

WESTERN DRESSAGE ASSOCIATION[®]

OF AMERICA

Western Dressage Judges Guidelines / What to Expect

Western Dressage integrates the historically validated principles of dressage with the best of western stock horse tradition. It is a systematic and progressive system of training for the western horse and rider in traditional stock tack with the purpose of enjoying a safe, pleasurable, versatile, and useful working horse. The hallmarks of the Western Dressage Horse are usefulness, rideability, willingness, safety, pure gaits, lightness, calmness, and steadiness. A Western Dressage Rider should be attentive and tactful. They should use clear, effective, subtle aids coupled with a confident seat and light, responsive hands in communication with their horse.

A Western Dressage Partnership should exhibit impulsion originating from deeply engaged hindquarters transmitted without resistance through a supple top line to a light, soft contact with the rider's hand(s). The horse would move freely forward via a willingness to work off the hindquarters. A Western Dressage Horse that works effortlessly off both ends enables the western horse to be a useful working partner. A Western Dressage Partnership should culminate in a happy, harmonious horse and rider relationship.

Western Dressage Tests provide the opportunity for horse and rider to demonstrate growth through a series of progressive elements by advancing from test to test and level to level as they develop in physical skill, mental maturity, and partnership. Competitions are both rewarding and educational, with judges providing scores and offering feedback for each element, as well as for collective marks demonstrated throughout the test.

THE GOAL of Western Dressage is to develop a partnership: a happy equine athlete working in harmony with his rider. A system of progressive training produces a horse that is physically strong, balanced, supple and flexible. This equine athlete also demonstrates a calm, confident, attentive attitude and is happy with his job.

Rider and horse achieve this goal using the principles of classical dressage training, combined with maneuvers of the stock horse, emphasizing the lightness and harmony with the rider, a hallmark of Western Dressage.

Western Dressage horses demonstrate free-flowing, comfortable strides. The gaits are free, regular in rhythm, and consistent in tempo, and enhance the natural gaits of the horse. As the horse develops, he learns to engage the hindquarters, use the back freely, and therefore becomes light on the forehand.

The head carriage is different with different conformations and styles. A guideline is to look for the nose level with the point of the shoulder when the horse is maintaining uphill balance.

THE GAITS

Clear four-beat walk, two-beat jog of alternate diagonal pairs with a moment of suspension, and a three-beat lope with a moment of suspension after the third beat are all essential for all correctly moving horses.

Western Dressage is open to all breeds. Emphasis should be placed on the purity of gaits, a connection from pushing of the hindquarters through a supple back into a soft hand. (For gaited horses, they may replace the jog with “intermediate or saddle gait). Big suspended gaits are not to be favored, since the Western Dressage horse is a WORKING horse, but neither does Western Dressage favor the jog and lope seen in many Western Pleasure classes, where suspension and purity of gaits are not always exhibited. Ideally, Western Dressage is not a Dressage horse in a western saddle. The horse MUST move naturally and happily in a manner consistent with its breed. Excessive speed or slowness is to be penalized. Speed is the enemy of impulsion.

THE TESTS

There are 6 levels of Western Dressage Tests for the 2018 competitive year:

Introductory Level — The purpose of these walk/jog Introductory Level tests is to provide an introduction to the discipline of Western Dressage. The rider should demonstrate correct basic position, use of basic aids, and understanding of figures. The horse should show relaxation; harmony between horse and rider is important. The horse accepts the aids and influence of the rider. The jog should be a natural gait within the horse’s scope and should demonstrate a swinging back. All jog work may be ridden sitting or rising.

Basic Level — The purpose of Basic Level tests is to confirm that the horse is supple and moves freely forward in a clear, steady rhythm, accepting light contact with the bit. The horse demonstrates a greater understanding of the aids and calm acceptance of the bridle. Greater emphasis is placed on relaxation, harmony, rideability and pure gaits. The horse is beginning to develop more impulsion and balance. All jog work may be ridden sitting or rising.

Level 1 — Level 1 tests confirm that the horse is building on the elements from lower levels and is developing more engagement to show sufficient impulsion as the lengthened jog and lope are performed. The horse demonstrates a more consistent light contact with the bit. These tests introduce some collection, lateral and longitudinal balance, and suppleness and emphasize harmony and rideability. All jog work may be ridden sitting or rising.

Level 2 — Level 2 tests confirm that the horse, having achieved the impulsion required in Level 1, now accepts more weight on the hindquarters (collection), moves with an uphill tendency especially at the lengthened paces, and is reliably and lightly on the bit. A greater degree of straightness, bending, suppleness, balance, and self-carriage is required than at Level 1. All jog work must be ridden sitting.

Level 3 — Level 3 tests confirm that the horse has achieved the impulsion required in Level 2, accepts more weight on the hindquarters (collection), and moves with a greater degree of uphill tendency as required in the collected gaits especially in the collected lope. The movements should be performed with greater straightness, bending, suppleness, balance, and self-carriage than in Level 2. All jog work must be ridden sitting.

Level 4 — Level 4 tests confirm that the horse has achieved the impulsion, engagement, uphill balance, and self-carriage required in Level 3. Level 4 movements should be performed with greater impulsion, engagement, straightness, suppleness, bending, and balance. The marked lightness of the forehand results from a distinct lowering of the haunches and the thoroughness required in the partial lope pirouette. A solid foundation is evidenced throughout by a correct, willing, harmonious performance softly on the aids. All jog work must be ridden sitting.

TACK (for more detail, please see the USEF rulebook and the USEF Attire and Equipment Guide)