

What is :-

A Schooling Session

Schooling sessions are training sessions. The club organises general sessions where schooling will be at the request of the participants. Usually, general schooling starts with flat work and then a bit of show jumping for those who want it. Some sessions are designated for a particular area of schooling. Dressage, show jumping, cross country and flat work for show jumping are some examples. A wide range of trainers is used but there are firm favourites who are asked to return year after year.

A Club Night

Each month, the club organises a Club Night. These may be ridden competitions, specialist demonstrations (side-saddle, showing), lectures or outings. Competitions are for club members only. Other events, such as demonstrations, may be open to non-members. It is usually a case of "turn up on the night". The exception is an event where individual times are given. These will be clearly stated in the newsletter

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 – cummulatives – 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!

Riding Test

A riding test is, on the face of it, just like a dressage test. There is, however, one key difference; it is the rider who is being judged, not the horse.

The arena is just like a dressage arena, with the same lettering. Tests are described in the same way also.

The competition is about the rider performing the correct moves, giving the horse the correct signals and sitting properly. Of course, if the horse is not going well, the judge is likely to infer that the rider is not giving the proper aids.

The organisation of riding test competitions is the same as dressage competitions. Indeed, competitions are very often mixed; so the comments on dressage about starting the test are also true for riding tests.

Show Jumping

In a Show Jumping competition, each competitor jumps a course of fences in a given sequence. Penalties are awarded for poles knocked down and for refusals (the horse stops at a jump or runs to the side). A course plan will be pinned up somewhere; usually near the gate into the arena.

Most competitions are in two rounds. The first round is not timed. Those competitors who jump clear (no penalties) in the first round then jump a second round against the clock. The second round fences are usually slightly different to the first round. The winner is the competitor with the fewest penalties.

There will always be a practice area with at least one fence to jump. This is for warming up NOT for giving your horse a schooling session!

You will be allowed to walk round the course before the competition begins. When the course builder has finished the course, you will be told that the course is ready for walking. It is considered bad manners to start walking the course before the course builder has finished. It is also silly, since you may not see the finished course.

Competitions may be run in number order or by declaration. Declaration means that each competitor goes to the steward at the gate and declares that they want to compete. You can choose to go early or late. It works on a "first come - first served" basis. If you want to go first and someone beats you to it, then that's tough!

Whichever mechanism is used, when it is your turn to jump, you should present yourself, mounted, at the gate. You will be told when to go into the arena. Once in the arena, you may walk, trot or canter but you mustn't put your horse at a fence. The judge will signal for you to start by ringing a bell or some other sound. If you start before this signal, you will be disqualified. You start the course by passing between the Start markers. Jump the fences in the order they appear on the course plan.

If you knock down a pole, you should continue round the course. If your horse refuses to jump a fence, you may try to jump it again. Three refusals in a round means elimination; the judge will signal this and you should not jump another fence unless the judge gives you permission.

If your horse runs into a fence, knocking it down, it counts as a refusal. The judge will signal and you should wait for the fence to be rebuilt. When it has been rebuilt, there will be another signal for you to restart.

If you fall off, you will be eliminated except in Horse Trials where you are allowed to fall off once; a second fall then means elimination.

You finish a round by passing between the Finish markers. After that, you should ride quietly out of the arena.

Style Jumping (used to be Equitation Jumping)

A cross between Rider's Test and Show Jumping, Style Jumping is a test of the rider's style and ability. This competition is about the fundamentals of show jumping. You should see the Novice class as a way into show jumping; a way to learn the basic skills. At Intermediate and Open, the skills required are of a higher level.

When it is your turn to enter the arena, you should present yourself at the front of the judges box and salute. The judge will give you a signal to start. You should then proceed to canter round the arena, first on one rein, then on the other. (Clockwise then anti-clockwise or vice versa). The judge will give another signal when you should start the jumping. That part is exactly like show jumping. When you have completed the course of jumps, continue to ride at canter round the arena, including a change of rein, until the judge signals for you to stop. Then leave the arena quietly.

The judge marks each competitor for each part of the test. The winner is the rider with the best marks.

Long Reining

A course is set out and each competitor must complete the course, controlling the horse with long reins. The course will usually contain a small jump, bending poles etc. It is judged on the success and competence of the partnership.

Showing

Showing classes come in a number of flavours. Some are ridden, some are in-hand (where the horse or pony is controlled from the ground). Some ridden classes have one or more jumps e.g. Working Hunter. In general, a showing class is judged on the conformation and ability of the horse for the particular class.

Competition rules

The official rule book is available from British Riding Clubs. Where appropriate, rules are taken from the official rules of British Dressage, British Show Jumping Association and British Horse Trials Association.

The rule book is rather too large to be covered here! Yet again, if in doubt, ask a committee member.

Copies can be bought from British Riding Clubs, Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2XZ