

# Tips On Acing Your Dressage Test:

## Driving your test doesn't have to be something you dread!

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### From A Coach's Point Of View

Driving dressage tests should not be the dreaded thing you "have to do" before you can go have fun on marathon and cones! You should approach the dressage test with the attitude that "this is a chance to show off my wonderful horse!" as opposed to "please don't let me mess up or forget my test!"

It really is an opportunity for you and your horse to demonstrate your skills and showcases you and your faithful equine. All the skills you work on and practice for dressage are really the driving skills you will use in all your driving activities. If you can do well in the dressage ring, obstacles will be a "piece of cake"!

### Practice Makes Perfect

The key element for successfully driving a dressage test is proper preparation – do your homework on the movements of the test with emphasis on relaxation, frame, impulsion, rhythm, on contact. This preparation will take many sessions – don't expect to get the movements perfect the first time!

Practice the individual figures and combinations of figures. You really want to concentrate on every stride while keeping in mind your objectives. When it comes to the test, you will only have one chance to get it right so lots of practice doing it correctly will insure you shine during the test!

Establish a consistent warm-up routine that you always do. When you get to a show, do the same warm-up routine – this will help calm your horse (and you) in the new environment. Doing the familiar activity will settle you both and prepare you for what is to follow.

### Prepare Yourself For Show Day Success!



### I. Presentation

This may be judged either at the standstill prior to driving the test or while "on the move" during your test, depending if you are competing in Training, Preliminary or higher levels.

The key points are to be properly prepared (horse, harness, vehicle, driver and groom all clean and appropriately attired), have your spares kit readily available for viewing (if required), and know the protocol for how the presentation is being done at the competition (refer to Prize List for specific details and location).

When being inspected at the standstill, the driver should sit properly with the whip facing forward (prevents contact with the judge walking around the turnout) and the horse on light contact. The groom can stand at the head of the horse (slightly off to one side) for safety purposes. The judge will acknowledge when the inspection is complete and then the groom can remount the

TIPS ON ACING YOUR DRESSAGE TEST



**Top:** Remember to salute the judge at the start and end of your test.

**Above:** Corners should be driven deeper than circles and with proper bend.

**What is proper bend?**

Proper bend is when the horse's body follows the line on which the horse is moving - the hind feet should track in line with the front feet. This line may be a curved line such as in corners or serpentines or it may be straight. Correct balance must be maintained.



**Above:** The free walk should show stretching in the back. The reins will be longer but not floppy!

vehicle. You as the driver should thank the judge, then move off designated area. Be alert for other competitors in the same area to avoid contact.

**2. The Warm-up**

Do your warm-up routine in the designated area. Be alert for other competitors doing their warm-up in the same area to avoid contact.

**3. The Test**

The bell/whistle will sound and the competitor has one minute to enter the ring. Many shows encourage the competitor to make a circuit around the outside of the dressage ring prior to entering the ring – check to see the protocol at the competition you are at. Making this circuit is another way to help settle the horse(s) in the new environment. When selecting which direction to go, plan it so that you are turning in to the dressage ring on your “best” turning side e.g. if you horse turns better to the left then do your outside circuit in a counter-clockwise direction so that your final turn in to the ring is a left hand turn.

**4. Entering The Ring**

You want to make a good impression with the judge so enter with a strong, bold, controlled and straight entrance. Do not rush the salute. Once you've completed your salute, proceed smartly to C.

**5. Driving The Test**

Drive each element of the test

as accurately as you can, remembering to focus on key qualities such as rhythm, impulsion and frame. Some concepts to keep in mind when driving the figures are as follows:

- Collected gaits are shorter and more elevated – not slower
- Lengthened/extended gaits are longer and lower – not faster
- Circles should be uniform, rhythmic, touch the points that mark the circle, be on the outside rein
- Corners should be driven deeper than circles, have straightness after the bend in the corner
- Serpentines are half circles connected by a straight line across the arena (not diagonals)
- Transitions occur when the horses' nose is at the designated letter so prepare early
- When doing a diagonal, arrive early to the letter so the horse is doing the movement at the letter
- Free walk should show stretching in the back and overtracking, reins will be longer but not floppy
- Backup is a two beat movement with legs moving in diagonal pairs rhythmically

**6. Exiting The Ring**

After the final, un-rushed salute to the judge, pick up a nice working trot and leave the ring directly after making the turn. You may salute any additional judges as you pass by X.

**Enjoy the driven dressage experience!**