

## Dressage

Dressage is a form of competition in which a horse and rider perform a pre-determined set of moves. A judge assesses the horse's performance and marks the competitor according to how well the horse performs each of the moves. Marks are also given for general ability – cumulatives – such as obedience, paces and rider effectiveness.

There are two sizes of dressage area. The most common for the easier tests is a 20 X 40 metre arena. A larger 20 X 60 metre arena is also used, particularly for more advanced tests.

The arena is marked out with letters and moves are described on a test sheet using these letters.

A test sheet consists of a series of instructions which are to be carried out in sequence. They start with the instruction of how to enter the arena and end with how to leave.

Competitors may ride the test from memory or have someone call the test from the side of the arena, if the judge and the rules so allow.

In dressage competition, entrants are given starting times. In some competitions, there may be more than one arena for each test. You will then be told a time and which section/arena you are in. Each arena is generally judged as a separate competition (although some BRC competitions have rules for combining results from multiple arenas). Depending on the event, there may or may not be a steward to call you, when you are due in the arena.

You should arrive at the venue in plenty of time to collect your number (if needed), to find out where your arena is, to prepare yourself and your horse and to warm up. There will be a designated warm-up area and you should use that space only, unless you know that other areas can be used. Riding in a warm-up area with other riders has some rules of etiquette. Mostly it is simple courtesy. It is usual to pass horses left side to left side so, if you are riding anti-clockwise round the outside of the warm-up area, you should expect anyone riding the opposite direction to move inwards to allow you to pass. The opposite directions would mean that you should move inwards. If you are overtaking another rider, you should pass them on the inside (nearer the middle of the area) and make sure that you give plenty of room. A verbal warning that you are approaching can be useful at times. As you gain experience, you will see when another rider is practicing a specific movement. If you can, give them the room to complete it. Hopefully, they will return the compliment when you are on a mission and are heading toward them!

When it is your turn to perform your test, ride to the arena but do not enter yet! Ride round the outside of the arena at walk or trot. Use this period to relax your horse before starting the test. The judge can see you, even although you are not being judged at this point, so remember that first impressions count. The judge will signal when you are to start. Judges very often sit in a car. The signal may be beeping the horn, blowing a whistle or ringing a bell. Check beforehand what the signal is, if you haven't seen a previous competitor in your arena. If in doubt, stop beside the judge's car, wait until you are noticed then ask.

If you make a mistake in your test, the judge will ask you to stop with the same signal used to start the test and will then explain where you went wrong. The judge will also tell you where to restart.

The winner is the competitor with the highest mark. (Marks are usually expressed as a percentage on score sheets.)

Riding a dressage test can seem nerve-racking. What if you make a mistake? What if you forget the test? What if you do it really badly? Well, don't worry about any of that. When you enter the arena, put a big smile on your face, eyeball the judge and say to yourself "we're terrific; watch what we can do!" Then enjoy yourself!