



How to get better marks in your dressage test!

Feed back from Judy Vertue, National Judge, Gauteng from judging at the KZN SANEF Competition Warm Up Classes 14-16 May 2010

Way of going

In the Prelim class there were some really lovely horses, with lots of potential, with the majority of them appearing to have a very nice 'mind' and working in harmony with the rider. But there were a substantial number of horses, who were just not MOVING FORWARD enough in the trot, which was often laboured and lacking energy. We want to see a horse moving forward positively with a spring in his step moving actively on the hind leg.

Know your test!

On coming round the arena to report to me, one competitor asked if they could just have a few extra minutes before they went in, in order to 'run through the test in their mind' once more. Another said could I give her a few moments as she just wanted to run through the test again with her caller as her caller had only just got the test!! In both instances, I replied that unfortunately 'no', as I have an obligation as a judge to ensure that the next person in the class is able to ride on her riding time and I cannot delay the class for these reasons. By making these requests/comments, the competitor is unfortunately giving the judge the impression, even before they enter the arena, that they are not sure what they are doing!!! It is the competitor's responsibility to have the correct test, to learn it, and to organise their callers! Don't give the judge a negative impression even before you start even if you are very nervous!!

Performance of movements

The judge is first and foremost always looking at the 'way of going' of the horse according to the training scale. However many competitors missed out on the 'extra mark' due to inaccurate riding.

Serpentine

Many 'prelim' competitors did not ride a three loop serpentine correctly. Competitors rode deep into the corners, stayed on the track for up to 6 strides, presenting a 'square', rather than three equal half 20m circles!

Straightness

The Elementary Test 6 has three movements half circle 10m BX / XE, two in trot and one in canter with simple change. Many were not straight on the centre line and also had unequal half circles in the trot work. The canter into simple change at X was often not completed to the centre line, with the horse walking on a curved line. Clear walk, 3 to 5 strides must be shown.

Movement 11 in Elementary 6

Some competitors had unfortunately the wrong 'idea' about this movement, putting the hands low and down and letting the horse stretch forward/downwards. Competitors

tend to read the movement instruction, but not the 'directive' next to it, which is the judge's guidelines. The whole objective of this movement is for the horse to remain in the same frame (FEI use the word 'attitude'), to be well balanced on his hindquarters and not 'held up' by the riders hands but to be in self-carriage. And so the directive says '*Steadiness, rhythm & maintenance of the same attitude and balance while giving hands; reins should be clearly loose.*) This can only be achieved by the rider putting both hands up towards the horse's ears and making the rein loose as per the directive.

Turn on the haunches in Elementary 6

For younger or less experienced horses that are not yet able to show collected walk, the **turn on the haunches** is an exercise to prepare the horse for collection. The turn on the haunches is executed out of medium walk, prepared by half halts to shorten the steps a little and to improve the horse's ability to bend the joints of the hindquarters. The turn on the haunches can be executed on a larger radius (approx $\frac{1}{2}$ m) than the pirouette in walk, but the requirements of the movement are the same.

The aim is to demonstrate the willingness of the horse to turn around the inside hind leg slightly bent in the direction of the turn, **whilst maintaining the activity and the clear four beat rhythm of the walk.**

Observations in judging this movement

- Trying to make it much too small, resulting in the horse 'sticking', losing his balance and then stepping wide.
- No clear preparation, just carrying on walking a very large half circle.
- Incorrect bend, with rider sitting to the outside

Dress Code

This is an elegant sport. Do justice to yourself and your horse by having clean tack, clean numnahs, polished boots - this costs nothing!! And hair neatly contained in a hair net (minimal cost!!). Also be aware of the dress code for this discipline, black shirts are not allowed!

Where to find out more?

There are some riders who may not have a full time dedicated dressage instructor so it is up to you, the rider, to find out more about the rules, the movements, the dress code etc. These are all in the SANEF Dressage Rules, which you can find on **the SANEF Web Site**, www.horsesport.org.za, and then selecting Dressage and then Rules. All dressage riders should have a copy of the rules.

If you want to know even more, every judge in South Africa also has a copy of the **FEI Dressage Handbook, Guidelines for Judging**. Talk to one of your local judges if you want to see a copy. This is an invaluable 'bible', describing not only the general principles of dressage, and the training scale, but also a description of all the movements and the scoring criteria from 0 to 10. This can be purchased directly from FEI. Go onto their website, www.horsesport.org, select MEDIA, then PUBLICATIONS, and then from menu on left select OTHER, and it will allow you to click on the title and give you an

order form. Price Swiss Francs 40. Check also whether SANEF has any spare copies in their office as at one time, they did order bulk supplies.

Hope this is all useful 'homework' and I look forward to my next trip to KZN!
