DRESSAGE RULES

V2024

Hobby Horse Riders
FUN • FANTASY • FITNESS

Dressage guidelines and rules

Produced for the Finnish Championships, and related qualifiers, championship classes, and recommended for use in other dressage competitions/training sessions.
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DRESSAGE - GENERAL INFORMATION

Dressage, means ‘training’ and is the foundation of competitive horse riding in the real horse world.

The same principles apply to riding hobby horses. Dressage, as a sport is closely aligned to dancing - the horse and its rider are in harmony, moving smoothly together and showing effortless forward and supple movement. All the physical work, though, in the hobby horse world is done by the rider.

However, the hobby horse plays an important role in the performance - the positioning of the head demonstrates in different ways what the specific dressage movement is.
In competitions judges look for the quality, accuracy and expression of the movements and score each one with points from 0-10. This is called the Scale of points. (10 excellent, 9 very good, 8 good, 7 pretty good, 6 satisfactory, 5 sufficient, 4 insufficient, 3 fairly bad, 2 bad, 1 very bad and 0 not shown).

The result is decided by the total number of points scored for each movement by each rider-horse combination. The overall impression points are added, in addition to test points, and a percentage is calculated to find the winner.

Bringing a professional assessment to the competition gives the rider more opportunities to compare and evaluate how they are progressing and give them information to help improve in the future.

There are many different levels of dressage. – from Preliminary (beginner) to Grand Prix, which is the most difficult level of dressage.

The levels in Finland are a bit different from the AUS/USA/UK and possibly other parts of the world. In this translation of the Finnish document we are discussing Australian HHR dressage levels. If you wish to define a training level for a hobby horse in Australia, for example, a Preliminary-Novice level horse is not yet ready for international level or FEI level tests. Some enthusiasts do not determine the level of their horses at all and only train and compete at the level they are enjoy most.
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Dressage has gained popularity slowly but surely in the Hobbyhorse world, the standard has risen dramatically within a couple of years. However, show jumping is still most popular, but often as the enthusiast gets older, there is also an interest in dressage.

The average age of dressage riders is higher than the average age of riders that mostly are showjumpers. Dressage also works the muscles in a different way than show jumping and requires a harder training program. Dressage requires excellent co-ordination, balance, and muscle control, as well as endurance from the rider. The performance must look calm, controlled, and moving in a controlled and balanced way. Hurried and lack of accuracy is not considered good.

DRESSAGE ARENA

There are two standard sized arenas used. - Arena A and Arena B.

The more advanced tests are designed to be ridden in the larger A-arena, while easier or simpler test are designed for the smaller sized B-arena.

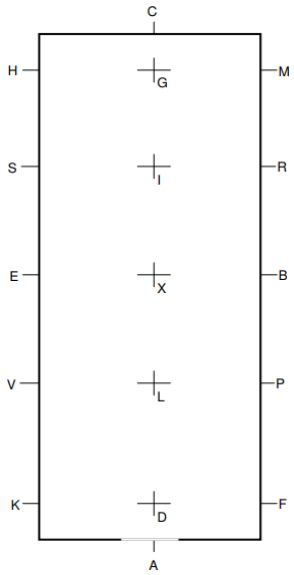
The arena is rectangular in shape and marked by a low white fence, poles, or other markers. In low level or training days the arena may only be outlined by poles at the corners.

The letter markers are placed outside but close to the arena at designated points as shown on drawings. Arena A has more letter markers than the smaller arena B.

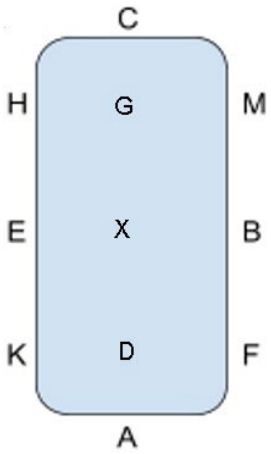
A arena is: 7 metres on the *short end and 21metres on the long side.*
B arena is: 7metre on the *short and 14 metres on the long side*

These are the arena sizes used at the Finnish Championship the markers of the B Arena are changed for use with Australian Tests.

ARENA A (7M X 21M).



ARENA B (7M X 14M)



The head Judge is seated at C on the short side. There may be other judges on the short side left or right of the head judge or at other markers around the area on the long sides at B or E.

If more than one judge is used the scoring is a percentage mark.
An average percentage is calculated when the total of the judges scores are divided by the number of judges.

The judge/s also check that the surface of the arena is smooth, for safety of riders, the markers are correctly placed, and the arena is symmetrically set up.

The entry at position A is an opening of about 60cm wide.

Inside the arena the movements of the dressage test are performed, as written on the test, as the riders' body is level with the described marker.
The letters are spaced at precise positions around the outside of the arena.

There are invisible or unmarked letters on the centre line in both arenas. (It is permissible to mark points with tape/chalk or on grass mow a mark or paint.)

LEVELS OF DRESSAGE

Dressage Tests are divided into levels of difficulty. The hobby horse can be trained to the desired level by the rider. The level of training determines which Dressage Tests the rider competes in. Each Level outlines the movements expected to be performed.

In Australia we designed a condensed/modified format of the levels to suit Hobby Horse riding from Equestrian Australia and the International body- FEI. (Federation Equestrian International)

Preliminary/Novice Level: Is the starting level for those new to the Hobby Horse sport. At this level the horse can perform the basic gaits (walk, trot, and canter), tempo and rhythm changes as well as Halt and rein-back. The horse responds easily to turning and changes of pace and responds to the directives of the rider and the rein aids (circular patterns, changes of direction described in the test).

Elementary/Medium Level: In addition to the above requirements, in the hobby horse tests, some collected and lengthened paces and lateral paces are performed including leg yield, more complex transitions, canter straight from walk and trot directly from rein-back. At this level the horse moves in a somewhat more controlled rather than faster manner.

Advanced/Prix St George Level: The ability to do extended gaits, shoulder-in and shoulder-out (in walk), counter canter, change of canter lead through walk and single flying changes and both the turn on the haunches and turn on the forehand. The level includes flying changes at every second stride and a full canter pirouette.

At this level a horse is now described as a Dressage horse. The use of a double bridle is also introduced at this level, but it is not mandatory.

The rider and hobbyhorse effortlessly perform all the above movements.
In addition, the horse must be able to sustain the collected gaits, shoulder-in and shoulder-out performed in trot. In canter, a simple flying change and cantering directly from rein back. The rider is being judged or assessed more strictly for precision and correctness for each transition of these demanding performance levels.

Intermediare 1 and 11: At this level of competition the horse must have a double bridle (a snaffle and a curb bit with a chain or a Pelham bit with two separate reins).and a noseband. **NOTE**: Without the double bridle at this level and higher the horse and rider will not be qualified to ride these tests.

This level requires the rider to ride with a double bridle without difficulty and the additional movements to the previous test movements described are: flying changes at every third or fourth stride, a half-canter pirouette and a full pirouette in walk.

Intermediare 11: This is the second highest level. At this level - very difficult and physically challenging tasks requiring endurance and strength, with many movements included in these long tests.

The level includes: flying changes at every stride (at least 5 consecutive), passage, piaffe 7-8 steps, zigzag half pass in every gait, moves from passage to piaffe and vice versa and difficult transitions.

Although it is not commonly attained or included by most Dressage Hobby Horse riders, it is becoming more popular as Tests are written for the level.

Grand Prix: This is the most advanced level of dressage. The level of difficulty is increased by adding piaffe in 12–15 steps, a double pirouette in canter and flying changes (at least 9 consecutive steps).

The Grand Prix horse and rider has reached its peak

GAITS or PACES

The basic types of gaits or paces are how we describe the foot falls of the horse. They are **walk, trot** and **canter**. Other special types of gaits can be found by breed - however, this manual only deals with the above.

Walk

The walk is the first of the paces and the most natural movement. There are variations within the pace: *walk, collected walk, medium walk and extended walk*. It has a four-beat tempo and is maintained regardless of the length of stride.

All the various walks should be an active ‘marching pace’ with energy and expression with a four-beat tempo.

Also, at the end of dressage tests there is the "*free walk*" decribed as the natural unrestrained (rein hold is long) allowing maximum stretch of the horses neck, allowing the horse to move freely in the walk pace of its choice.

In a ***collected walk***, the horse lifts the leg higher (almost to 90%) and leg travels more upward than forward, covering less ground and his step is now shorter and higher than normal but still maintaining the same tempo. The horse is also supported in a higher frame than normal, but still retaining a relaxed feeling, with some nodding of the head.

In a ***medium walk***, the horse stretches forward, with a longer stride and shows a long and relaxed frame of head and neck, with the pace tempo remaining the same as in the basic walk.

In an ***extended* walk** the horse reaches/stretches the leg out and forward to its maximum length, covering as much ground a possible while still showing the same suppleness and relaxation and tempo.

The rider changes position of the horse according to the pace. In the free rein walk, the horse can lower its head to a more relaxed state.

Trot

The Trot pace has a two-beat tempo and also rhythm and suspension and cadence according to which type of trot is required. It is a faster gait and resembles jogging.
Trot, collected trot, medium trot and extended trot are the four stages. Rising trot with a hobby horse is not done.

Collected trot is a powerful, cadenced (bouncey) and elevated pace that covers less distance but maintains at the same tempo and rhythm. The horse's head is elevated in a higher-than-normal frame.

Medium trot is a pace that shows more ground cover, in the same way as medium walk - the step stretches longer but the pace remains in a two-beat tempo and the same trot rhythm.

Extended trot is the most impressive of the paces. The horse is given a bit more rein and the extension is performed correctly when it can be shown as very long, cadenced but relaxed and energetic forward movement while maintaining strength and poise and balance.

Canter
It has a three-beat tempo with a moment of suspension (like skipping), which is maintained at all times.

There is canter left and right and it is changed to balance the horse in the direction of travel. Counter canter can also be performed where the horse travels with the leading leg being in the opposite direction to the way of travel.

The canter is the fastest of the three basic gaits. The canter is ridden forward and when done well, looks easy, cadenced (bouncy) and strong.

There are four basic canter paces: – *a working canter, collected canter, medium canter and extended canter*.

Working canter is the first canter and is offered in a natural, relaxed and energetic, three-beat tempo with the same rhythm maintained throughout the test and ridden in a moderate frame.

Collected canter - the horse is ridden in a rounder more upright frame. It is a three-beat (skipping) tempo with a moment of suspension, It is an elevated shorter stride that has a cadenced bouncy expression, while maintaining the same rhythm.

Medium canter *is also a collected type of movement, and* the head of the horse is in a more upward frame. The legs should stretch well forward while the pace is kept controlled, as in all of the medium gaits, the movement must remain balanced without change of tempo or rhythm to be properly performed.

Extended canter is a powerful and expressive pace that covered as much ground as possible while remaining balanced, in tempo and rhythm and with clearly defined transitions without it seeming hasty.

THEORY OF DRESSAGE MOVEMENTS

In this section we will briefly discuss the theory of the different dressage movements.
Everyone can do the movements in any manner they want.

However, here we will attempt to explain the theory of how it works in relation to riding a Hobby Horse Dressage Test and how the Judges at a competition will learn how to assess these movements.

This part is tailored to fit hobby horse riding. The information in this part is not suitable for riding real horses.

Halt - The horse is standing still, straight and tall with feet together and pointing ahead. The horse's head is relaxed slightly below normal. (Is ready to move forward immediately.)

Rein-back – moving backwards a set number of steps. The horse's head must not get too high, otherwise the movement will seem too stiff or stilted.

Leg yield – Feet are positioned towards the inside of the arena while staying on the desired line/track. Leg yield can be performed on the track or for example on a diagonal line.
The hobbyhorse should be flexed very slightly away from the direction of movement.

Shoulder-in – Feet are positioned towards the inside of the arena, with the horse's head flexed in the same direction. The riders outside shoulder should be slightly forward.

Shoulder-out – Feet are positioned away from the inside of the arena, with flexion of the horse's head towards the inside of the arena. The riders outside shoulder should be slightly forward.

Zigzag half pass – The rider preforms a zigzag on the centreline of the arena, always changing the direction of the movement after a prescribed number of steps.
It can be performed in all paces. Example of steps: 2-4-4-2 (Intermediaire), 3-6-6-6-3 (Grand Prix).

During the first set of steps, the rider moves away from the centreline and during the last step the rider returns to the centreline.

During the middle (4&4, 6&6&6) the rider crosses the centreline symmetrically leaving half the number of steps on both sides.

When performed in canter, the lead will always change when the direction changes. The head of the horse and the upper body of the rider lie in the direction of travel (see diagram)

Turn on the forehand (left or right) – this is also a change of direction or rein.
The rider performs a 180-degree movement with the head of the horse as a pivot point inside the motion. The legs move on two rails and the horse is flexed in the direction of the movement slightly.

Turn on the haunches (left or right) –this is also a change of direction or rein.
The rider performs a 180-degree movement with the end of the hobbyhorses stick as a pivot point inside the motion. Turning on the haunches is the opposite from turning on the forehand. The horse is flexed slightly to the changing direction.

Flying change – The rider changes the leading leg of the canter. The flying change occurs in a moment of suspension (in the air). The rider will jump into the air to take the other leg as the new leading leg when they land.

The horse's head should be flexed slightly to the new side and the rider switches the reins to the other hand – the reins should always be held on the leading side.

Flying changes can be done at every stride on higher levels. (Change of rein hold is only done after the last change which should be in the direction of travel.

Counter canter – Moving on the wrong lead deliberately. Lower-level horses can accidentally move in a counter canter without the rider's request. A high level and balanced horse can maintain a counter canter without problems even on a curved line. The horse is flexed towards the leading leg of the canter (counter flexion).

Canter pirouette – A 360-degree motion where the hobbyhorse stick end remains within the arc of the movement. The pirouette is started by shortening the stride of the collected canter

to an almost in-place position while maintaining activity and balance, while moving in the direction of the leading leg.

The rider's legs are moving on two tracks, the leading leg moving in a bigger more elevated action and the other leg more anchored or on the spot to the inside of the movement in a smaller circle. This leg taking most of the weight of the rider’s body and pushing the movement around and sideways.

The perfect number of steps in a full canter pirouette is 5-6 steps depending on the length of the rider’s steps.

The head of the hobby horse is positioned in a very collected position and the flexion of both horse and rider’s upper body is in the direction of the movement.

The canter pirouette can also be done in *a half-pirouette* - the ideal number of steps being three. The lead is changed after these three steps when the rider is back on the desired line of travel (track).

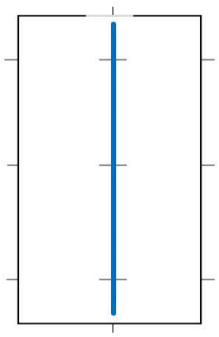
At the higher levels, riders can perform a *double pirouette*, which requires strength and precision, the amount of steps is doubled by the steps in a normal pirouette (10–12 steps). In a test it is not permitted to do more than a double pirouette.

Pirouette in walk – A 360-degree motion, turning on the haunches in full circle. Or Half pirouette is a 180 degree half circle and is also a change of rein.

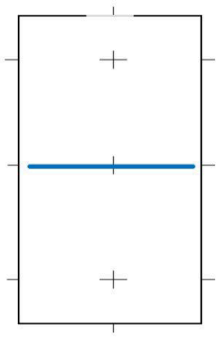
Passage – Very collected trot that hovers with great cadence and suspension but moves forward with energy and balance. It is a high-level movement, requiring great strength and stamina. In passage the horse is collected upwards, and the leg movement is desired to be elevated, flexible, and powerful, covering little ground but still moving forward in the correct tempo and rhythm.

Piaffe –Like Passage, Piaffe is a high-level test movement and is performed with very elevated trot steps without moving forward. Like passage but completely in place. Piaffe is a powerful movement. The horse should be even more collected than in the Passage. At Intermedaire level the minimum is 7 steps, while Grand Prix requires 12 steps. A *pirouette* can also be performed in Piaffe, it resembles turning on the haunches. The movement can be done in a full pirouette or a half pirouette.

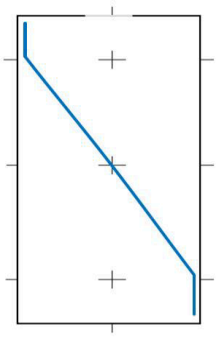
DRESSAGE PATTERNS
Not to scale



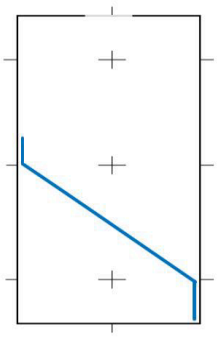
Down the centerline



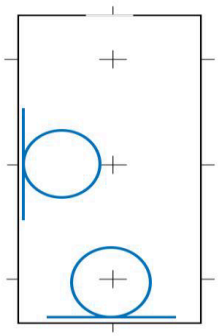
Down the midline



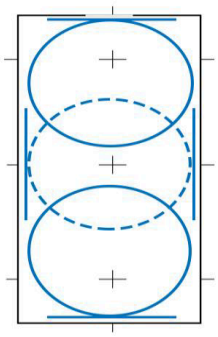
Across the long diagonal



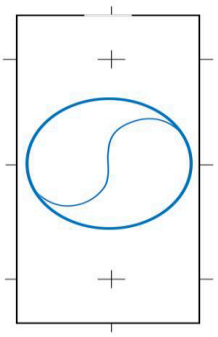
Across the short diagonal



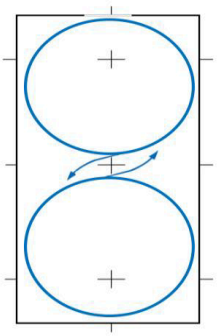
Circles (small)



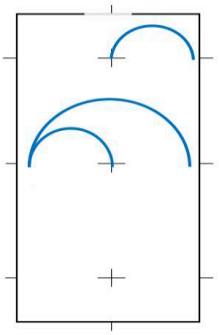
Circles (large)



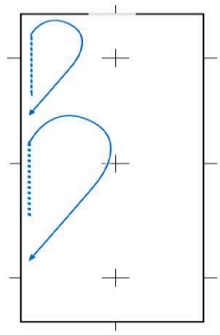
Through a circle



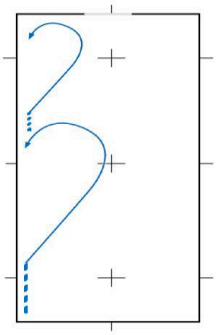
Switching circles (figure eight)



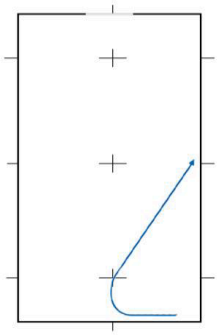
Half-circles



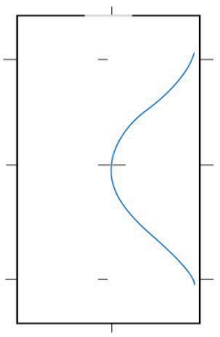
Half-volte to the wall



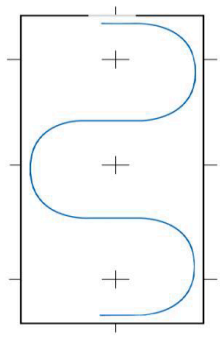
Half-volte to the wall (reverse)



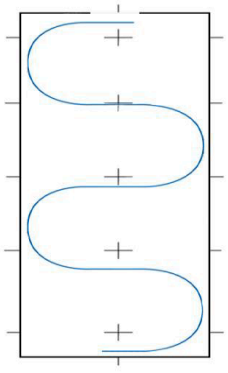
Corner cut



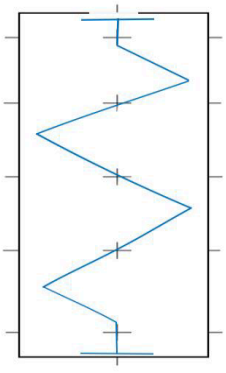
Shallow loop



3-loop serpentine



4-loop serpentine



Zigzag halfpass (3-6-6-6-3)

COMPETITION RULES

The rules / recommendations below are used in the Finnish Championships and their use is also encouraged for general use in competitions.

Open/general dressage tests

The horse and rider are to perform each test they chose from the beginning to the end.

Each mark on the test is scored out of 10. A score of 5 or lower requires an explanation in the comments section. The judge can give a score of 0 if the movement was not performed at all. If the result is 5 or more, the points only need be recorded on the test paper.

The judge, in the collective marks, considers the criteria as listed on the sheet and records a mark out of 10 in each of the collective boxes. The general impression usually reflects the overall performance. The judge may also offer other remarks and suggestions.

Calculating percentages will give the competition a better basis of comparison and the rider will get a clearer result for the future. Some movements are given a co-efficient of x 2 if they are the purpose of the test or are the more difficult movements.

The test is only allowed to start with the judge's consent. The judge will stand up, sound a whistle/bell or say loudly "*Start*" at the initial greeting, after which the rider can start the test. Clear start signals are recommended. If a rider starts a test before permission is given an error mark may be given for the first movement or it can be cause for elimination should the rider not refer to the judge if the whistle or bell sounds to stop the test.

This signal is also used if the rider makes an error of course. In this case the judge may stop the test then instruct the rider on where to resume the test. Marks are deducted for each error and if there are more than 3 errors the rider is eliminated.

The same horse is allowed to participate twice in the same class with a different rider.

Usually, in dressage the rider can only participate once in the class.

The advanced level tests may require a double bridle (a snaffle and a curb bit with a chain + two separate reins or a pelham.). Without the double bridle at this level and higher the horse will be disqualified.

Forbidden equipment on every level is ear covers, whips and various accessories.
Exemptions requires special permission from the organisers at nomination.
Presenting with these accessories or equipment will result in the horse being disqualified.

Kür – Freestyle test to Music

Same rules as above section: Open / General dressage tests

A dressage test is designed by the rider in accordance with the mandatory movement for the level of the competition and ridden to music of their choice.

The length, or time allocated for the test can be limited as per the test criteria. The maximum number of minutes in the Championships is usually 3-4 minutes. If a test exceeds the maximum time, error points will be added to the performance.

The time limit varies in each test and are indicated on the test sheet.

The rider can also be disqualified if the time allowed is exceeded. (See error scoring section)

In Kür classes, the riding is also judged on artistic points, including the choice of music and its interpretation, degree of difficulty and choreography. Artistic scores are an important part of the critique.

The music starts with a rider's hand gesture before or directly after the initial salute.
The rider's arm should be raised and extended to the side and the music is to start playing when the rider has lowered their hand.

The music, in the required format must be included with the nomination or upon registration or when asked for. It cannot be changed after the nomination date has ended unless stated otherwise. Music is usually delivered as a link from YouTube to the event organiser's email or any method as specified on the program.

If there is a pre-qualifier event in the Kür class, it will be ridden on the same horse as on the competition day itself. If the horse and rider move forward from the qualifier. The same horse can participate with up to two different riders in the same class.

Dressage Championships may require pre-qualifying tests for the Kür and some high level tests.

These may be evidence of previous competition results or may be a qualifying video.

Pre-qualifying by video, the rider films the specified test and sends it to the qualifying team before the last registration date. Instructions for posting can be found in detail on the Program or website of the Championships of that year.

The video must be clear, landscape filmed so that the entire area is visible. The video must have a resolution range of at least 360p. The video is uploaded to YouTube either publicly or hidden. A smaller resolution/unclear video will lead to the rejection of the video.

The camera is set up at the judge's end (letter C) in the middle of the short side so that this short side is fully visible. Use fixed position, not handheld - a camera tripod/table/chair will do. Do not use a person to hold the camera If the video does not meet the above criteria, it will not be judged.

The video must be an unedited version of the test. No edits will be allowed.

The arena must include at least the middle letters of the long side and the middle letters of the short side. Marking all letters (A and B arenas) is highly recommended. A clearly identifiable object that is not on the riding path is enough of a mark.

The arena should be clearly defined and the minimum size on the A-arena is 5x15 meters. However, the recommended size is 7x21 meters. Please mention the arena size in the video description when registering. Be careful that the arena is symmetrical.

The qualifiers require a double bridle (a snaffle and a curb bit with a chain + two separate reins). Without the double bridle the horse will be disqualified. Forbidden equipment is ear covers, whips and various accessories. With these accessories the horse will be disqualified.

The qualifying test is ridden on the same horse as the competition final.

ERROR SCORING

During a test, it is also possible to lose points for mistakes. The most common way is to lose your way and travel on the wrong track temporarily. This section discusses the errors a little more clearly.

Errors of course: riding errors (-2, -4, and 3 errors = disqualification) are marked * at the point of error and recorded as -2 for the first incident and -4 for the second one. A third error of course is elimination.

In the Collective box the judge notes the fault points and the reason for the fault point - or the reason for the disqualification.

When a rider makes an error, the judge will sound a whistle/bell as follows: 1 whistle/bell tells one error and 2 whistles/bells two errors. Three whistles/bells in a row means disqualification.

Long uninterrupted whistling means temporarily interrupting a test that is not due to the rider. When the judge gives permission again, the rider can continue from where it left off or as directed.

Causes of error points:

- The rider did not perform the requested movement at a particular point/the rider did not do the move at all - so the part of the movement in the test is marked as number 0. The paper marks -2 points which are deducted from the final points.
- The horse makes a disobedience error - for example, bucks, rears, stops, or kicks the fence.
- The rider gets advice from someone outside the arena.
- The rider takes a wrong direction but returns within 10 seconds to the right track.
- **Kür track music** exceeds the maximum time by 10 seconds.
- 4 error points get marked if any of the above is done in addition to a previous error or the same error is repeated.

If the above-mentioned mistakes are repeated three times/three different errors, it will lead to the immediate disqualification and the rider needs to leave the arena

Other reasons leading to disqualification:

- Leaving the arena during the test.
- Incorrect tack.
- A visible or serious injury during the test.
- Starting the test without the judge’s consent.
- Falling off/down.
- The music goes over 20 seconds of the set time in the Kür class.

CLOTHING AND TACK

It is *recommended* to wear a simple and clean outfit in dressage competitions. Clothing should be flexible and breathable, lightweight but sturdy. In clothing, neutral colours are the most appropriate, but there is no specific style of dress that everyone should follow. However, gymnastic slippers are popular among dressage riders, especially in indoor halls or on a very smooth footing as they are less likely to impede movement. However, it is recommended to wear well-fitting and shock-absorbing shoes. Riders with long hair are advised to style their hair or put it up so the judge can sees the movements of the rider's upper body and the shoulder line better.

Nothing is mandatory in the rider's outfit and therefore a lack of something does not lead to elimination. However, adhering to the above guidelines is strongly encouraged, as it is an expression of the rider's dedication to the sport.

The hobby horse's equipment has mandatory requirements that are important for riding in the different levels of competition. The Preliminary/Novice/Elementary test levels have no restrictions, even a bitless bridle is allowed. However, the recommended bridle standard is a tidy English noseband with a snaffle bit and one set of reins. The advanced level Dressage horse is already in need of a **double bridle.** The bridle includes a noseband (usually a Hanoverian) without a flash, a snaffle, and a curb bit with a chain and two separate reins. A dropped noseband cannot be worn with a double bridle. Some horses can wear a Pelham bit with a chain but must have two sets of reins. An advanced rider can easily ride with two reins.

At all levels, there must be no extra equipment on the hobbyhorse other than the bridle. Ear covers, whips, martingales, and any other equipment will lead to elimination.

JUDGES AND OFFICIALS

At least one **judge** and an **assistant** (writer/secretary) are required for every dressage arena. There may be more than one judge per arena. Each is identified by the arena letter position they judge from. **The head judge** is at C, the letter judges usually sit in the middle of the long side, and if there are more judges available for the course, they may also sit in the corners of the arena, but often 1-3 judges are sufficient. If there are more judges, the separate points will count the total number of points from all the present judges' papers together.

The judge's assistant/writer/scribe. Acts on the instructions of the judge, records the points and comments and sits next to the judge. If the scoring is computerised, the assistant enters the points directly on a computer, the results are calculated as the class progresses and marks them directly on the computer. If there is no computer the score sheets are collected and taken to the Scorers, who manually do the calculations to work out the competition results.

At the Finnish Championship a computer is mandatory. The results are recorded either in Excel (recommended) or in Word/other text processor. In Excel, it is convenient to rank participants by ranking points. The assistant must therefore be able to calculate percentages, use Excel, Word, or another text processing software.

In addition, the writer must learn the tests they are using. An assistant may also act as scribe if the judge prefers to dictate the remarks.
The judge's assistant is an important addition to having a successful competition.

The following items are recommended for the judge's table to improve efficiency:

- Blank sheets of paper
- Pens
- Calculator which checks percentage calculation
- Whistle/Bell for error situations.
- Enough test sheets
- Computer/Laptop
- Entry list
- Camera. The camera (if available) is placed in front/behind of the judge's table to film the performance to record the performance so that the judge can return to see the test if a dispute or error is questioned. It cannot be used to change the test sheet in any way after the competition ends.

In addition to judges and their assistants, other officials may include an *announcer, an arena supervisor, test runners, an equipment/gear steward, a potential cameraman, and stewards to repair the arena if needed* (fallen fence/letter/distracting object in the arena).

A bigger staff will guarantee a quick and smooth-running schedule.

It is good for the staff to discuss their roles before the competition, so that everyone can manage their jobs without confusion.

This document of guidelines/rules applies to overall dressage and competitions in the dressage genre.

The rules are used as a guide for organising and judging a competition.

This document is an adaptation to English and is also an edited version of the 2019 published rules for the Finnish Championships Dressage Rules.

This can be used and applied in lower level competitions.

These Guidelines for dressage are recommended for use in training.

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