Changes to the Freestyle Score Sheets

Note these important changes—and glean some tips for designing lower-level freestyles

By Janet L. “Dolly” Hannon

Effective December 1, 2014, there are some significant changes to the USDF freestyle score sheets that competitors, freestyle designers, and judges need to be aware of for the upcoming show season. I’ll explain them in this article.

Stricter Standard for Allowable Elements

The biggest change to the 2015 USDF freestyle tests is that, in order to be in compliance with United States Equestrian Federation dressage rules (USEF DR 129.7.b), a freestyle competitor may no longer perform movements and transitions that appear only in tests of a higher level.

In the past, freestyle competitors were permitted to include some movements and transitions that were found at a higher level—for example, performing a simple change of lead (a Second Level movement) in a First Level freestyle—but this is no longer the case. To avoid confusion, the USDF Freestyle Committee recommends including only movements that appear in the standard USEF dressage tests or that are listed as compulsory elements at or below the level you are showing.

There are a few exceptions to this rule, and they are listed on the freestyle score sheets and in “Additionally Allowed” on the facing page.

The Clock Is Ticking

Per USEF DR 129.6.e: “Under penalty of elimination at the discretion of the Judge at ‘C’, a rider must enter the arena within 20 seconds of the music starting. Music must cease at the final salute.”

Lateral Movements

You must show at least 12 meters of any lateral movement (e.g., shoulder-in). To ensure that the judge can clearly see the movement, 18 meters is recommended.

Find the Freestyle Score Sheets

The 2015 USDF freestyle score sheets; freestyle rules, guidelines, and definitions; information about freestyle awards; and much more are available on the USDF website. Go to usdf.org and then select Competition / Programs / Musical Freestyle.

Score-Sheet Enhancements

There are no changes to the artistic side of the score sheet. On the technical side of the score sheet, the boxes for the movements that could have multiple scores have been enlarged, as have the comment boxes. This should be somewhat easier on scribes. The Freestyle Committee hopes that, with more room to write, competitors will receive more comments and feedback specific to the technical movements, as well.

Tips for Lower-Level Freestyles

In the desire to make their lower-level freestyles more interesting, some competitors try to be creative in a way that unfortunately is confusing to the judge and is not advisable. Here are some suggestions for the do-it-yourselfer:

• Keep your freestyle on the short side. There is a maximum time limit of five minutes, but there is no minimum time. Repeating compulsory movements is not necessary and makes the judge and scribes’ job much harder.

• Make the choreography easy to follow. (As long as it is not an exact pattern from a current test, it will not be considered “test-like.”)

• It is difficult to be overly creative at some levels. Include the required movements in a logical way, and don’t make it challenging for the judge to follow your intentions easily.

• Many cuts in the music and chang-
es of gait can make a freestyle look and sound choppy. It is preferable for your freestyle music to sound like a composition.

• Strive to make all patterns in the choreography and movements clear to the judge sitting at C. Especially if you intend to qualify for Great American/USDF Regional Championships or the US Dressage Finals, ensure that a judge at B or E could also easily understand your choreography.

• Videographers tend to film from the side, but be sure you know what your freestyle looks like as viewed from C, as well.

Freestyle: A Growing Trend

At the 2014 Great American/USDF Region 2 Championships, there were more than 30 First Level freestyles in one class and big numbers in all of the USDF freestyle classes, which was exciting. I personally judged more than 50 lower-level freestyles at that show, which was a first for me. There definitely seems to be growth in the classes, and I hope that trend continues.

When it all works, the music enhances the horse, and the partnership and harmony between horse and rider are evident. Freestyle can be a beautiful thing to experience and to judge. ▲

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Additionally Allowed

Besides the compulsory elements for each level freestyle and the movements from the USEF dressage tests at the corresponding level, the following movements and transitions are “additionally allowed” in USDF freestyle competition:

**Training Level**
- Canter-trot-canter transitions with a minimum of 20 meters between the canter transitions
- Trot-halt-trot transitions
- Trot-walk-trot transitions
- Trot serpentine or single loop
- Larger serpentines with loops no smaller than 15 meters.

**First Level**
- Turn on the forehand
- Any configuration of leg-yield
- Trot circles of 10 meters or larger
- Trot or canter lengthening on a 20-meter circle
- Counter-canter
- Canter serpentines
- Canter circles of 15 meters or larger.

**Second Level**
- Renvers (removed from the standard USEF Second Level tests but still allowed in Second Level freestyles)
- Half turn on the haunches of no more than 180 degrees
- Trot circles of 10 meters or larger
- Medium canter or trot on a 20-meter circle
- Medium canter on a diagonal.

**Third Level**
- Renvers (now included in the standard tests)
- Half-pass counter-change of hand with only one change of direction (two half-passes)
- Half pirouette in walk
- Canter to halt
- Trot and canter circles of 10 meters or larger.

**Fourth Level**
- Half-pass zigzag in trot and canter (three or more half-passes)
- Canter pirouettes
- Three-tempi changes
- Trot and canter circles of eight meters or larger.