

BYRDS Squads

Regional BYRDS training has developed hugely in the past five or six years, and is still growing and improving year on year. Six years ago 'Regional BYRDS' was only just coming into existence. The numbers of young riders in our regions has trebled in the past three years alone. To cope with this increase in numbers things do change slightly nearly every year, but we hope that although it can be confusing, you will understand it is in the interest of the sport!

Each region organises things a bit differently depending on the geographics and demographics of their particular area, and depending how long the regional structure has been in place.

The Squads

The squads are basically a framework for progress within the BYRDS structure. This is to encourage riders to develop and improve as riders and horsemen. BD is also starting to introduce a proficiency test that involves both riding and horsemanship: many of our BYRDS riders no longer come through a pony club system and may also keep their horses at livery, but it is very important that they still develop some basic knowledge of horse care so they can safely look after their animals, especially when away and looking after their own horses/ponies at competitions. Eventually BD intends that riders may only start competing when they have successfully completed a proficiency test.

The pathway that the squadding system basically follows can be seen below:



THERE IS ALSO JUDGE TRAINING AND TRAINING FOR THE COACHING CERTIFICATE FOR OLDER MEMBERS.

How riders can be put in to a suitable squad

Riders are normally put in to a squad using a combination of tuition/assessment with their BYRDS trainer/assessor and squad test riding. Using training as well as tests allows us to get a clearer picture of a riders understanding, level of work, and the relationship they have with their horse/pony. Some regions also get their riders to gain a certain percentage in the relevant squad test before they move up to next level. The system is in place to help build the riders confidence as well as their understanding and ability – it isn't a good thing to try and rush through the levels. There are no time limits on a rider's progression through the system, nor any requirement that they must eventually be A squad riders.

The tests and how they are judged

The rider tests have been designed to show the judge(s) how well a rider can influence their horse's way of going through a supple and correct seat, good preparation, and a good relationship with their horse. Although they may appear relatively simple, they are constructed in a way that requires a great deal of skill to be able to ride them **fluently** and **easily**.

From a marking point of view the test is split into three clear sections:

The Seat. To bring the best out of their horse a rider must be balanced and supple. Their straightness, security, correctness of position and poise are also marked in this section.

Way of going. Although this mark is apparently for the horse it is the rider's job to influence it. There is no mark for paces, so the horse is not being judged. A well-trained horse that is supple, works in a good forward rhythm to an elastic contact, will get better marks than a super horse working in an incorrect way.

Movements and figures. This mark reflects the rider's ability to prepare effectively to enable a test to look easy and fluent. It is also for the accuracy and correct positioning of all the movements. An ability to ride accurately is essential in the training of the horse, and is also an important discipline to enable both horse and rider to progress up the levels.

The rider's relationship with their horse is reflected in all the three sections. A rider who comes in and presents a good test will be well prepared and must have been influencing their horse well in the weeks coming up to a competition.

(It is very important to remember that just because a horse appears to go well does not mean it is an easy horse to ride!)

To ride these tests well the riders must consider what is being judged. It may seem easy for a B 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, straight requires a very well co-ordinated, supple and thoughtful rider! Each test contains movements that are just as difficult for the relevant level as this example is, so it is fair to say that these are very challenging tests when they are ridden with all this in mind! It is also important to bear in mind that if you work hard at riding these tests well it will massively help with your normal tests.

Qualities a Trainer would look for at each level.

Below is a basic outline of the qualities a rider in each squad would demonstrate. It is obvious that some of these things could not be determined from watching a rider ride a test, which is why the training and ongoing assessment is so important. Riders may well not exactly fulfil the criteria that are laid out below. They may enter a squad when they are only beginning to fulfil them, and will probably move on when they are well established at that level. (It would be fair to say that within each squad there is e.g. C-, C, C+...)

Due to the ever-increasing numbers of riders it is possible that before too long there will be an ABC squad at both pony and junior/young rider level.

Fledgling squad

Position:	Working towards a basically 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 of 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 school movements with some degree of accuracy. Working towards riding without stirrups in the easier paces.

C Squad

Position:	Working towards a basically correct position, aware of any major issue and with assistance is able to work on improving these. Able to follow the horses movement in the more comfortable paces.
Effectiveness:	A rider who is able to maintain a fair rhythm in all three paces, and 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 and 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 own riding and maintain horses 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 horses way of going, but may need help to improve it.
Feel:	A sympathetic rider who has harmony with the horse, and is 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 horses 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 shows very good harmony with and awareness of their horse in all their riding.
Understanding:	Has clear understanding of a good way of going, and 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.