the duties of the HM, i.e., accompanying riders to inspection, keeping rub rags handy, keeping riders on time for inspection, rides, turnback, etc. Emphasize that riders must also wield a pitchfork (it's not just the duty of the HM) and must assist in getting another rider ready. A major purpose of a rally is to teach Pony Club members to work as a team.

If possible, one session should deal with setting up a mock tack room, planning ahead who checks for nails, hanging stall drapes (sheets) if your club uses them, etc. It helps to have a layout planned ahead of time.

UNMOUNTED PREPARATION, *continued*

Teammates set up and dismantle tack stalls or trailers, whichever is designated at the rally, thus operating as a well-oiled machine on arrival at the rally site. The idea can be modified to suit your club. The more time Pony Club members spend together, the more smoothly they will mesh as a team.

MOUNTED PREPARATION

Unless the team is very experienced at competing, it often takes between four to six mounted practices in order for the riders to feel “ready” for the rally (and sometimes many more). If there is not enough time for four to six sessions, at least two clearly designated mounted rally prep sessions should be scheduled.

Dressage: An instructor/older Pony Club member should help riders to memorize the Dressage test, if there is one. Younger members can set up the letters in their living room, yard, etc., and learn the test by practicing it on foot. During other sessions, the instructor should teach the members how to ride the test. A good way to work on this is to break the test down into parts and work on them individually. Younger Ds may feel more secure having it read.

Jumping – Show Jumping and Eventing: Another rally prep is jumping. Warm-up and schooling are important. Riders should practice over a stadium course and a course in the open. C-1s and up need to learn to gallop and establish pace and rhythm. The instructor *must* understand rallies and safety, and should be competent to teach members the basics of walking courses and jumping, both in stadium and in the open.

Written Test: Hopefully, quiz prep during the winter months has prepared your members for a written test. All Championship qualifying rallies will have a written test. Written tests for all disciplines are available from the Instruction Director.

Games: Because Games competition is one in which team members and ponies must ride and perform numerous cooperative skills, Games teams *must* practice together over a period of weeks. Only such consistent team practice ensures that ponies will understand what is expected of them and will be safe and cooperative in the competition.

Rulebooks

Of course, the best sources of information about competition in Pony Club are the rulebooks and newsletters for each of the specific disciplines. The rulebooks are available through the Bookstore and on the USPC Web site.

For specific questions concerning rules or disciplines, always contact your Regional Supervisor first. The RS may then refer you to a specific national Committee Chair. Committee Chair names, Email addresses and phone numbers may be found in the *USPC Annual Directory*.