

Showing Ponies

Lead Rein Ponies

There is something special and refreshing about riders so young that they are totally dependent on the honesty of their little ponies. The adult on the end of the lead may think that they are in control but if that little pony decides to say “No”, or “Not your way but my way”, then the leader is virtually powerless to make amends while under scrutiny of the judge. The best of these little ponies is worth their weight in gold.

Regardless of the shape of the neck, there should be plenty of length in front of the saddle and the head should be well set on the neck such that the pony can bridle easily and without discomfort caused by thickness through the gullet. The head, while not necessarily small, will be in proportion to the body and possessing a kind eye.

The wither will be fairly narrow so that the child can sit in comfort and the shoulder sloping to allow freedom of action. The tail will be carried gaily. *The action should suit the child at its current stage in riding.* This criterion is very important and often forgotten. Some older, more experienced riders can cope with a longer stride while the beginner simply cannot. The action should be active but not so active that the little rider is bounced out of the saddle and yes, it should be straight and true.

At the end of the day, the type of lead rein pony is of no significance if the manners are not there to accompany correct conformation and preferred type. Performance in the class is all-important. There is no place for the beautiful pony which does not please its little rider for that pony should neither please the judge. There are no exceptions to this rule and if the ponies don't go well, no matter how wonderful they may otherwise be, they do not stand up in the line.

In judging a winning lead rein, you should see a relaxed partnership between leader, rider and pony. They should be going as one, confident, carefree and above all at peace with the world and its surroundings. Tension is not a good sign, and this is often associated with a tight lead rein, a short, stilted gait and very serious faces! The last mentioned often tells its own story and the best of leaders are those who can put up a convincing act when things aren't going too well. All of this is immediately obvious in the walk round and the first trot out generally sets the scene for the remainder of the class. Ponies are trotted individually to the end of the line and this first performance places a lasting image in the mind of the judge. Over trotting, or trotting too fast, is all too common among amateur producers. The pace should be rhythmical and easy; the stride appropriate for child; the head carried correctly and still. There is nothing worse than a pony which is not happy with its mouth and which shakes its head as a result.

The purpose of the lead rein is to provide that extra bit of security for the youngest rider and that security is not readily afforded at four or five metres from the child. Four or five feet away from the child would seem more appropriate. The pony should respond to the rein if the rider is sufficiently competent to use the aid correctly. If a rider is not able to steer the pony, then there is no harm in this provided the pony does not take advantage of the fact. Lastly, all lead rein ponies should be able to halt without fuss and stand quietly.

From a judging point of view, I feel it is important to see a pony at least walk away from you to observe correctness of movement (dishing, cow hocks and so on). It is also a help if ponies are trained to stand correctly for inspection. The leaders should put them into the correct position and leave them alone. Again, the less fuss the better. The tack should be made of quality leather, be finely stitched, clean and above all, correctly fitted. Some ponies suit white girths, some look better in leather particularly those which are slightly long in the back. Safety stirrups are very common nowadays. Snaffle Bits should be as outlined in the RAS Equestrian Rulebook, Appendix B. The lead rein should always be attached to the cavesson of a simple snaffle bridle. Browbands come in an

array of colours and styles. Tasteful (not over the top) browbands are normally selected by those producers whose personal dress is of similar standard. There is no question that the standard of dress has improved immensely for leaders and there are some stunning outfits on parade. The leader should never capture the judge's eye before the pony does, but their appearance should complement it. Keep the outfit stylish but classically simple. (And sensible shoes, please!)

Lead rein riders should not carry a showing cane or stick. They don't need one and if they do, it is not a suitable pony. The adult carries the cane and leather-bound ones are the norm. The point with which I leave you is probably the one which is dearest to my heart. Keeping in mind that the lead rein class is the nursery for our young show riders, we must ensure that the whole thing is fun.

First Ridden Ponies

"The First Ridden is the most important pony purchase a parent will ever make". Quote from a parent/show producer.

"These ponies do for it for their young riders because they want to – and they do it with a smile!". Quote from a well-known Judge.

By Tom Best

These words are not a bad way to sum up a child's first pony and very useful model to keep in mind when judging them or buying one. To the first pony, you entrust the safety of the child, you kindle the interest which hopefully will remain for a lifetime and you allow showing to be a joy and never a chore.

Regardless of the type, the "perfect" performance is always the same. What do we look for? First and foremost, the picture must look safe. The pony will not be phased by anything, including the unexpected. It is unfortunate if something happens to frighten a pony while it is in the ring, when the heavens opened, thunder roared, and lightening flashed around the ring. Ponies seemed to scatter in all directions and quite understandably so. Nevertheless, one of them stood there without batting an eyelid – it won.

Good manners are paramount. The ponies should look happy, obliging rather than submissive and content to go in whatever direction it is headed by the young rider. They must accept the bit; no head shaking, no pulling, no over bending, no tension. It should always go in a relaxed way but at all times forward. There is nothing worse for a child than having to kick like fury to get a pony moving.

First Ridden ponies should move freely but at a pace which suits the child. At the other end of the age range, some of the riders are very able and a pony with a longer stride or which travels at a faster pace is perfectly suitable for that type of child.

Something slower with a shorter stride but still forward going is more appropriate for a beginner. The ears will be forward, and resistance is a word not to be found in their vocabulary.

We all accept that the walk is a very important pace; however, I'd stick my neck out and say that the first ridden trot is one which tells all. This is the pace at which a great deal of the schooling is done. Young children find difficulty understanding the use of the seat in determining impulsion and balance; in most cases they don't understand it at all. In my view, this is why they are less effective in walk and canter and generally canter only makes a statement about safety. On the other hand, having conquered the technique of "up downs", a good trot seems easier to achieve.

In terms of performance, all the things which I have stated apply with the **clear ruling that cantering is only allowed during individual performances and only if all competitors are happy to canter.**

The first ridden should have sweet heads, big fronts, good quarters and free movement are criteria which prevail. Colour means nothing. Tack and turn-out for first ridden ponies and riders are basically the same as for lead rein ponies, but without the lead. Navy jackets and lemon “jods” prevail in the show pony section, while native riders wear traditional country checks and tweeds. There are some innovative ideas on colour co-ordinates however my preference often lies with the traditional understated outfit which almost goes unnoticed. The cut and the fit of the clothes probably matter more.

Show Ponies

Not exceeding 128cm

The not exceeding 128cm show pony class is for ponies up to and including 128cm. In this class judges will expect a quality, well-mannered pony which, in their opinion, is suitable for the younger child to ride. The top 128cm pony should be more refined than the first-ridden and the workout should include a change of rein at the canter. Judges will, of course, be looking for ponies that are mannerly and well-schooled.

Over 128cm & not exceeding 138cm

The over 128cm pony classes are for those exceeding 128cm but not exceeding 138cm. It is one of the strongest classes to win with some of the most correct and beautifully bred ponies in it. In this case breeders seem to have found the right blend of quality while retaining all the necessary pony characteristics. Riders in this age group, too, seem more suitably mounted and retain the good appearance that means so much to the judge’s eye. At this height the judges will be looking for ponies that really cover the ground and which are polished and fluent in their individual workouts.

Over 138cm & not exceeding 148cm

The over 138cm show pony classes are for ponies exceeding 138cm and not exceeding 148cm. Of all the ponies, the 148cm is the most difficult to find, and breeders’ opinions differ as to what constitutes a good example. Many ponies around the 148cm height usually retain the pony characteristics but lack scope and size. When up to full height, they may tend at times to go too hack type. With the introduction of the saddle hunter pony classes, it is now more essential the judges, breeders and exhibitors should try to keep to the pony type of 148cm show pony. This pony should possess correct limbs and a good sloping shoulder, together with the all important pony head. It should be a forward-going animal and bold in its outlook. It should be able to canter well and give individual workouts that are controlled and a pleasure to watch.

Saddle Hunter Ponies

With the same height divisions as for Show Ponies but within the one ring, the ideal Saddle Hunter Pony should have substance, be active and well-mannered with strong easy paces and a good gallop. The Saddle Hunter Pony must be capable of carrying weight for long distances over varied country. A well-schooled quality workmanlike pony, with more bone and substance than the show pony. Quality should always be a priority. The head of a Saddle Hunter pony is generally described as handsome rather than pretty.

Working Hunter Ponies

Working Hunters are required to demonstrate good jumping ability, strong paces including a good gallop. Be of good strong conformation showing good manners and be a comfortable ride over long distances.