



# Preview: The New Dressage Tests

Overview of what's changed in the 2011 USEF and USDF tests

BY AXEL STEINER

I've been asked many times: Why does the US Equestrian Federation change the national dressage tests (Training through Fourth Levels) every four years?

The answer is twofold. First, the *Fédération Equestre Internationale* (FEI) traditionally changes its tests (Prix St. Georges through Grand Prix, among others) every four years, in the year before an Olympic Games. For many cycles, the USEF has gone along with this practice.

Second, much is learned in each four-year cycle about the current tests and the training requirements behind them. Members of the USEF Dressage Committee, the body that writes the tests, are some of the stewards of our sport. Our goal in creating the tests is to make sure that the training of the horse is progressive from level to level and based on the pyramid of training (the training scale) (illustration, facing page).

Some of us on the USEF Test Writing Subcommittee have been helping to create dressage tests for many years. We realized a long time ago that only if something is in a test will it be practiced at home. As an example, when we introduced the stretchy circle, many riders were dismayed,

fearing that horses would either run off or fall on the forehand. Now, most participants—especially the horses—love the exercise. Another example: Part of the rationale for including renvers (haunches-out) in Second Level was to improve the shoulder-in, which is such an important exercise. In order to move from shoulder-in to renvers, one must have a solid shoulder-in! As a result, judges have seen great improvement in this movement over the past four years.

The test writers take notes on what works and what doesn't, from both a riding and a judging perspective. In the new (2011) USEF tests, for instance, we eliminated the score in First Level for the transition between the free walk and medium walk, which proved difficult to see and therefore difficult to judge.

Show organizers also have a voice. In general, they prefer shorter tests. For 2011, we complied, with one exception: In Training Level, we increased the time in the ring slightly to give the greener horse about 30 additional seconds of ring time. All of the other tests are slightly shorter, with none longer than six minutes.



The pyramid of training

Finally, all of us—organizers, riders, trainers, and judges—agreed that three tests per level are enough.

## Highlights by the Level

The USEF Test Writing Subcommittee also received excellent input from the USDF Test Writing Committee, chaired by Bill Solyntjes. We used

many of that committee's suggestions, and we are looking forward to additional ideas for the next cycle.

Now, on to the new tests. Here are the changes that have been implemented at each national level for 2011. The 2011 USEF dressage tests take effect December 1, 2010. They will be available from USEF ([usef.org](http://usef.org)) and published in the 2011 USDF Competitor and Member Guide.

### Training Level

No major changes in content.

#### First Level

Recognizing that breeders are producing sport horses with more scope and athleticism, and that these horses are easily moving up to First Level earlier than in the past, we agreed to make the sitting trot optional throughout the First Level tests. Riders now may choose to sit or rise (or some combination thereof) all trot work. I'm sure that many horses and riders will thank us.

#### Second Level

No major changes in content except that, from Second through Fourth Levels, the requirement for straightness has been included under "submission" in the collective marks.

#### Third Level

No major changes in content.

#### Fourth Level

We listened carefully to competitors, who felt that the Fourth Level tests, especially Test 3, were too difficult. The Prix St. Georges of old was a more difficult test, and in recent years the FEI has reduced the requirements of that test. The FEI's changes made PSG similar in difficulty to the existing (2007) Fourth 3 test. In order to keep the proper progression, we have reduced the requirements in all Fourth Level tests. Now there will be a definite step up to the Prix St. Georges.

For example, the Fourth Level flying-change requirements have been reduced. The new Fourth 2 asks for three

changes but with no count (near quarter line; near center line; near quarter line). Fourth 3 now calls for three changes every fourth stride. In addition, the half-pirouettes in Fourth 3 have been changed to "working" half-pirouettes, which are already included in the current Fourth 2 test.

## The Collective Marks

Major changes have been made in the scoring and weight of the collective marks.

**Gaits.** To level the playing field a little, and in agreement with the FEI, the gaits score no longer has a coefficient.

**Impulsion.** The USEF Dressage Committee did not agree with the FEI on eliminating the coefficient for the impulsion score. The 2011 USEF tests continue to carry a coefficient of 2 for the impulsion score.

**Submission.** The submission coefficient remains 2.

**Rider.** The rider score in the previous (2007) USEF dressage tests had a coefficient of 3. To give the judges more specificity in addressing those areas in which the competitor is deficient or superior, the rider score has been split into three separate elements:

- Position and seat
- Correct and effective use of aids
- Harmony between rider and horse.

We have reduced the combined value of the collective marks from the current 90 points to 80 points, which provides a better ratio to the overall test.

## Purpose and Directives

The USEF test writers tried hard to improve the descriptions of each test's purpose and directive ideas, from both a language and a biomechanical aspect. Here, the expertise of committee member Dr. Hilary Clayton was of great help.

The purpose and directive ideas for each test are printed on the test sheet. Test movements *only* are available online at [usef.org](http://usef.org) and are published in the annual USDF Competitor and Member Guide. The USEF Dressage Test Booklet (\$5 plus S&H; available from USEF), which contains all of the USDF and USEF tests, includes each test's purpose and directives.

## The People and the Process

Eight members of the USEF Dressage Committee serve on the Test Writing Subcommittee. The subcommittee members who worked on the 2011 tests were Dr. Hilary Clayton, Janet Foy, Hilda Gurney, Sandy Howard, Marianne Ludwig, George Williams, Lois Yukins, and me. ⇨

# The New USDF Freestyle Tests

By Terry Ciotti Gallo

The USDF Freestyle Committee has finalized the new 2011 USDF Freestyle, Pas de Deux, and Quadrille Freestyle tests. These tests take effect December 1, 2010, and the score sheets are labeled as such.

The goals of these tests are threefold: 1) to have the compulsory elements align with those of the USEF tests; 2) to promote strong technical execution; and 3) to clearly define the important aspects of an artistic ride. In keeping with these goals, changes have been made to both the Technical Execution and Artistic Impression sections.

## THE FREESTYLE TESTS

**Technical Execution.** This section has several new scores. Among them are "Gaits (rhythm and quality)," "Impulsion (energy, elasticity, engagement)," and "Submission (basic issues of submission, technical aspect of the rider)." These collective marks and the addition of a combined score for the initial and final halts are included at all levels. The new total possible points for execution is 150.

Compulsory elements are in accord with the new USEF tests of the same level: A score for medium walk at both First and Second Levels has been added; counter-canter has been moved from Third Level to Second Level; and Fourth Level now calls for flying changes of lead every fourth stride. Three-tempis at Fourth Level are allowed, but only as an enhancement to the choreography and not as a replacement for the fours. Also at Fourth Level, the rider has the option to perform either a working half-pirouette or a true half-pirouette at canter.

**Artistic Impression.** The "Rhythm, Energy, and Elasticity" collective mark has been stricken (but continues to be used on the FEI test sheets). The collective mark for "Harmony Between Horse and Rider" remains. This score reflects the partnership of the team as well as the ease with which the horse performs the choreography. Its coefficient has been increased from 2 to 3.

There is no change to the definitions of "Choreography" or "Degree of Difficulty," but the coefficients are raised from 3 to 4 and from 1 to 2, respectively.

The category "Choice of Music and Interpretation of Music" has been split into "Music" (coefficient 3) and "Interpretation" (coefficient 3). "Music" is judged on suitability, seamlessness, and cohesiveness: The music should reflect the horse's type and character;

have no disruptive cuts; and be linked by genre, theme, or instrumentation. The "Interpretation" score reflects two elements: whether the music expresses the rhythm and tempo of the gaits, and whether the choreography shows a relationship to the music's phrasing and dynamics.

Because the Artistic Impression coefficients are high, judges will now be allowed to use one-tenth-point (0.1) increments. Half- and full points will still be used for Technical Execution. These increments are the same for Freestyle, Pas de Deux, and Quadrille Freestyle.

See the Artistic Impression section of the test sheet on the facing page.

## PAS DE DEUX AND QUADRILLE

The Pas de Deux and standard Quadrille tests are unchanged, but there are dramatic revisions to the Quadrille Freestyle. This score sheet is the same from Basic Level through Grand Prix.

First, the score-sheet layout now mirrors the folded-page format of the Freestyle and Pas de Deux, including a cover page. The inside pages list the technical-execution scores on the left and the artistic-impression scores on the right.

Quadrille Freestyle now targets the same requirements as the individual Freestyle and Pas de Deux tests, with one exception: For safety reasons, canter lengthenings are not mandatory. The compulsory elements for each level are listed on the score sheet.

## RULES, GUIDELINES, AND DEFINITIONS

For all the details you need to compete successfully, type "musical freestyle" in the search box located on the USDF home page ([usdf.org](http://usdf.org)); then click on the top article. You'll see a page with links to test requirements, rules, how-to articles, resources, and more. They are listed under the section "Learn More."

Quadrille enthusiasts, be sure to check out the revised edition of *Why Do Quadrille?* This handbook contains information on establishing a team and running practice sessions, guidelines for the standard tests, and quadrille freestyle design tips. *Why Do Quadrille?* is available from the USDF store.

The USDF store also sells a CD containing all of the Freestyle, Pas de Deux, and Quadrille score sheets. A list of the compulsory elements for each level can be found at [usdf.org](http://usdf.org).

*Terry Ciotti Gallo is the chair of the USDF Freestyle Committee and the owner of the freestyle-design firm Klassic Kur. She lives in Florida.*



## ARTISTIC IMPRESSION

NOTE: Non-compulsory movements must be rewarded or penalized under "Choreography" and/or "Degree of Difficulty" (Artistic). Judges marks for Artistic Impression may be given in one tenth (.1) increments.

NO.

	POSSIBLE POINTS	JUDGE'S MARKS	CO-EFFICIENT	FINAL SCORE	REMARKS
1. Harmony between Horse and Rider	10		3		
2. Choreography use of arena, design cohesiveness, balance, and creativity	10		4		
3. Degree of Difficulty	10		2		
4. Music suitability, seamless, cohesiveness	10		3		
5. Interpretation music expresses gaits, use of phrasing and dynamics	10		3		
<b>Further Remarks:</b>	TOTAL ARTISTIC IMPRESSION				<p>Overtime penalty will incur a deduction of 1 point from Total Artistic Impression.</p> <p><b>In Case of a Tie:</b> The higher total for Artistic Impression will break the tie.</p>
	DEDUCTIONS (Overtime Penalty)				
	FINAL ARTISTIC IMPRESSION (150 total possible)				
	FINAL TECHNICAL EXECUTION (150 total possible)				
	FINAL SCORE (500 total possible)				
	PERCENTAGE (Final Score divided by 300)				

About two years of riding, judging, observing, note-taking, and informally discussing the pros and cons of various tests elapse prior to the first formal meeting to begin working on potential changes for new tests. Several of the subcommittee members also attend the USDF Test Writing Committee meetings at the USDF annual convention. We test-ride, test-judge, and test-time all potential changes. Then we start to discuss and negotiate the different elements and approaches. It takes many hours of conference calls and countless rounds of e-mails to hammer out the tests. After that, it's proofread, proofread, and proofread again!

The USEF tests are important not just to American dressage competitors. National federations in many other countries have recognized the quality of our tests and have been using them for years.

I hope that you enjoy the new tests. Please help us to improve them further by giving your feedback to the USDF and USEF test-writing committees. ▲

*Axel Steiner is the chair of the USEF Test Writing Subcommittee. An FEI 5\* (formerly "O") judge, he lives in San Marcos, CA.*

FREESTYLE GUIDELINE: *New Artistic Impression section*

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