

Regional BYRDS training squads

Regional BYRDS training has developed hugely in the past few years and is still growing and improving. To cope with the rapid increase in members, small changes are made all the time and each region is organised slightly differently depending on local members' needs.

The squad system is designed to help you improve. BD is also introducing a proficiency test that involves both riding and horsemanship. Many of our BYRDS riders no longer come through the pony club and keep their horses at livery, not at home, so it is important that every member can look after their own horse or pony, especially when at shows. Eventually BD intends that all riders will successfully complete a proficiency test before starting in a competition.

How riders are "squadded"

Your BYRDS trainer/assessor will decide which squad to place you in by giving you a lesson and a squad test, to give them a clear picture of your understanding, level of work and the relationship you have with your horse/pony. In some regions, riders have to gain a certain percentage in the relevant squad test before moving up to the next level. The system is there to help build your confidence as well as understanding and ability – it isn't good to try to rush through the levels. There are no time limits and there is no pressure to become an A squad rider.

The squad tests

The tests have been designed to show how well you can influence your horse's way of going through a supple and correct seat, prepare for the test and form a good relationship with your horse. Although the tests may seem relatively simple, it takes great skill to perform them fluently and easily. The marks are earned in three areas:

The Seat: To bring out the best in your horse, you must be balanced and supple. Your position - straightness, security, correctness and poise - are also marked.

Way of going: Although this mark appears to be for the horse, it is your job to influence him or her. The horse's paces are not judged. A well-trained horse that is supple and works in a forward rhythm to an elastic contact will get better marks than a flashy-moving horse working in an incorrect way.

Movements and figures: This mark reflects your ability to prepare effectively to enable a test to look easy and fluent. It is also judged for the correct positioning of the movements. An ability to ride accurately is essential to train a horse and for you and your horse to progress up the levels.

Your relationship with your horse is reflected in all the sections. A rider who presents a good test is well prepared and must have been influencing their horse well in the weeks leading up to a competition.

Consider what is being judged. It may seem easy for a B squad rider to ride a left turn at H, a right turn at G, circle right at X and give and retake the inside rein, but to do all that in quick succession and keep the horse forward, supple, rhythmic and straight requires a well co-ordinated, supple and thoughtful rider. It is important to remember that if you work hard at these tests, it will help you enormously when you compete.

Qualities a trainer looks for

Below is an outline of what is expected in each squad. The training and ongoing assessments are important because some of these elements cannot be determined from a test. You may not fulfill all the criteria when you enter a squad and will probably move on when you are well established at that level.

Fledgling squad

Position: Working towards a correct position, but may not be able to maintain it in all paces.

Effectiveness: Able to ride in a fair rhythm in walk, trot and canter.

Feel: Aware when the pony is working happily forward and uses tactful aids.

Understanding: Aware of rhythm and forwardness and that bend should be in direction of movement.

Level: Able to ride simple movements with some degree of accuracy. Working towards riding without stirrups in the easier paces.

C Squad

Position: Working towards a correct position, aware of any major issue and, with assistance, is able to work on improving these. Able to follow the horse's movement in the more comfortable paces.

Effectiveness: A rider who is able to maintain a fair rhythm in all three paces, can influence bend to a good degree and is aware of contact and issues that may need working on.

Feel: A rider who is aware of the harmony they are aiming for, achieves it at times and tries to deal with problems.

Understanding: Is aware of the scales of training, especially forwardness, rhythm, suppleness and contact. Is able to improve their riding and maintain a horse's way of going with supervision.

Level: A rider who would be able to ride a prelim or novice test with understanding of preparation. Can ride without stirrups in walk, trot and canter.

B squad

Position: A basically correct position showing some depth and security. A rider who is, for the most part, able to remain soft and supple.

Effectiveness: An effective rider who is able to positively influence their horse's way of going, but may need help to improve it.

Feel: A sympathetic rider who is in harmony with the horse, aware of any problems and deals with them in a good way.

Understanding: Has an understanding of a good way of going and the scales of training. Is able to work under supervision to improve their horse and can exercise it well without supervision.

Level: A rider who has some understanding of lengthening and shortening the stride and basic lateral work. Can ride confidently and effectively in all three paces without stirrups.

A squad

Position: A correct position with depth and security. A soft, supple rider who is able to follow the horse's movement with ease.

Effectiveness: An effective rider who is able to positively influence their horse in its way of going and improve it.

Feel: A rider who is in harmony with and shows awareness of their horse.

Understanding: Has clear understanding of a good way of going, scales of training and can apply it, theoretically and in practice. Is able to work under supervision and alone to improve their horse and themselves.

Level: A rider who can include some more advanced work in their training and understands what this brings to them and their horse.

Squadding System Pathways

