

Gear Checking Information For Rally Days

Refer to PCA Handbook on correct gear rules used generally and for discipline specific gear

1. Who...

Members who are eligible to do gear checks are:

- NCAS Level One and Preliminary coaches.
- PCA NSW Old System Level One & Two Coaches.
- Current Gear Check certificate holders.

2. Safety...

The instructor/gear checker needs to use; safety practices for themselves, the rider and the horse:

- Check with the rider that the horse is safe to approach and does not mind someone approaching.
- Approach at a 45 degree angle to the front of the horse.
- All people on the ground should stand on the same side of the horse.
- Stirrups to be run up at all times when the rider has dismounted.
- Rider to hold the horse correctly (See Riding Manual).

3. Purpose...

The purpose of the gear check is for three main reasons:

- For safety - To check all the gear is sound. That the leather and fittings are not split or wearing thin. Holes are not torn.
- For Horse welfare - That it fits the horse correctly and comfortably.
- That the rider is wearing the approved helmet, boots and other dress requirements.

4. Procedure...

The instructor needs to develop a systematic way of doing a gear check by following these guidelines:

- The gear check should be done firstly with the rider dismounted.
- Ideally if a rider is under 18 years there should be a parent or legal guardian present.
- During Covid the instructor should not touch the riders gear, the rider or a parent should make the alterations if needed.
- The rider should then mount and the stirrup size should be checked.
- Girth should be rechecked by the rider or parent when mounted.

5. Other...

Be aware that at gear check you can also look and give helpful information on the following:

- The horse's health - The horse's condition, weight, coat, respiration etc.
- The horse's feet - if they need trimming or to be reshod.
- Check for injury, swelling, blood - Anything that is unusual or concerning.
- Watch and help riders to know how to mount and dismount safely and correctly.



6. The most important thing about gear checking ...

The most important thing about gear checking is if something is found to be unsafe or not fitting properly you need to assist the rider to overcome this. Horse welfare and comfort is paramount.

- Do not let these things go uncorrected. If there is an issue, alternate gear needs to be found for use that day.
- Eg. If the saddle is ill fitting and is going to cause the horse discomfort, you should try borrowing a saddle pad or folding up an extra saddle cloth to help the situation.

7. If a rider arrives with incorrect gear ...

If a rider was to arrive at Pony Club using a bit or gear that does not meet Pony Club NSW gear rules do not change these immediately.

- Some examples of incorrect PCA NSW gear includes: running reins, standing martingale, bitless bridle or a wrong bit.
- For further examples refer to the PCA NSW Handbook.

What to do:

- The First step is to assess the horse and rider.
- Kindly let the rider know the rules and make a suggestion for what alternatives they could use.
 - Get them to try the recommendation before the next rally day, either at home with their parent or their private instructor to work with them to make sure they have control of their horse without the auxiliary gear and or different bit.
- As long as the Senior Instructor feels they are safe they are still able to participate on the day.

Gear Checking Procedures

For the safety and comfort of both horse and rider

What to check for on each item ...

SAFETY

- Soundness of leather - that it has not stretched.
- That the stitching hasn't started to undo or fraying.
- There is no cracking of the leather.
- No stretching of holes eg. Girth, stirrups.
- Correctness of fit Eg. Riders helmet, stirrups.

HORSES COMFORT

- Correct fit.
- Soft, clean and supple gear.

This article will now outline the suggested order to proceed gear checking with, alongside a brief description of what to look for within each area.



ITEM	WHAT TO LOOK FOR:
RIDER	The Rider should dismount to start the Gear Check. Also, if at any time a rider needs to remove or put on a jacket or jumper, they must dismount to do so.
HELMET	<p>The rider needs to take off their helmet if not already been tagged to check for the correct Helmet standard. This needs to be done dismounted.</p> <p>The helmet needs to fit correctly, chin strap done up properly and no damage to the helmet.</p>
BOOTS	Smooth soles with elastic sides. If unsure, check PCNSW Handbook for boots allowed for particular disciplines.
UNIFORM	Club uniform as stated by the club.
JEWELLERY	Watches can be worn. Rings should be taped or wear gloves. Stud earrings only. Prescription glasses allowed and specific sports approved sunglasses.
BRIDLE	<p>The browband must not be pulling tightly across the horse's forehead or pulling the head piece forward behind the ears. It must be a good size to allow comfort.</p> <p>The Throat Lash should be tight enough to keep the bridle from coming over the horse's ears but loose enough to not tighten under the horse's gullet when working. All straps should be in their keepers.</p>
BIT	<p>Should be sitting comfortably and positioned with 1-1 ½ wrinkles on each side of the horse's mouth. The bit must sit over the horse's tongue.</p> <p>It must also have a finger width either side of the mouth to indicate if it is the right size for the horse. Check the PCANSW Bit Dictionary for approved bits.</p>
NOSEBANDS	<p>Should not interfere with the horses breathing. They must not be too tight. You can use a noseband taper gauge.</p> <p>It is much safer for the riders to be off their horses when they are having their bridle checked. Some horses may object and cause a rider injury if gear on their head is being checked while rider is mounted. It is often better to let the rider or parent check this while the gear checker watches.</p>
REINS	<p>Always check that the entire rein is sound, it should not be getting thin or fraying. Check where it connects with the bit, the stitching, studs, or buckles are not worn. Reins must be connected and not separate. If a knot is made in the reins to shorten them the buckle at the end must be undone.</p> <p>As reins are an important part of the rider's control of the horse it is very important to check carefully and replace if there is any sign of wear.</p>
SADDLE	<p>It is most important that the saddle fits the horses well and is not causing them discomfort. The saddle should not be sitting down on the horse's wither or spine and the sides of the gullet or tree should not come into contact with the horse as it moves.</p> <p>A good indication is if you put three fingers up and down under the pommel of the saddle that there is that much room clear. If this is not the case with the rider off it will only get worse once the rider is sitting in the saddle. For the day some sort of padding should be used and afterwards a saddle fitter may need to check the saddle or a properly fitting saddle pad.</p>
GIRTH POINTS	<p>The stitching on the girth points needs to be checked right up under the saddle flaps. Having the rider dismounted makes it possible to check these sections properly.</p> <p>The leather and holes of the girth points/straps must be sound. The girth itself and its buckles also need to be checked.</p> <p>The girth needs to be firm but not too tight. There is anecdotal evidence that horses can get colic and display violent behaviour if their girth is too tight and tightened too quickly. For safety and comfort the girth should be done up in stages, hole by hole as the horse accepts the pressure to avoid bucking and blowing out. The horse should be led around after being girthed up before the rider mounts.</p>

STIRRUP & STIRRUP LEATHERS	<p>The stirrup leathers, in particular where the leather holds the stirrup iron and the leather across the stirrup bar need to be checked thoroughly for wear and tear.</p> <p>The holes in the stirrup leather need to be free of stretching and tearing. If the stirrup bar moves up and down and it can't be moved easily it should be left down.</p> <p>The stirrup must be an approved stirrup and must fit properly. A good indication is having an adult size finger being able to fit either side of the widest part of the foot when in the stirrup. Also be careful stirrups are not too big for the rider and that their whole foot cannot go through the stirrup.</p>
SADDLE CLOTH	<p>The saddlecloth should be thick, clean, and well fitting. The saddlecloth should be big enough that the saddle does not sit on the edge of the saddlecloth as this can give horses a sore back very quickly.</p> <p>The saddle cloth should be pulled up at the pommel and cantle, so it is not pulling across the wither and spine of the horse.</p>
BOOTS & BANDAGES	<p>The main rule for boots on horses is that they fit correctly, are not done up too tight and they are kept clean to prevent rubbing.</p> <p>Tabs and straps should be pointing to the back and on the outside of the leg.</p> <p>You should not use long boots on the horse's hind legs when jumping and they must not be weighted. There are strict rules around using back boots when jumping. See Equestrian Australia rules on this.</p> <p>Bandages can be used but must have a padding underneath and must be sewn the full length on the outside of the leg, not taped.</p>
BREASTPLATE	<p>A breastplate is worn to help stop the saddle slipping back. It needs to sit high and in the soft part of the horse's shoulder and not low on the point of the shoulder or boney area. It needs to be done up firmly when the saddle is sitting in the correct position to prevent it slipping back.</p> <p>If the breastplate has a strap between the horse's front legs check it does not hang down to low. It can be dangerous if this strap is hanging down as horses can get their front legs through it when jumping. It should hang just a few centimeters below the horse's breast, obviously not in contact and rubbing or being too tight.</p>
MARTINGALE	<p>Keepers or stoppers must be fitted to avoid the rings on the martingale getting caught on the buckles of the reins where they connect to the bit. The rings of the martingale must not restrict the line from the horse's mouth to the rider's hands.</p> <p>When the rider's hands are in the correct position, just above the horse's wither and the horse's head is in a normal position, the line of the rein should be straight and not broken. If the horse was to lift its head into a position that is too high, or if the rider's hands get too high, this is when the action of the martingale should take place.</p>
SPURS	<p>Make sure the spur is the correct version for the discipline or a general rally day.</p> <p>The shank of the spur must be in a downward position. The spur should sit above the heel at the back of the ankle. The buckle on the spur should be sitting near to the top or slightly to the outside of the boot with the strap pointing down.</p>
WHIPS	<p>Whips for general use shall not exceed 75cm in length overall and must not be weighted at the end. Dressage whips can be longer see below.</p> <p>No substitute for a whip or a whip without a flap is permitted.</p> <p>Hacking canes (with or without a flap) not exceeding 75cm in length overall are permitted in Riding and Hacking classes only. Whips when used must be carried in the hand only. Only one whip may be used at a time.</p> <p>Dressage Whips which must be at least 95cm long and not over 110cm long (excluding tassel or flap), are permitted in dressage competition up to and including advanced level. They are also permitted in the warm-up area for the competition and for dressage instruction with the permission of the Senior Instructor. Dressage whips may have either a tassel or a flap on the end.</p>