

YOUNG DRESSAGE HORSE CLASSES

A Riders Guide.

Objectives and Philosophy

Young Dressage Horse classes are fundamental to the future and growth of the sport of dressage. The primary objective is to evaluate the potential and correct training, appropriate to each age group, which illustrates the correct foundation for the YDH to continue to compete successfully at FEI level. *The emphasis is first and foremost about the horse, with lesser emphasis placed on the rider.*

Judging Guidelines

Individual movements are not judged separately, as in 'standard' tests, but instead a mark is given for the

- Walk
- Trot
- Canter
- Submission, and
- Overall Perspective.

The tests have been designed to emphasise the paces, and the training requirement that is required or expected for each age group.

4-year old Dressage Horse

This is the phase of understanding where the training emphasis is placed on the first three stages of the Training Scale; rhythm, suppleness and contact. These three phases are also known as the development period. Judges will be looking for

- Looseness
- Elasticity
- Good freedom and movement in the shoulder
- Adjustability within the frame and the steps
- That the horse is responsive and willing

They are not looking for collection as yet, as it is too early, but the horse should show good activity and seek an elastic contact.

The main emphasis is on the paces, and an ability to lengthen the steps in trot and canter.

Considered to be minor mistakes, therefore leniency is given for –

- ¼'s in at times, but not crookedness.



- concentration lapses
- momentary shortness in the neck
- momentarily above the bit
- halt not straight etc

5-year old Dressage Horse

As well as the above, the judges will place a little more emphasis on straightness. Medium and collection are now required to be shown in the paces, as are simple changes through walk. The horse is required to show a **willingness** to collect and demonstrate increasing balance and self-carriage when executing the serpentines and half 10metre circles.

Full collection is not required at this level and formal precision of the movements are also not required, but a little more rideability is expected with the horse listening to the rider, showing self-carriage and comfortable with the demands of the test.

Emphasis will be placed on the stretch on the half circle – this is a very important movement to demonstrate suppleness and obedience.

The horse needs to follow the contact which should be demonstrated clearly by the hands releasing forward in front of the wither. The movement should appear controlled with the horse letting go in the back and still remaining up in the shoulder. The contact should remain steady, the activity evident in the hind legs, and the horse should accept the shortening of the reins and frame without resistance.

Considered to be minor mistakes, therefore leniency is given for –

- Moments of tension at beginning.
- Not totally attentive or straight in the halt.
- Transitions not on the markers.
- Wrong lead but immediately corrected.
- The odd 'whoopsie' is acceptable.

6-year old Dressage Horse

The horse should now demonstrate an **ability** to collect in trot and canter.

It's important that the judges are able to observe that impulsion is being created from an active hind-leg and a relaxed swinging back.

A higher degree of submission and obedience is required, with self-carriage and a correct contact established. The judges will be looking for self-carriage in the give and retake of the reins. This should be demonstrated by both hands moving forward along the horse's neck and giving up the contact with the mouth.

Flying changes are optional. When evaluating the flying changes, they are to be initiated from behind, and be well balanced. The quality of canter before and after is important, as is straightness, and an uphill frame.

Judges are still not requiring complete accuracy of movements and transitions at markers, but looking for obedience and control which together produces precision.

Considered to be minor mistakes, therefore leniency is given for –

- Lateral movements not always starting or finishing at marker
- Some loss of bend at end of movement in half passes
- Flying changes not at marker – emphasis to be on quality.

Submission Mark takes into consideration:

Rideability, adjustability, and trust should all be apparent between the rider and the horse.

The horse should be displaying a steady connection, with the poll being neither too high nor too low. Suppleness and elasticity is sought throughout the gaits and in two track work, with the combination showing a balance between harmony and energy. Self- carriage is important right from the beginning, with a more horizontal frame is acceptable in the 4 and 5 year old.

Overall Perspective takes into consideration:

The emphasis is on three basic quality paces with the standard of training defined as per the **Scale of Training**.

Conformation, temperament, natural talent and the ability to perform at a high level is also taken into consideration, as is the ability to collect and take weight (Push and carry). (Refer to FEI Handbook, YDH section).

Potential cannot compensate for lack of obedience or lack of performance.

Temperament and Expression:

A young dressage horse has to be attentive by nature but nevertheless relaxed. It must be active and engaged but without tension. The horse must go willingly forward, without any pressure from the rider and should always be focused on the rider's aids.

A good dressage horse must have presence and expression. This expression is based on the overall attitude of the horse and the way in which it presents itself during the test.

The horse's natural charm, the way it moves and the freedom and cadence in the paces will determine its expression and presence. (As per the FEI Dressage Handbook, guideline to judging).

Fundamental training errors:

- Disobedience
- Irregular rhythm
- Unnaturally high neck and head carriage
- Showing tension in the poll and jaw
- Poor acceptance of the bit
- Elevation of neck not relative to bend in the hindquarters

- Not through
- Obvious crookedness
- Tending to pull rather than push
- Lack of engagement in the hind legs



**DRESSAGE
CANTERBURY**