

WHAT IS [DRESSAGE]?:

Dressage, pronounced dress aahj, is the French word for training. Mere words do not describe the beauty of this art form. It is the most disciplined of the equestrian sports. It is a refined, harmonious, silent conversation between horse and rider resulting in aids given by rider to the horse which should not be apparent to the observer's eye.

The graceful and controlled movements exhibited by the horses and riders you will observe today, have been practiced as far back in time as the depictions on the bas relief frieze around the Parthenon in Athens, Greece.

These precise athletic movements can only be achieved when the rider, through his seat and leg, is able to compress the horse (known as collection). This makes the horse balanced and light on his feet and responsive to the rider's aids.

It takes many years of training to develop the Grand Prix horse and rider. Additional demands of perfection, muscular development and balance are needed in order for a horse to execute the required gaits at the Grand Prix level.

Not every horse can do the canter pirouette, piaffe and passage. The horse must have not only the physical talent, but the willingness to accept more rigorous training.

Even when a horse is able to execute the compulsory movements, there will always be a rare few who will perform the tasks with precision, agility and expression. That ability is what makes champions.

The musical Freestyle, referred to as a "kur" or "Kuer," affords the rider the opportunity to perform all the compulsory movements of the test in any desired sequence and at any point in the arena, to the music of the rider's choice. This adds an exciting element of artistic expression that enhances the pleasure of the performance.

A winning "kur" will summon the ability of both horse and rider to execute more difficult sequential movements than those of the actual Grand Prix test. Merely setting the test to music will not create the champion. The scoring includes marks for both technical execution and artistic presentation.

We have added more information throughout this program to help you reach a better understanding of the beautiful sport of dressage.

Thank you for joining us!

WHAT TO [LOOK FOR IN A TEST]

The judge looks to see that the horse is willing, relaxed, supple, fluid and attentive at all times during the test. Any show of resistance, tension or stiffness is penalized.

The horse should appear to perform the movements of his own volition, with no obvious prompting from the rider.

THE [MOVEMENTS]

Collection – Second Level

The horse shortens his frame and stride, becoming more elevated with increased suspension between steps.

Shoulder In – Second Level

The horse is slightly bent around the inside leg of the rider, and its inside leg passes and crosses in front of the outside leg. The horse is looking away from the direction it's moving.

Halt

The halt must be square and completely immobile.

Walk

The walk should be a cadenced, four-beat gait with no shuffling or jogging.

Rein-Back

A backward movement where the horse should step evenly with front and hind legs a specific number of steps.

Extended Gait – Third Level

The horse stretches his legs and body to lengthen the stride, maintaining the same rhythm.

Half-Pass – Third Level

The horse moves obliquely or diagonally forward. The horse should be very straight with neither the hindquarters nor the shoulders leading.

Flying Changes – Third Level

When a horse canters, the inside front leg lands last in every stride, notably farther ahead of the other three legs.

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Pirouette – Half Pirouette Third Level; Full Pirouette Intermediaire I

A pirouette is a highly developed and difficult form of lateral movement executed on a very small circle with a diameter approximately equal to the length of the horse. It can be performed in all gaits.

Piaffe – Intermediaire II

The ultimate collected trot on the spot where the legs are lifted in even cadenced steps with the highest elevation possible.

Passage – Intermediaire II

A collected, elevated trot. This movement is elegant, the horse appears to float with his steps suspended in the air.

BUILDING TO [THE GRAND PRIX LEVEL]

We are very pleased to welcome so many non-competing spectators to the *Del Mar Classic*.

Dressage is a sport which is much more enjoyable when better understood. For this reason, we would like to briefly familiarize you with the progression of required movements from Training Level to Grand Prix Special. It takes many years to progress through the levels.

Every test, from Training Level Test 1 to Grand Prix Special consists of a series of prescribed movements, each receiving a score of between 0 and 10. Each test begins with the horse entering the arena at “A,” proceeding down the imaginary center line at the designated gait and halting for a salute to the judge. The horse and rider team, depending on their level, execute various movements in a geometric pattern. Most movements begin or end at one of the letters you see around the arena. The final scores for each test are “Collective Marks,” grading the overall quality of the gaits, impulsion, submission and the rider’s use of aids. These scores are multiplied by 2 (these are known as coefficient marks).

Below is a brief outline of the various movements you can expect to see. Each test builds upon the skills developed at the previous level. There are no shortcuts here!

The Training Level tests require use of the basic gaits ... walk, sitting and rising trot, canter.

At First Level the horse begins to develop more lengthened strides and more control and geometric use of the arena.

At Second Level, the shoulder-in, the counter canter, and rein-back are introduced. This is the first test at which collection is required of the horse.

Third Level introduces the half-pass, half-pirouette and single flying changes. More collection at all gaits is required.

At Fourth Level, the test becomes longer and more demanding. There are frequent changes of pace, 3 flying changes of lead every third stride, more extension and more collection. At this point the coefficient marks apply to the walk, the pirouette and the flying changes of leads.

The Prix St. Georges is the first FEI level (Federation Equestre Internationale).

The tests may no longer be read aloud by an assistant. There are 27 required movements and now 5 flying changes are required every third stride.

The Intermediaire I test involves more pirouette work, more half-pass and 7 flying changes at every second stride. The balance and self carriage of the horse becomes more critical as does the speed with which each required movement occurs.

The Intermediaire II is the beginning of the most demanding of the required movements involving collection and balance. The horse is required to perform 7 to 8 piaffe steps, passage work and 9 flying changes of lead every stride.

The Grand Prix has 36 required movements and a time of 7 minutes. There are a total of 470 possible points awarded for the test. Piaffe steps now number 12 to 15, there is frequent Passage movement and the transitions in and out of these movements are most important. At this level, there are 15 flying changes of lead every stride. The control required by horse and rider is essential to a well-executed test. The changes of speed and the difficulty of the patterns of the Grand Prix test are extremely demanding of both horse and rider. International competition at this level also requires control over the nerves of the horse and rider. Many will never achieve this level. Fewer will excel. Even fewer will be champions.

The Grand Prix Special utilizes many of the same requirements as the Grand Prix, but the demanding movements of Piaffe, Passage and flying changes are repeated frequently – the ultimate test of balance and precision.

We hope this brief synopsis encapsulating years of work on the part of horse and rider will enable you to better enjoy the Del Mar Classic.

THE [MOVEMENTS]

Dressage competition takes place in a low 22 x 66 yard rectangular arena. It is marked by 12 lettered points around its circumference. There are five imaginary lettered points down center line, and five down each quarter line.

Movements are expected to be performed EXACTLY where specified by each particular test, and marks from 0 to 10 are awarded for each movement and for each transition between movements.

A halt, for example, must be executed in a square; changes of gaits must be smooth transitions; circles must be round; a diagonal movement from one letter to another must be straight.

Rhythm, relaxation, contact, straightness, impulsion and collection are six major dressage guidelines that the judges are looking for.

Scores for especially difficult movements are multiplied by 2, as are the collective marks for the rider's seat, position, and application of aids.

Marks are totaled for official placings and then converted to a percentage, making it possible to compare scores from class to class, level to level, and competition to competition.

HOW IS [DRESSAGE TESTED]?

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WHO IS [SEATED WITH THE JUDGE]?

Have you wondered who that person is seated with the judge? This is the scribe. The scribe records the score for each movement and comments made by the judge during the test. Scribing is often a sought after volunteer position. A scribe starts at the lower levels to gain the experiences needed to scribe at the FEI levels and the more complicated musical freestyle tests.

WHAT ARE [THE LETTERS]?

No one has the answer. Many judges have been queried; many books have been consulted. There seems to be no explanation for the selection or the placement of the letters!

