

Pony Club Safety Checks

By
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Why is a safety check important?

The safety check is a vital part of every Pony Club mounted meeting and should be given first thing before riders mount up. The reasons for safety checks is to make sure that all tack is well fitted, to each mount, as well as clean and safe. It is also the time to check that each rider is properly and safely turned out, in neat well fitted attire.

The safety check helps to teach members how to properly adjust their tack to fit each horse they ride, and how to spot problems that might be occurring, such as; loose stitching, broken keepers, rust beginning to appear on metal parts, or caked on dirt or grim that may ruin the tack .

How to perform a proper safety check?

The Line Up

1.) First have all members lead their horses (with stirrups run up, and the reins taken over their horses head, with the right hand holding reins about 6" under the chin, and the extra length of bridle reins folded into the left hand) to the center of the ring, and line up with all horses heads all facing the same direction. NOTE: For safety reasons keep at least 10' between each horse in the line up.

2.) After each horse has been brought to their spot in the arena and halted each rider should stand to the left side of their horse, again with right hand 6" under the chin and extra length of bridle reins folded neatly in the left hand, awaiting their turn for the safety check.

Note: This is great practice for riders planning on going to Rally as it prepares them for their formal inspection as well as their safety checks.

The Safety Check

Checking the Bridle

1.) When you get to the first rider at the line up ask them to turn and face the horse. Switching their reins accordingly, so their left hand is 6" under the chin holding the reins, and the extra length of bridle reins is folded neatly into the right hand. This way the rider can see what you are doing and hear what ever comments you have to say.

2.) Start with the reins. Inspect the reins from buckle to bit, making sure all stitching, and braiding (on laced reins) is good. Check that there is no rust or dirt on any of the buckles, bit, or curb chain (if rider is using a Pelham or Kimberwick). The bit should be clean and well fitted.

3.) To check the proper fit of the bit, Snaffle bits should make one or two gentle wrinkles at the corners of the horses lips. Full Cheek snaffles can have bit keepers on the upper cheeks. Pelhams and Kimberwickes should rest against the corners of the mouth without making more than one small wrinkle. Curb chains should lay flat and you should be able to get two fingers between the curb chain and the chin groove.

4.) The noseband should sit 2 to 3 fingers below the cheekbone but, not so low as to interfere with the bit and pinch corners of the horses mouth. It should be on the inside of the cheek pieces, closest to the horses face. It should be snug enough that you can place one finger between it and the horses face.

5.) Next check the cheek pieces. Cheek pieces should lay flat against the side of the horses face, all leather ends should be tucked into both (the stationary and the floater) keepers. Check the stitching at the buckles, and make sure buckles are free of rust and dirt. The cheek pieces should be clean especially on the underside.

6.) The Brow Band, should rest flat against the brow of the horse, not bulging out away from the forehead (which would be too big), nor being pulled tight, causing the headstall to be pulled forward and pinching the back of the ears (which would be too small). It should rest about a half inch to an inch below the front of the ear. Check that all pieces of head stall that should run through the Brow band (cheek pieces, throat latch, noseband) do. Check the underside of the leather that it is clean, and the stitching at the buckles is in good shape.

7.) The Throatlatch, check that it is clean, and is tucked neatly into the keeper and the floater, check the stitching at the buckle and that the buckle is free of dirt and rust. To check the fitting of the throatlash you should be able to place a fist between the throatlash and the horses cheek.

8.) Make sure to check both sides of the bridle. When doing so, ask the rider to step to that side of the horse so they can see what you are doing and hear any comments you have.

Checking the Saddle

1.) The saddle should sit at the base of the withers, with out pinching or pressing on the top of the withers, the spine, or the horses shoulder blades. You should be able to stick 3 fingers between the pommel (front of saddle) and the horses withers. The pommel (front of saddle) and the cantle (back of saddle) should be fairly even. If the pommel is too high rider will have a tendency to get behind the motion, if cantle to high rider will have a tendency to get ahead of the motion of the horse. The saddles seat should be clean, with out rips or tears in the leather,

2.) The stirrup bars, leathers, and stirrups and stirrup pads, should be clean, free of dust, dirt and rust. The stirrup pads should be clean, free of mud and dirt and should snugly fit in the stirrup. Check that all stitching is in good shape. The flap should be clean and supple on both sides, with both leather keepers in place.

3.) Lift up the flap and check the girth, tighten if necessary. The girth should rest one hands breath behind the elbow of the horse. If the rider is using an elastic ended girth make sure to check the elastic,(if the elastic is frayed it is not safe) Girth should be adjusted the same on each side with 2 holes above and 1 below available. All girths need to have the stitching and the buckles checked, they should be clean and in good working order. The billet guards should be positioned so that they cover the girth buckles, when the flap is put down.

4.) Check the billets, they should be clean and supple, their should be no ripped holes, and no loose stitching, especially where the billets attach to the underside of the saddle. The girth should be buckled on the first and third billets with the middle billet pulled out so it's on top, not trapped

underneath. Note: The reason for buckling the girth on the first and third billets, is because it puts even pressure on the front and back of the saddle.

5.) Make sure to check both sides of the saddle. When doing so ask the rider to step to that side of the horse so they can see what you are doing and hear any comments you have to make.

Checking the rider

1.) The rider should be in neat, safe, and proper attire for each mounted meeting. Boots, breeches and helmet should be in good safe shape and well fitted.

2.) Hair should be pulled back out of the face and no jewelry.

3.) Helmet should be an ASTM - SEI approved and well fitted. It should not droop down into the riders eyes, or be slipping off the back of the head. The chin strap should sit comfortably on the chin or underneath.

Checking the horse

1.) Horse should be neatly groomed with no dirt, sweat marks, bedding or mud stuck to them.

2.) The hooves should show good maintenance, and regular farrier care.

3.) Eyes, nose, lips and dock wiped off and clean.

Checking other equipment such as : Saddle Pads, Breast Collars, Breast Plates , and Martingales

1.) When using a white fleece saddle pad their should be a 2" boarder all around and should fasten to the billets to keep it in place. When using a square pad, it should also have a boarder all the way around and be fastened to the billets of the saddle.

2.) Breast Collars, keep the saddle from sliding back. It is fitted around the chest without binding at the base of the neck. It is attached to both sides of the girth, and makes a nice horizontal line all the way around the front of the

horse. The upper strap that goes across the crest of the neck, it should be snug enough to keep the chest strap from slipping down, but not so snug that it rubs the crest of the neck.

3.) Breastplates, keep the saddle from slipping back. The yoke fits around the shoulders, and attaches by two straps to the D-rings of the saddle. The center strap runs between the horses front legs and attaches to the girth. You should be able to fit a hand between the crest of the horses neck and the top of the yoke. The center strap that runs between the horses front legs should be loose enough that it doesn't rub but not so loose that it hangs too low.

4.) Standing Martingales are used to keep a horse from getting his head too high. Which can cause a rider to loose control. The strap attaches to the noseband (never use with a dropped noseband) and runs between the front legs and attaches to the girth. The yoke portion that goes around the horses neck buckles on the left, with a rubber band holding both pieces of the standing martingale securely in place at the chest. The martingale should be adjusted so that it can be pushed up to touch the horses throat when the horses head is in it's normal position.

5.) Running Martingales, are used to keep a horse from getting his head too high. Which may cause a rider to loose control. The yoke portion goes around the horses neck with the buckle on the left. A second strap attaches to the girth between the horses front legs and runs up where it attaches to the yoke at the center of the chest. This strap branches off and forms a Y, and the ends of the Y are rings that the reins run through. When the horses head is in a normal position the rings should be able to touch the horses throat.
Note: Running Martingales are not for beginner level riders.

Some Final Notes

I know it seems like there is a lot to do, when doing a proper safety check and there is, but the more often you do them the quicker you become. Safety checks should be used as a teaching tool to help Pony Clubbers learn the parts of the bridle, saddle and other tack, and how to adjust everything properly. Also how to check for problems that may occur with their tack and to take pride in keeping their tack clean and in good condition.

If you make safety checks part of every mounted meeting, Pony Clubbers get more proficient at their grooming, and tacking skills. Which helps them when it comes time to present their horse at a safety inspection at Pony Club Rally or for a rating.

Take some time to teach your C level Pony Clubbers; How to perform a “proper” safety check. This will make the safety checks go faster so the kids can mount up to start their lesson. Under my supervision my C’s perform the safety checks in the center of the arena while I observe what they are doing and saying. If they are in doubt about the fit or position of something, I’m always right there to lend a helping hand.