

DRESSAGE – GETTING STARTED

The term 'dressage' is derived from the French word "dresa", which simply means training. So anyone with a reasonably well trained horse, that can be ridden in a walk and trot within a confined arena (60 metres by 20 metres), can ride a dressage test. You just need to follow some simple rules.

Firstly you need to contact your local dressage club. To find this just go to the following link www.dressagensw.equestrian.org.au and scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on your relevant State club. From the resulting Menu Bar you need to find Clubs (each State shows it under a different heading). Contact a Club Committee member and ask about joining the Club and when they have their next competition and where.

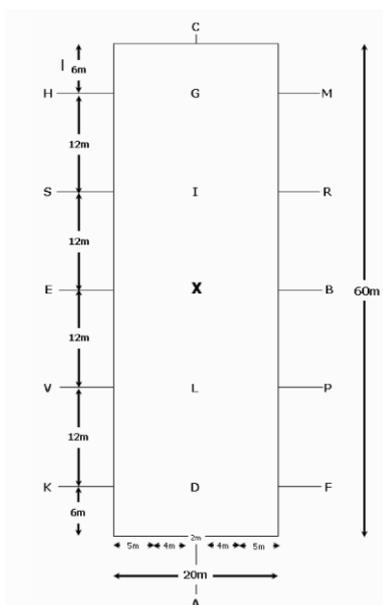
If you are a pony club member, you could talk to your Chief Instructor about your wish to try dressage. They may include dressage training in the rally days, if they have not already done so. You may also like to contact a qualified Instructor and have some dressage lessons. Qualified instructors can be found at the Equestrian Australia (EA) website www.equestrian.org.au then select Sports > Dressage > Education > Find a Coach. (Equestrian Australia is the national governing body for all equestrian sports.) This Coach can teach you how to ride a dressage test.

Whilst the following is to be used as a guide only, to read all the Rules you will need to go to the Equestrian Australia website, www.equestrian.org.au, select Sports > Dressage then scroll down to **Dressage Rules and Tests**.

THE DRESSAGE ARENA

Okay, now that you have all the formalities sorted out, you need to understand the arena you will be competing in.

- This arena is 60 metres by 20 metres and has twelve letters along the sides indicating where movements are to be performed and where changes of paces are to occur. Not shown are the letters which are on the Centre Line, being D, L, X, I, G. "X" is in the middle and often where you stop and salute at the beginning and end of your test.
- At one end will be the letter "A" which has the entry to the arena and the other end has the letter "C" which is where the judge will sit in her car with her penciller (writer), just outside the fence line, to judge your test.



WHAT LEVEL OF TEST SHOULD I RIDE

Tests starts at Preparatory level (mainly walk and trot) then go to Preliminary which includes canter and then to Novice which will include some lateral work, being leg yields. From there the levels progressively become harder. In Preparatory there are four different patterns and from Preliminary and upwards there are three different patterns.

You need to find out where you can enter as most Clubs use a separate website for entries. I would strongly recommend that you enter the Preparatory tests to begin with.

- You can enter up to three tests per day, but mostly we only enter two tests on the one day. If you are feeling confident you can enter say a Preparatory and a Preliminary test, being two levels but you cannot enter say a Preparatory and a Novice as you can only do two consecutive levels.
- All tests are available from the Equestrian Australia website www.equestrian.org.au> Sports > Dressage then scroll down and you will see the linked word “tests” in yellow. Then from there scroll down to “2014 EA Dressage Tests with Explanatory Notes”.

HOW DO I LEARN MY TEST

- You will need to practice your test in a proper sized arena with letters correctly positioned as shown in the diagram above.
- It will be a great help if you can have a friend call out the pattern, one movement at a time.
- You are also allowed to have a ‘caller’ on competition day, so don’t stress if you are worried you won’t remember your test in a competition. More about the caller later.
- To understand where circles should happen, you could go to The Dressage Directory website and print out the diagrams of the tests you are entering, www.dressage.net.au/dnlinks5.html#austest and select **Australian Dressage Test Diagrams**. These diagrams are great for learning where circles, serpentines and loops should be ridden.
- TOP TIP: Print the diagram out on A4 paper and laminate it. Then using a white board marker you can draw your test over and over again!

ENTERING A COMPETITION

- You may need to be a member of the Club to compete, so check before entering the competition. Most Clubs use either Global or Nominate for competition entries, but some have set up their own programs. Again check a committee person for this information.
- You also need to read the **Conditions of Entry** very carefully before you put in your Entry.
- Clubs will advise members when entries are open but check also when the **closing** date is, as you don’t want to miss out.
- Once entries are ‘**closed**’, the draw will be prepared and sent out to all competitors usually one week before the competition.

WHAT DO I WEAR

(Please read the EA Rule Book, Section 2 – Dress, Saddlery and Equipment for full details)

- Light canary or beige jodhpurs (white is usually for the higher levels).
- The shirt should be light or pale colour and tucked in. Collar must be a rat catcher, high frill or business style colour (in which case you must have a tie.) Shirt may be long sleeved or short sleeved. Some Clubs are happy for competitors to wear their Club t-shirt but please check.
- Stocks should be white, off white or same colour as coat. Piping trim is permitted. Feel free to add some bling, such as a brooch or your favourite horse pin.
- Short coat in darkish colours, e.g. blue, green, black, grey, brown. Most riders have a black or very dark blue or grey jacket. Tweed coats are accepted but bright coloured jackets are not permitted. Piping trim is permitted.
- Riding boots short or long, black or brown. Juniors usually wear short boots.
- Approved safety helmet.

- Gloves, white, black or a dark colour.

Optionals:

- Spurs - must be made of metal with the shank pointing down. Please check the EA Rule Book for the complete definition on permitted spurs.
- Whips - must be no more than 120 cm for horses and 100 cm for ponies which includes the tassel.
- Gaiters - to be worn only with short boots with heels and must match the colour of your boots. The exposed side of the gaiter must be full grain leather. Suede on the exposed side is not permitted.

Saddlery

- A fully mounted dressage or all purposes saddle (black or brown only). Treeless saddles are permitted. Stock saddles, jumping saddles and western saddles are not permitted.
- A snaffle bridle with a single snaffle bit. Must be black or brown. Nosebands can be either dropped, cavesson, Hanoverian or crossed.
- White square dressage saddle cloth.

THE DAY BEFORE

- Wash your pony, clean all your saddlery equipment and ensure all your horse gear for the competition is ready to go.
- Plaiting the mane and forelock is recommended, unless already "hogged".
- Pack a water bucket and some hay or feed for your pony as it may be a long day.

YOUR BIG DAY

- You will need to arrive at the venue at least one hour before your first test time, so don't be late.
- Upon arrival please make sure your mount has fresh water and is comfortable.
- You need to be gear checked before each test, so ensure you know where this person is. There is usually a sign near the arenas. Gear checking ensures you have the correct attire and saddlery, so please do this about 15-20 minutes before your test and then stay in the warm-up area.
- If you return to your float and change clothes or saddlery, you will need to be gear checked again. Failure to gear check before each test may result in **elimination**.

WARMING UP

- Once you have saddled your pony (in the gear you will be competing in) check out where other people are warming up and spend some time riding around ensuring your pony is comfortable with his surroundings and is paying attention to you.
- It is not permitted to gallop around the warm up area! Be respectful and try to keep a reasonable distance between other horses that will also be warming-up.
- Protocol states you pass oncoming left shoulder to left shoulder, wherever possible.
- You must stay well clear of the competition arenas. Riders and spectators must stay a minimum of 10 metres away from the arenas. (Callers exempted)
- No other person is permitted to ride your horse on the day of the competition.

YOUR TEST

- If you are concerned about remembering your test pattern you can have a caller. This person stands at either B or E just outside your arena and can call each movement for you. Most people starting out will have a caller and if you don't have a friend experienced in calling, ask the gear checker if she can have another person assist.
- Once you have been gear checked you should ask whether your arena is running on time or late. Also ask who the previous rider will be. The gear checker will be able to tell you whether there are one or two tests before your test.
- Please wear a watch or ask your helper/caller to let you know 3-4 minutes before your test. Wait for the previous rider to leave the arena and then ride to the judge's car.

- The judge may still be finishing her comments/scoring, so please wait a respectful distance for him/her to finish and acknowledge you.
- Once the judge has given you the OK to start your test, please go to the "A" end and trot/walk a circle there until the judge (usually) beeps her horn. You still have 45 seconds to enter the arena so don't panic.
- Once your caller sees that you are ready to come into the arena, he/she will commence calling your test and should call about one movement in front of the movement you are currently riding.
- Get your pony straight and ride into the arena and commence your test. At the end of your test, please salute and smile at the judge. Remember you are having fun!
- If there is considerable time before your next test, please make your pony comfortable at the float and relax. Then shortly before your next test, saddle up and warm-up again and follow the routine as above.
- Once all the riders have finished their ride in that particular test, the scores will be collated and a winner announced. You may need to wait for quite some time before this is done, or you can leave a stamped self-addressed envelope with the committee so that they can send you your test paper.

Enjoy your first competition in dressage.