



Pony Tales

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Home from boarding school, the jolly girls in pony books plan summer hols round junior camps, gymkhanas, country fairs, set up a course of multi-coloured barrels and bright striped timber poles for practice in the rail-fenced paddock.

Muck-out, wash-down, tack-up, plaits, saddle-soap, curry-comb. Father – tweeds, cravat – hitches the horse-box for the county show. Mother – waxed jacket; hair pins jabbing from her mouth – fastens entry numbers to twill riding coats, unmuddies jodhpur boots.

Thud of hooves in the practice arena. Picnic hampers in the car park. Faults made public in a megaphone's no-nonsense tones. The end-of-round bow to judges when the last brush fence is skimmed. Impossible ponies tamed. Horse thieves outwitted in the night.

Emergency supplies conveyed to a snowbound neighbour's farm. Alarms raised on brave cross-country gallops to a vet. Finally, our heroines are covered in rosettes of glory, having overcome a nasty rival's guile ...

Their future holds sweat-shirted hunter trials, top-hatted dressage, the swish glamour of the point-to-point ball. Best of all, they imagine jumping to their country's rescue; clear rounds clinching victory in the Nations Cup.