

DRESSAGE ESSENTIALS



1. The Object of Dressage

- a. The object of dressage is to improve balance, control, mobility, memory and freedom. Riding the movements required for a test and maintaining a good rhythm increase the awareness of balance and control.
- b. RDA dressage tests range from led, with helpers, at walk, to canter tests with lateral movements. The challenge of learning a test, riding it accurately and performing to the best of the horse's ability, has many positive benefits.
- c. The objective for the dressage horse is to develop physique and ability harmoniously, making the horse calm, supple, loose and flexible, but also confident, attentive and keen, thus achieving perfect understanding with its rider.
- d. These qualities are revealed by the freedom and regularity of the paces, the harmony, lightness and ease of the movements, the lightness of the forehand and the engagement of the hindquarters, originating in a lively impulsion and the acceptance of the bridle, with submissiveness throughout and without any tension or resistance.
- e. The horse thus gives the impression of doing of his own accord what is required of him. Confident and attentive he submits generously to the control of his rider, remaining absolutely straight in any movements on a straight line and bending accordingly when moving on curved lines.

2. Dressage Test

A dressage test is simply a selection of movements which are performed in a set order. In competition a judge is necessary.

3. The Benefits of Dressage

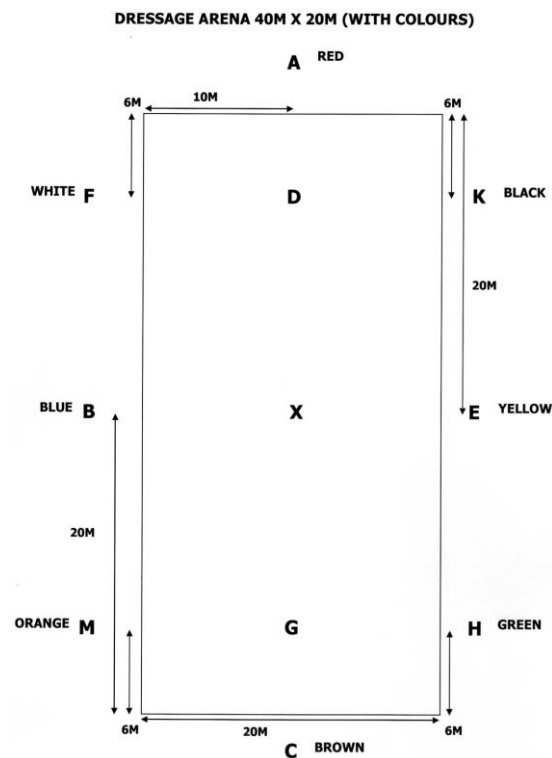
- a. Balance - To ride a dressage test the rider must have an increased awareness of balance. That awareness leads to greater control of the body. Preparation for change of direction takes on greater significance for both horse and rider when the balance is incomplete.
- b. Control - In a dressage test the judge is judging the horse not the rider. It is up to the rider to instil and maintain a good rhythm at any pace. This in itself is a demanding task and on either straight lines or circles the rhythm should be consistent. Different riders riding the same horse will achieve astonishing variations.
- c. Memory - A dressage test involves a test of memory. Commanded or not, the rider should have, as far as possible, the pattern of movements in their head. The degrees of accuracy are also variable - depending on the disability of the rider and the training of the horse. An accurately ridden test will give a more capable rider a feeling of achievement, coupled hopefully with a firm desire to improve.

4. The Practical Aspects of Dressage

- a. If a Rider would like to ride in Dressage Competitions we thoroughly recommend that a Rider is classified by an RDA Accredited Physiotherapist trained in the classification system. This system has been put in place to grade riders according to their functional profile, which makes for fairer competition. Among riders with disabilities there are various types of impairments. Classification assesses how the rider's physical disability affects their function and movement. Following classification, the rider will be allocated a grade which enables them to compete against riders of the same grade. Once the classification has been completed the form is sent to the National Classifier/National Profiling Co-ordinator who reviews the information and sends confirmation to RDA National Office. The rider will then receive a letter, which details their profile, grade and any compensating aids that may be used.

Classification for visually impaired riders must be carried out by an ophthalmologist or optician. Once the sight form has been completed this will then need to be sent to British Blind Sport who will clarify which profile the rider is. All forms can be obtained from the Dressage Co-ordinator at National Office.

- b. Ponies/Horses - Ponies and horses may be any size, but must be up to carrying the rider's weight. In the early stages any riding pony can compete. A test entails basic training, walk and trot and sometimes canter with changes of direction. Training for a dressage test will help with the basic training of your pony. No extra special equipment is needed. A saddle, bridle with snaffle bit, and a neck strap if used is all that is required.
- c. Disabilities - Any rider can do some dressage movements. There are tests to suit all abilities. Initially all disabilities compete together, but at Regional and National events, some riders are grouped according to their functional profile. This is explained more fully in the Dressage Rule Book. Basically, tests are designed for riders depending on their classification.
- d. Arena



All RDA tests are ridden in a dressage arena which measures 20m x 40m. There are eight markers around the edge of an arena - each one is given a letter, plus the centre marker which is known as X, some riders may find it easier to associate the letter with a colour as suggested (see diagram above) or with a picture such as a mouse for the letter M. It is not necessary for Groups to have a specially built surface or dressage arena for them to be able to practice or compete, although a 40 x 20m rectangle marked out in the riding area does help.

- e. What to do next - If you would like to introduce dressage into your riding sessions, your Regional or County Instructor will advise your Group. The 'Dressage Rule Book' is produced each year and it contains details of rules for riding the tests, notes on how to interpret the test sheets and notes for competitors. All the current tests are printed in it, with the rules applicable to Regional and National competitions. The 'Dressage Rule Book' is available from the Dressage Co-ordinator at RDA National Office. Training days for judges, physiotherapists, instructors, helpers and riders are held in different parts of the Country and information on these can be obtained from the Dressage Co-ordinator at RDA National Office.
- f. Dressage Anywhere is an online competition website where riders at every level can compete from home. Members use Dressage Anywhere to participate in monthly scheduled virtual dressage competitions and to improve their training. It is aimed at dressage riders of all levels with limited time to travel to competitions, horses that will not load or for those who have no transport. It is also an ideal opportunity to gain extra judge and pre-live competition feedback.

Dressage gives an opportunity for riders to show a judge, parents, friends and helpers what has been achieved during the riding sessions. It can also help an instructor to set goals, allowing the riders to demonstrate often hidden reservoirs of determination to achieve and can vividly show the benefits of previous instruction. Dressage can be easily linked to the requirements of the National Curriculum.