

The YOUNG RIDER'S GUIDE To Pony Club

From Horsemanship and Sportsmanship to Fun and Games, Learn the Different Facets of This Organization

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Where do the crossroads of fun and education with horses meet? At The United States Pony Club, Inc. (USPC)! Poll a group of Pony Club kids as to their favorite aspect of being a member of USPC, and you'll likely hear responses such as "Riding with my friends" and "Competing at the National Championships." Ask the parents, who will tell you they enjoy the safety, teamwork, and responsibility that Pony Club promotes. Think scouts with horses! Read on to learn more about this organization that consistently produces responsible, knowledgeable, and talented equestrians.

How it Works

Pony Club has a wide reach and long history. Kevin Price, CEO of USPC, explains that the Pony Club idea originated in Great Britain in 1928; today Pony Clubs exist in 31 countries, with an estimated membership of more than 130,000. Members range in ages from as young as four through age 25, and also include members of the adult Horse Masters program. "Among major English riding organizations in this country, only one, the United States Equestrian Team (USET) is older than the United States Pony Club," notes Price.

The organization's Standards of Proficiency establish a ladder of riding and horse management skills; mem-

bers test for these to achieve certifications, working from the D level up through the A level. "We develop horsemen with well-rounded riding and horse management skills. The big buzz in the equine industry amongst many of the disciplines is the lack of horsemanship and horse management skills," remarks Price. "If there is one thing that really sets Pony Club apart from other equine related organizations it is our core values, which start with education in horsemanship." In addition, older members develop leadership skills as they mentor younger Pony Clubbers. Members can compete in various disciplines [see sidebar] at rallies.

If you are lucky enough to live near one of the USPC's Licensed Riding Centers, you can enjoy all the perks of Pony Club membership without the hefty price tag of horse ownership. Riding Centers are essentially established riding schools that have incorporated Pony Club into their program. This is a safe and practical option for

youngsters without "horsey" parents, as they receive guidance and oversight at the barn and when mounted by one of the center's instructors.

Not Just Pony Rides!

While the majority of Pony Club activities consist of mounted and unmounted meetings at the local level, Price explains that USPC offers numerous opportunities, programs, and activities available to support and meet the interests of its members. These include:

- **USPC Championships**, competitions held on the East and West Coast in the disciplines of eventing, dressage, show jumping, polocrosse, games, tetrathlon, and quiz.
- **USPC Festival**, held in Lexington, KY, every third year and brings together PC members from the entire country for one championships competition, as well as mounted and unmounted educational sessions.
- **USPC Annual Meeting and Education Symposium**, held annually every January at a different location in the country and includes over 65 unmounted educational sessions.
- **Visiting Instructors Program**, which upper-level certified PC members participate in as visiting instructors for a Club, Riding Center or Region, thereby sharing their knowledge and skill while at the same time gaining knowledge and skill themselves and experiencing a new location or part of the country.
- **PC International Exchanges and Competitions** are competitive venues in the disciplines of show jumping, tetrathlon, games, and non-competitive exchange opportunities in foxhunting.
- **Pony Club Pony Jumper and Dressage4Kids Teams**, in which USPC supports and sponsors



PHOTO: COURTESY OF USPC

A variety of disciplines are offered in Pony Club. From eventing to western, riders can find something that suits their interests.

a team to compete at the USEF Pony Finals and the Lendon Gray Dressage4Kids program.

• **USPC National Youth Congress** is a capstone educational program that brings together as many as 45 PC members from across the country to work with a select group of Pony Club graduates from a cross section of professions to interact, learn, and expand their Pony Club experience.


• **USPC National Youth Board** is a small group of 20 dedicated older USPC members that functions to increase communication between the organization's governing body and its members. Youth Board members participate on USPC committees and two members serve as full members of the USPC Board of Governors.

• **Grants and Scholarships**

are available through Pony Club, including college scholarships, and riding and educational grants available to members.

• **Competitors from Pony Club** also often participate in the United States Eventing Association, United States Dressage Federation, United States Hunter Jumper Association, horse breed organizations, and other sport organizations.

Don't let the name "Pony Club" fool you. "The first assumption about Pony Club is it's about kids and ponies. The first myth to bust is that our members ride only ponies. In truth, our members ride ponies and horses. The second myth to bust is that we only produce riders, and we are a feeder into the ranks of the upper levels riding disciplines. While it is true we develop riders, and some

have gone on to become international and Olympic competitors, our main goal is to develop well-rounded horsemen who will be successful citizens and leaders. In this aspect we excel," notes Price. "Included in the list of distinguished past Pony Club members is a governor of state, state and congressional representatives, generals and other high ranking military officers, and countless physicians, nurses, veterinarians, attorneys, musicians, actors, research scientists, professors, teachers, CEOs of businesses, and horse professionals of all kinds." Of course horse people are always excited about those competing at the top of their chosen equestrian discipline; you can't fail to notice an astounding number of riders representing the United States were once Pony Club members. 

OPTIONS

So what can you do in Pony Club? USPC offers a wide variety of activities:

Foxhunting

Tradition and fun meet in foxhunting. In fact, USPC was founded in 1954 by a group of foxhunters with the aim of promoting the "happy child on a happy horse" philosophy. From "puppy walking" to galloping and jumping with the field, foxhunting has something for every level of rider.

Polocrosse and Polo

New to USPC is the age-old sport of polo, known as "The Sport of Kings." Polocrosse, which has been a part of Pony Club in the United States for some time, is a hybrid version of polo and lacrosse. Both are not only amazing team sports, but are great for cross-training as well.

Games

Hurdle Race, Needle & Thread, Mug Shuffle: could there possibly be a more fun way to learn the basics of riding than mounted games? Games on horseback teach young riders balance, coordination, and self-confidence in an exciting team setting.

Dressage

Often referred to as "ballet on horseback," dressage takes flat work to a new level. In Pony Club, youth competing in dressage can begin with introductory walk/trot tests and move up the levels, incorporating graceful movements such as half-pass and flying changes. Riders also perform in the Musical Kur (freestyle), Pas de Deux (pairs) and Quadrille (team freestyle).

Eventing

Combining the thrills of cross-country, the technique of show jumping and the grace of dressage, eventing is a multi-faceted sport that develops the complete rider. Event riders are naturally drawn to the thrill of galloping and jumping in the open. Levels span from fun logs for beginners to awesome water complexes for advanced riders.

Horse Management and Quiz

An invaluable aspect of Pony Club is the promotion of solid horse management skills, producing well-rounded and knowledgeable equestrians. Pony Clubbers can take

this know-how into competition at Quiz Rallies, which tests hands-on horse management savvy.

Hunter Seat Equitation and Show Jumping

Pony Clubbers can choose to take the Hunter Seat Equitation track before segueing into show jumping. From classical English equitation to speed and precision over fences, these divisions offer great opportunities for hunter/jumper riders.

Tetrathlon

Involving swimming, riding, running, and shooting, this unique sport develops the total athlete! In fact, Olympic participants in the Modern Pentathlon have been scouted in the Tetrathlon division at USPC's National Championships. The riding phase consists of show jumping, cross-country, or both combined.

Western

While Pony Club has traditionally focused solely on English riding, USPC has recently launched a two-year western pilot program, which is going strong.

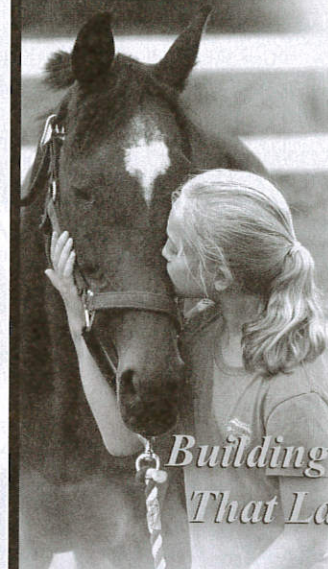
The Benefits of Pony Club

Ready for a laundry list of spin-off benefits for youth immersed in the Pony Club system? "Pony Club's success is not just that we develop well-rounded horsemen with solid horse management skills and knowledge, but in doing so we develop in our members' knowledge and a range of soft skills, which aid them throughout their lives," explains Price. These include:

- Communication skills
- An understanding of proper social etiquette, courtesy, and polish
- An understanding of formal and informal dress
- Leadership and teamwork
- Teaching, coaching, and mentoring
- Public speaking and presentation
- Time management and organizational skills
- Conflict and negotiation skills
- Critical thinking, analysis, and problem solving
- Budgeting and financial management
- Business management skills
- First aid/medical knowledge
- Nutrition
- Stable management and facility operation/management
- Safety and risk management
- Planning skills (trip, competition, etc)
- Record keeping



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