

GUIDELINES FOR JUDGES FEI & USEF YOUNG HORSE TESTS

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Judge what you see, and forget what you may know about the past of a horse or rider.
- Score on the scale 0-10, remembering the words behind the marks. Hope to find “very good” and “excellent” horses, but be brave enough to be honest when a horse is marginal or insufficient for a career in dressage sport.
- Do not over-penalize the joyfulness, curiosity, or insecurity of the young horse.

FURTHER PRINCIPLES

- The athleticism, basic paces and general impression of the horse as a dressage prospect are judged. General Impression includes temperament, natural talent and conformation to become a high level dressage horse.
- Overall performance is more important than the details of the test. This includes the cooperation with the rider, natural balance, willingness to perform, and willingness to collect.
- Questions which guide the judging and scoring:
 - Does the performance of the horse correspond to the general idea of a dressage horse?
 - Is the horse on the correct training path, following the training scale?
 - Does the horse have the ability to perform Dressage at a high level?

FOUR-YEAR-OLDS should show:

- Natural balance and engagement. The ability to bend the joints in the hind legs;
- Willingness to go forward with impulsion rather than just speed;
- Willingness to accept the rider’s aids without coercion;
- A minimum of negative tension, physical or mental;
- An uphill tendency as a bonus, depending on the physical stage of development.

FIVE-YEAR-OLDS should show in addition to the above qualities:

- Willingness to collect, as observed in movements where taking additional weight onto hindquarters is required or desirable;
- Equal bend and suppleness to both sides;
- Correct development of straightness.

SIX-YEAR-OLDS should show in addition to the above qualities:

- Clear ability to collect, shown for longer periods of time, as demanded in the test;
- Uphill balance more clearly demonstrated;
- Increased suppleness and bending for lateral work. The quality of the lateral work and the flying changes are an important part of the assessment;
- Clear, consistent cadence in trot and canter;
- Fluency and self-carriage in all work.

FOR ALL AGES:

Fundamental training problems will lead to lower marks, especially in the Submission score. For example:

- continued lack of or resistance to contact;
- rigidity in the back;
- lack of throughness;
- lack of elasticity;
- crookedness ;
- insufficient engagement;
- lack of confidence.

Minor Training Problems must not be heavily penalized, if the horse otherwise is showing correct training with developed gaits. For example:

- not standing square in the halt;
- short in the neck or low in the poll, on occasion;
- inconsistent angle in the shoulder-in;
- loss of balance or rhythm in a canter depart .

Harmony and correct frame should be shown.

Transitions between the paces should be free of tension.

Horses that show concern and lack of concentration early in the test, but improve and relax as the ride progresses should not be as severely punished as they would in a regular dressage test.

It is appropriate to comment on the health and/or condition of the horse if it is extra good or appears poor.

DISCUSSION AMONG THE JUDGES

Discussion should start at the beginning of the test, to develop a mutually agreed on impression of the horse. This is confusing to the scribe, who does not know which comments to write down. Make a plan for this before the class begins. It usually works best for one judge to be the one to formulate and dictate the comments which are intended to be written on the sheet.

Discuss each gait as it is presented, but later also decide which gait has the highest quality. Then it is easier to score the other two. Are they the same quality or lower? The scores should be in relation to each other, as well as to the other horses in the class.

It also helps to keep track of the scores given to previous horses in the class, so that the correct relationship among the horses are preserved.

The score for each gait includes not only the purity and quality of that gait, but also the performance of the test movements in that gait. Pay close attention to the guidelines written on the test sheet for each scoring box.

Besides the directives for the Submission box, consider also how easy the performance would be to improve. Are the mistakes minor or are there fundamental training problems?

For the General Impression mark, consider both the quality of the horse's natural talent and whether or not the horse's training is going the right way. Both are necessary for a horse to succeed at higher levels. Consider whether the horse seems as though it has the qualities needed to be a successful Grand Prix horse. Top scores should be reserved for top horses.

Although a horse may have excellent potential, this can not compensate for lack of obedience, poor performance of difficult movements, or fundamental training problems. However the horse that shows talent, potential and presence should be awarded better points than a horse which is simply obedient.

COMMENTS BY MICROPHONE

Decide ahead who will give the comments after the ride. It may be desirable to have one judge comment on all horses in the class, or the job may be rotated.

The commenting judge must make the audience understand the reasons for the marks. This should be done in a positive and constructive way:

- Summarize the horse's strong and weak points;
- Be concise but clear;
- Be kind but honest;

- Reflect the general impression of the performance;
- Mention a highlight if possible;
- It is easy to comment on a good (8 and above) performance. Practice ways to say “this was only satisfactory (6)” in a way that will encourage the rider;
- Try to “sandwich” comments by starting with something positive, proceed to the negative, and finish with another positive point.

SCORING GUIDELINES

9-10 Top Horses, Good Training

8 Good Horses, Good Training

7 Good Horses with a few mistakes

6 Good horses with bigger mistakes or average horses

5 and below Serious problems or horses with barely enough potential

9-10 Absolute regularity, outstanding engagement, willing to collect. All criteria of the training scale has been met. Horse has excellent expression, and natural talent to become a dressage horse.

8 Regular, good activity and engagement, with good expression. Horse shows a natural talent and meets all criteria of the training scale.

7 Horse is correctly trained, is regular with good activity and engagement. Demonstrates good attitude and behavior.

6 Horse is lacking in some activity and engagement, and could show more natural ability. The training scale is mainly fulfilled.

5 Some deficiencies in the training scale, losing rhythm, lacking freedom and on the forehand. Not suitable and lacks natural talent.

5 and Below Resistant, bad basic training, gaits not regular, not able to perform the required movements.

SUGGESTED COMMENTS

TROT

Lacks/shows elasticity

Expressive

Lofty

Shows/needs clear cadence

Engages hind legs well

Expressive/bold/powerful/well-engaged mediums

Needs/shows impulsion without tension

Shows ability to adjust the frame
Long strides, needs more strength to carry better behind
More pushing than carrying
Good/needs more groundcover
Could develop a more uphill tendency
Needs more self carriage
Effortless
Lively
Lacks/shows scope
Tight in shoulders/back
Inconsistent tempo

WALK

Good energy
Covers ground well
Shows overstep and freedom of shoulder
Good/needs elasticity
Neck could stretch more forward and downward
Tense
Back tight
Rider should be able to gather the reins without horse stiffening in poll/losing rhythm/changing tempo
Rhythm could be more consistently clear

CANTER

Elastic
Expressive
Needs clearer cadence
Engages hind legs well
Expressive/bold/powerful mediums
Shows ability to extend frame and stride
Long strides, but needs more uphill balance
Could develop a more uphill tendency
Needs more self carriage
Lacks elevation of the shoulders and engagement of hindquarters
Effortless
Lively
Needs more/shows good ground cover
Lacks volume
Lovely cadence
Loses jump when tries to collect

SUBMISSION

Good work ethic
Good rideability
Good harmony with rider
Obedient
Shows good basics, developing according to training scale
Appears to enjoy his work
Concentrates well on rider's aids
Horse is concentrated on surroundings rather than the rider
Inconsistent throughness
Back needs to swing more
Tension prevents elasticity
Poll should be highest point with nose more in front of vertical
Needs to show equal bend and balance to both sides
Mouth a bit dry and too quiet
Leaning on the bit. Needs uphill balance and better self-carriage.
Good energy, not always well-directed
Good basics but sometimes naughty, anxious, inattentive etc.
A bit too self expressive
Needs more confidence and experience
Perhaps needs more outings?

GENERAL

High quality horse
Training is going the right way
Needs to develop relaxation, clear rhythm and cadence as the foundation for his work
Problems with basics keep this high quality horse from showing to best advantage
Harmonious
Training not yet up to the demands of this test
Lacks the physical maturity for success with this demanding test
Needs to gain strength to be able to carry more behind
Tactfully ridden despite difficulties
Difficulties well-handled
Good work ethic
Diligent
Over-reactive
Youthful exuberance/enthusiasm shown on occasion