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A One and a Two: Let's Pas de Deux

Pair up for some real freestyle fun

BY TIGGER MONTAGUE



OUT OF THIS WORLD: Katherine Bateson-Chandler on Rainier (front) and Tina Konyot on Liberty wow the crowd at the 2006 Challenge of the Americas (FL) with their sci-fi-themed pas de deux

PAS DE DEUX IS COMING INTO ITS own as an exciting part of dressage in the US. The Bengt Ljungquist Memorial (BLM) Championships, a well-known dressage championships in USDF Region 1, features pas de deux competition. The popular exhibition-style fund-raiser the Challenge of the Americas, held in March in Wellington, FL, includes pas de deux. Morven Park in Leesburg, VA, hosts the annual Pas de Deux Challenge. USDF now offers pas de deux year-end awards.

Many well-known trainers and riders—Betsy Steiner, Tina Konyot, Katherine Bateson-Chandler, Jim Koford, Becky Langwost, John Zopatti, Jules Anderson, Evelyn Susol, and Tami Hoag, to name a few—have stepped into the pas de deux ring.

If you're wondering what it would be like to dance not only with your horse but with a partner, read on.

Pas de Deux 101

Pas de deux invites creativity in both music and choreography. Want to ride to vocals? No problem. Worried about matching your horse's beats per minute (BPM) to music? In pas de deux, the music must only "suggest" the gaits, not match exact footfalls. What's more, you can make your choreography even more exciting when you execute it side by side with your pas de deux partner.

As in quadrille (freestyle routines for four or more horses), pas de deux is judged on spacing, alignment, and synchrony. *Spacing* is the pairs' ability to maintain even distances while riding in line, "follow

the leader” style; side by side; and performing mirror images. Choreography that highlights skill in spacing is thrilling to watch and earns points from judges.

Alignment and *synchrony* refer to the pairs’ precision and uniformity throughout the movements. For instance, if two riders are executing ten-meter circles at X in mirror images and one rider starts earlier than the other, their alignment will suffer because the horses will not reach B and E at the same time. The movement also would not be synchronized.

Pair up for Fun

Trish DeRosa and Heather Fay were the 2006 BLM reserve pas de deux champions, earning a score of 76 percent aboard their Appaloosas Wolfie and Cash. Says DeRosa: “I find the pas de deux is an amazing way to enjoy dressage competition. My horse can be a bit of a tough ride, but put on some music and have fun working with a partner and all of a sudden I am more relaxed, sitting better, and not thinking about the challenge. I also think that the horses really enjoy riding in company.”

Anne Moss, an experienced pas de deux competitor with her fellow Pennsylvanian, Deb Tsang, observes: “It’s nearly impossible not to smile and truly enjoy yourself riding a well-rehearsed pattern to beautiful music. Having a friend in the arena with you is so much more fun for horses and riders. It gives green horses a lot of confidence. Riding to music takes dressage to another level, and having it in equine stereo can be breathtaking to ride and watch.”

Many pas de deux riders remark on the laughter that accompanies their practice sessions. As Moss puts it, “We create choreography over a couple of glasses of wine and we think we’re brilliant. The next day, we try to ride the choreography and realize, whoa, we need to practice more!”

Judge Helen George chuckles at what she calls the “kamikaze moments” during pas de deux practices. “When the choreography is in the process of being formed,

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there are plenty of times of ‘My right or your right? Oops,’” she says.

Getting Started

The first step in creating a pas de deux is to find an appropriate partner. DeRosa found her partner at a show. Moss put an ad in her GMO’s newsletter. Your horses do not have to match in color, size, or even stage of training. What’s most important is that both horses and riders are comfortable and confident at the chosen level.

One way that pas de deux differs from solo dressage freestyle competition is that there are no qualifying requirements. Another is that, in pas de deux, each required movement does not receive its own mark. Instead, the judge assesses the overall accuracy and quality of execution. The highest coefficient in pas de deux is for “performance as a pair”: the spacing, alignment, and synchrony.

During your initial practice sessions with your partner, just ride together, without music or choreography. Play with

spacing and movements, and let the horses get comfortable with each other. Enjoy the process of riding side by side, in line, and in mirror images. Many good choreographic ideas can come from these early practice sessions before you turn to paper, pen, and a good bottle of wine!

Look for music that suggests trot, canter, and walk, and that is thematic. Donna Summer’s “She Works Hard for the Money” may be perfect for your trot, but that song will not work well paired with Aaron Copland’s *Rodeo* for canter.

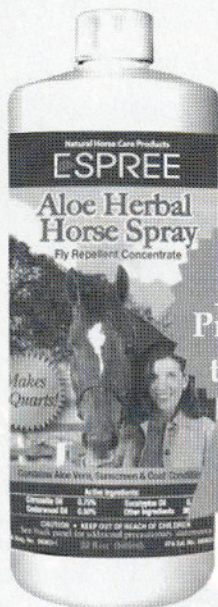
Pas de deux is a part of dressage whose time has come. Find your partner, bring your smiles, and let’s fill the arenas with pas de deux! ▲

USDF Freestyle Committee member Tigger Montague started her freestyle business, Spirithorse Productions, in the early 1990s. She produced and directed the freestyle version of *The Lion King* for the USDF Freestyle Symposium in 2001, and she created the *Celebrity Freestyle* for the Virginia Dressage Association. She lives in Charlottesville, VA.

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