

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO JOGGING

If you compete at an internationally sanctioned dressage competition, you'll have to take part in "the jog"—a horse inspection. Here's what you'll need to know.

BY JENNIFER M. MILLER

NO JOG, NO GO: In FEI competition, horses must pass a veterinary inspection before they may compete. Officials scrutinize a dressage horse at the 2012 London Olympic Games.

At the highest levels of international competition, horses are expected to be in top physical condition, and officials evaluate soundness and fitness to compete during mandatory horse inspections—commonly known as “the jog” or, if you prefer the British phrase, “the trot-up.”

In the sport of eventing, the jogs are so pivotal that they attract numerous spectators. Although they’re less of an attraction in other disciplines, horse inspections are mandatory for all disciplines, including dressage, at competitions sanctioned by the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI), the governing body for international equestrian competition.

If you plan to participate in FEI competition, you’ll need to know how to present your horse for the jog. And if you’re a spectator, it’s helpful to understand what’s going on and what the officials are looking for. Read on for our guide to the dressage horse inspection.

What Shows Require a Jog?

“By the end of 2015, twenty-one CDIs—Concours Dressage Internationale, or FEI-recognized dressage competitions—will have been held in the United States, and a horse inspection is required prior to the start of these competitions,” usually within 24 hours of the first ride, says Kristen Brett, director of dressage programs and endurance at the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF), Lexington, KY.

Often, a dressage competition holding CDI status comprises both an FEI-recognized division and a nationally (USEF/USDF) recognized division. Competitors in the CDI classes are required to take part in a horse inspection. At this month’s Dressage at Devon (PA), for instance, the CDI division includes classes at the FEI Junior, Young Rider, Under 25 Grand Prix, Prix St. Georges, Intermediate I and II, and Grand Prix levels.

A few high-level national championships also require horse inspections. The USEF mandates them for horses participating in a high-performance dressage national championship, such as the USEF Dressage Festival of Champions presented by the Dutta Corp., and the Markel/USEF Young and Developing Horse Championships. However, horse inspections are not held at Great American/USDF Regional Championships or at the US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan.

Why Jog?

According to Brett, “The purpose of the jog at either an FEI competition or a national championship is for the veterinary delegate and the ground jury to have the opportunity

to look over the horses. They are looking to ensure that the horses are fit to compete.”

“‘Fitness to compete’ is a somewhat subjective phrase that says a horse is free of any obvious clinical abnormalities that would put the horse in jeopardy of injury if it were to participate in the competition,” explains Duncan Peters, DVM, DACVSMR, an associate professor at Michigan State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine, East Lansing. “It mostly applies to the musculoskeletal system of the horse, but it can relate to cardiovascular and physiologic health, as well,” says Peters, who was the FEI veterinary delegate at the 2015 Pan American Games in Toronto and who will be a member of the FEI Veterinary Commission at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

“Fitness” is determined by a visual inspection of the horse and its movement by members of the ground jury in consultation from the FEI veterinary delegate, who is the veterinary equivalent of a dressage technical delegate or steward—an FEI official veterinarian whose primary focus is to ensure that veterinary standards are maintained and that the welfare of the horse is protected, says Peters. “They are looking for a healthy horse that is free of any marked discernible gait abnormality—lameness—or any other item that may be perceived by a bystander as to compromise the ability of the horse to compete.” The FEI veterinary delegate consults with the ground-jury members in evaluating any significant gait abnormalities that could impact the safety of a horse to compete.

The Jog, Step by Step

Horses and (usually) their riders—the “persons responsible,” in FEI lingo—wait in a collecting area to be announced and then move into the inspection area. One at a time, each horse is presented and its identity verified by the FEI veterinary delegate, who then conducts a brief visual inspection while the horse is stood up in hand.

Then it’s time for the actual jogging part, which takes place on a designated track usually 50 meters in length. Standing on the left side of the horse, the handler walks the horse on a loose rein about one-third of the way down the track, then trots to the end of the track. The pair slows to a walk and turns clockwise in a small circle, usually around a decorative arrangement, then picks up a trot again and continues back to the starting point. The trotting portion can be exciting to a super-fit horse, and more than one photographer has captured an image of some spontaneous airs above the ground.

At the conclusion of the jog, the inspection panel and the veterinary delegate have three choices: accept the horse for competition, not accept (i.e., eliminate) the horse, or refer the horse to the holding box for further examination prior to a



JOGGING STEPS: *The horse inspection begins with a visual inspection. FEI foreign veterinary delegate Dr. Kent Allen scrutinizes Breaking Dawn, ridden and handled by Canada's Ashley Holzer, at the 2012 London Olympics.*



Allen watches as Holzer leads Breaking Dawn away at a walk before trotting.



After making a clockwise turn, Holzer jogs Breaking Dawn back to the starting point.

decision. If a horse is not accepted, the person responsible is given a reason for the elimination. There is no appeal.

"In many cases," says Peters, "the ground jury acquiesces to the veterinarian to make the call as to whether a horse has a significant gait variation or lameness that requires it to be 'not accepted' or sent to the holding box." However, only the ground jury can eliminate a horse.

The holding box is a separate, cordoned-off area located adjacent to the inspection area but out of sight to spectators, media, and other competitors. FEI regulations require an announcement of progress for "held" horses, including the name of the athlete and horse, the competition number, and any decisions that are ultimately made by the ground jury.

In the holding box, the designated FEI holding-box veterinarian conducts a hands-on exam of the horse and the area or areas of concern, all with an FEI steward present. Active flexion tests (flexion of the joints followed by trotting away) is not permitted; walking and trotting in a circle is allowed, as are hoof testers and physical palpation. The horse's rider, handler, groom, and *chef d'équipe* may enter the holding box; and a veterinarian representing the horse may consult with the holding-box veterinarian.

Once the holding-box examination is performed, the holding-box veterinarian usually communicates with the person responsible, the *chef d'équipe*, and the private veterinarian, says Peters. The competitor then has the choice of either re-presenting the horse to the ground jury or asking for a reinspection the following day—an option available in dressage but not all disciplines, he says.

"If the competitor opts to re-present, the holding-box veterinarian then reports objective findings back to the

ground jury," says Peters. "There is no diagnosis of the condition, just a statement of fact." The ground jury and the FEI veterinary delegate then observe as the horse is jogged again, taking into consideration the information provided by the holding-box veterinarian, and a final "accepted" or "not accepted" decision is made. If the ground jury grants the competitor's request for reinspection the following day, then the horse is jogged again at that time and a final decision is rendered.

Presentation and Protocol

FEI horse-inspection rules don't actually specify much regarding how the horse and handler should be turned out for the jog. The rules state only that the handler should be "suitably dressed to present the horse for inspection," that the handler may carry a whip of up to 120 cm, and that horses must wear their competition numbers and "must be presented in a controlled and safe manner," which "normally requires a bridle." But there are a number of unwritten rules and traditions that first-time "joggers" need to learn.

Many dressage riders experience their first horse inspection at the FEI North American Junior and Young Rider Championships (NAJYRC). "Juniors and young riders often learn from their coaches or the *chef d'équipe* the correct way to handle the horse and what is expected of them," says Rosalind "Roz" Kinstler, of South Lyon, MI, who chairs the USDF Youth Programs Committee and is the USDF Region 2 FEI Junior/Young Rider coordinator.

Before the show, practice walking and trotting your horse in hand at home so that he learns to stay beside you



LOOK, IT'S A KITE! Some horses find the jog a little too exciting. This 2014 World Equestrian Games dressage competitor is making it difficult to evaluate his trot.

and match your pace. The more relaxed and obedient he is, the better he'll display his gaits and the more you will be able to keep the reins loose, as required. More than one CDI competitor has had to repeat the jog because the horse was leaping or cantering so much that he never showed a proper trot. And of course the last thing you want is for him to hurt himself during an unwanted display of exuberance.

Jessica Jo "JJ" Tate, a USDF bronze, silver, and gold medalist and a member of the silver-medal-winning Region 2 Young Riders team at the 1999 NAJYRC, thinks the horse inspection is necessary to ensure that horses are sound and healthy. Now an FEI-level competitor and trainer based in Chesapeake City, MD; and Wellington, FL, Tate likes to ride the horse before he jogs.

"My horses tend to get excited, so I like them to have a little less energy for it, as well as be loosened up," she explains.

Now that Tate has graduated from YR to adult CDI competitor, the only difference she sees between NAJYRC and CDI dressage horse inspections is dress code for the handlers. "In some ways, it's even a bigger deal when you are a young rider and your whole team picks out the outfit for NAJYRC. I now see many pros jogging in just riding pants," she says.

"The NAJYRC does a good job introducing the next generation to how a vet jog works and how to do it correctly," Tate continues. "Good horsemanship is an important part of becoming a successful rider, so everyone should learn to present a horse well." True to her YR roots, horse-inspection attire is important to Tate, who says she typically wears dress pants and a nice shirt, sometimes accessorized with a



JOGGING CHIC: Adult-amateur rider Janne Rumbough (center, holding horse Junior) won the ShowChic Best Dressed Award, co-sponsored by Kastel Denmark, for her impeccable horse-inspection turnout at a Global Dressage Festival CDI in Florida. Presenters, from left: Kastel Denmark-sponsored rider Lauren Knopp, Kastel Denmark owner Charlotte Jorst, ShowChic owner Michele Hundt, and Krystal Shingler of ShowChic.

scarf, and always safe footwear—no open toes or high heels.

But for some competitors, "suitably dressed" is open to interpretation. At the 2015 Reem Acra FEI World Cup Dressage Final horse inspection in Las Vegas in April, some competitors appeared in baseball caps, brightly colored sneakers, and denim.

Michele Hundt, owner of ShowChic, a dressage-attire boutique in Wellington, FL, is looking to up the fashion quotient at dressage horse inspections. During the Adequan Global Dressage Festival in Wellington each winter, she and her co-sponsors present "best dressed" awards to competitors following each of the eight CDI jogs. The best-dressed combos receive ribbons and prizes, such as breeches, saddle pads, and horse-themed gift baskets. The judging is subjective, of course, but "what started as fun is now competitive among riders and has raised the bar on rider turnout," Hundt says.

The fanciest outfit won't make up for a poorly turned-out horse, of course. Your horse should be the real star of the jog, with protocol dictating an immaculate grooming and braid job. Snaffle bridles are most commonly used, although not required. The tack should be as clean and sparkling as he is.

Best Foot Forward

You can't win in dressage just by aching the horse inspection, but you can certainly lose if your horse is deemed unfit to compete. Nothing is more important than a healthy, sound, and fit horse; but good preparation for the jog procedure, and the confidence that goes with knowing that you and your horse are looking your best, will help to make this important part of FEI competition go smoothly. Have a great show! ▲

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