



The Trip Harting Grant was established in honor of a popular Pony Club Dressage judge and instructor. Trip was a Graduate A member from Potomac Pony Club.

The Trip Harting Grant

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When I was accepted to the USDF L Program, I didn't know precisely what to expect. I did anticipate gaining a better understanding of the technical analysis of judging, biomechanics of the horse and rider, rules and regulation, and what the viewpoint is like from C. The USDF L Program was all of this and more! Fortunately, years of Pony Club

ratings provided me with the strength to manage the stress and high expectations of the examiners, to study the materials, and practice my judging skills. This whole experience has magnified my understanding of dressage judging terms, requirements of the levels, modifiers of the tests movements, definitions of the scores, directive

ideas, dressage rules and attire, and how to show empathy and provide constructive feedback to the rider. In order to provide insight to my experience, I will highlight specific details and the primary focus of each session.

The sessions of the L Program are taught by a plethora of wonderful and experienced judges. Session A was instructed by Janet Foy. This session focused on professional expectations and responsibility of a judge, judging methodology, rules and their application, general biomechanics of the horse and gaits, and the Pyramid of Training.

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Firstly, it is apparent that judges must maintain professionalism and consistency no matter what the situation, but consistency is a developed skill. I knew right away that I would be spending most of my time practice judging. Since I have been riding dressage for years, I knew many of the rules; but I was surprised at how detailed they really are and the protocols that need to be followed in order to enforce or take action on them. It took many times of rereading and asking questions about the rules to clearly understand them. As we moved into judging methodology, I realized just how

much thought a judge must truly put into their score. There are so many modifiers that contribute to or take from a single score and to what degree do you use it to determine the score.

The biomechanics of this session was the primary focus. It targeted on how the conformation of the horse, muscles, tendons, ligaments, and bones all work together to create movement. This section of this session was crucial for understanding how the horse uses its body, how it affects their gaits, and what to look for as a judge. The developing eye of a judge relies heavily on understanding what you are looking AT and what you are looking FOR. Again, this emphasized the need to practice judging. This session offered help in this area, as both days we were able to watch horses go through specific movements of training through second Level. Janet Foy would ask us for our score and why we gave it. This provided a lot of feedback on what is the criteria and the essence of each movement. Little did I know that I would have the criteria and essence of the movements memorized by the end of the program.

Session B goals were to help us understand the criteria and purpose of each level and the criteria for gaits, paces, and movements. Trenna Atkins was our instructor and she provided video after video of different tests, movements, and varying qualities of horses to help develop our eye. This session was great as it allowed for numerous opportunities for discussion about what to look for in each movement and also how to differentiate expectations through each level.

Again, we had the opportunity each day to watch horses perform movements and to score and discuss why we gave it that score. I found myself keeping pace better this session as I watched and scribed for myself. I also felt I was gaining understanding on how to differentiate the basics, criteria, and modifiers of each movement. Granted, I still had a long way to go!

Session B was extremely helpful and detailed as the reading material was specific to each movement in each level. The reading material had the biomechanics of each movement and listed the criteria, purpose or aim, common faults, suitable vocabulary, and modifiers that often occurred. I found this session to be the gateway to developing my eye and appropriate language to use per each movement. After this session was completed, I decided that I would need to create a document with each test movement with lists of vocabulary from tests I had accumulated over the years and that of my other dressage friends. I worked on this document for several months with another candidate. When it was finished it was thirty-five pages long and worth the time! Janet Foy had recommended that we do this and I used it throughout the program.

Session C was taught by Axel Steiner and this session's emphasis was on the collective marks and how to efficiently develop the final remarks. I immediately realized that brevity is not my strength, which is precisely what you need when you are writing final remarks. I realized that as a rider, I never knew just how much thought goes into the culmination of the collectives and final remarks. With Axel's humor

and experience, he took some of the anxiety out of this, but still strongly impressed upon the development of the final remarks as I watched the test. He suggested jotting down a brief note or even keeping the handy composite of further remarks that the L Program provides in our dressage test binder for a quick reference. I practiced both days of this session on how to ascertain what the obvious strength and weakness is of each horse and rider combination and put it into words. This was difficult, because there are so many facets of dressage, so which do you weigh importance on? Now I have to apply my knowledge of the criteria and essence of the movement!

Additionally, Axel discussed the three new rider marks and though the idea of having three would allow for a better evaluation and feedback, it also presented challenges. We discussed in depth what each of them evaluate, how to score them consistently, and how they tie into Submission and Impulsion. I left this session knowing that I would continue to reread material until this program was completed.

So now that I made it through Part 1, I was ready to get started on Part 2. I wanted to apply what I had read, reread, discussed, and practiced. Part 2 is comprised of three sessions called D1, D2, and the Final Exam which all occurred at recognized shows. The D1 session allowed me practice my judging skills, learn how to work with scribes, get a feel of the pace of one test after another, and to remember to breathe through it all. We had scribes the first day and practiced our "real time" judging. The

candidates are allowed one warm up test, followed by six more tests that are judged and scored. This format was followed in all three levels. Then I compared my scores to that of the instructor, who was Axel Steiner. The tabulation sheet allowed me to see how I placed each class and my overall point comparison to Axel. This provided the opportunity for me to discuss horses that I struggled with and other questions that I had. This first session in Part 2 was truly an eye-opener at how much a judge manages. There are so many unforeseen things that may and do occur and that it takes great skill to keep pace with the test and deal with the scribe getting behind, writing in the wrong box, the rider going off course, or a naughty horse. The second day of the session was designed for us to practice oral judging skills and discussion with the instructor about what we saw. It was nerve-wracking for me to have Axel sitting next to me, but great preparation for the final exam. The oral judging portion required me to show confidence and understanding of the requirements of the tests and the training pyramid.

The D2 session was much like the D1 session, but with higher expectations for us to show a greater level of understanding, confidence, and independence. Janet Foy was the instructor for this session. She did a great job impressing upon us that we must watch for the quality of the horse and be committed to giving higher scores if the horse and rider are doing a great job. She explained that often L Program candidates get caught up in "laser" judging and this intense focus is often on the negative occurrences of the test, rather

than the positive ones. I found her discussion on this to be very important and it conveyed the importance of giving 8's or 9's along with 3's or 4's if necessary. Janet reiterated the importance of having a spread of points from first to last place, so that your class is clearly placed in the correct order. Again, the first day was slated for practice judging and the second day was for oral judging. Janet had a different exercise for each candidate depending on our area of weakness. Instead of just judging the test, she had some candidates discuss what element was missing of the training pyramid per each movement or had us state the essence of each movement.

Throughout the duration of the L Program, it was required to complete at least 12 hours of scribing and 10 hours of sitting with an "R" or "S" judge. These experiences were invaluable! I spent much more than the required time with both scribing and sitting. All the judges were so helpful in allowing me to ask questions in between rides and giving tips about how to develop a judging methodology for specific movements. Two judges went so far as to allow me to tell them my comment and score with given movements and then they would give their own. It is obvious that there is much support among judges for the L Program and developing upcoming judges.

The Final Exam took place in Sacramento at the CDS Championships. Finally, ten months later and a trip out of state, I had made it to the final exam. I was stressed out and anxious, but ready to do my best to pass this exam with

distinction! This time we had Axel Steiner and Debbie Riehl-Rodriguez as our examiners. It was comprised of the written test, which occurred Friday night and then two grueling days of the same format as the previous sessions. The two big differences between the exam and the other sessions were that there was no feedback and that we did much more oral judging. We watched and judged beautiful horses and riders trying their best in their championship class.

In retrospect, this program taught me more than I expected, gave me the tools to judge fairly and constructively, and it has made me a better instructor and rider. I spent hours and hours reading the recommended books and materials, watching old dressage tests, using Youtube and USDF's e-Trak to judge out loud, traveling to shows to practice judge, and meeting with other candidates to study. Lastly, I had a huge amount of support from Kari McClain, "R" judge, Anne Appleby, "r" judge, and Mike Osinski, "S" judge who mentored and organized additional practice sessions comprised of volunteer riders from our barn for three of us candidates who went through this program together. They fervently supported our endeavor with their knowledge and experience of what it takes to be a successful judge.

Thank you for the financial support that The Dressage Foundation's Trip Harting Grant provided in developing my education as a judge. I did pass with distinction and hope to continue on to the "r" judge in due time. ■

To find more information on this grant, visit the "Opportunity" page of www.dressageponyclub.org.