

Geometry Class

Tips on riding an accurate test from a USEF "S" judge

By Kathy Rowse

Most of us took geometry in tenth grade, never thinking it would turn out to be applicable in the dressage ring. (Maybe geometry class would have been more



EASY AS PI: Good dressage riding requires some knowledge of geometry

interesting if we'd known!) In fact, your success in dressage competition has a lot to do with your mastery of geometry as it relates to the figures and movements.

If you have attended the USDF L Education Program, you know that dressage judges consider accurate geometry to be less important than correct basics. However, the horse that is truly attentive to the aids will be very adjustable so that the rider can produce precise geometry, such as accurately sized and correctly shaped circles. Conversely, incorrect geometry is like a red flag, showing where the rider's aids or the horse's response was deficient. A skilled rider understands how the aids direct the horse to produce accurate geometry and therefore higher scores.

The World Is Round: Riding Circles and Voltes

There are many articles on how to ride a 20-meter circle, but still we judges often see 18-meter circles at the ends of the arena (at A and C) and 24-meter circles in the middle, at B and E. Study the test patterns and the spacing of the letter markers in the arena. Use cones to mark the circle points, and practice until you can control the size of the circle.

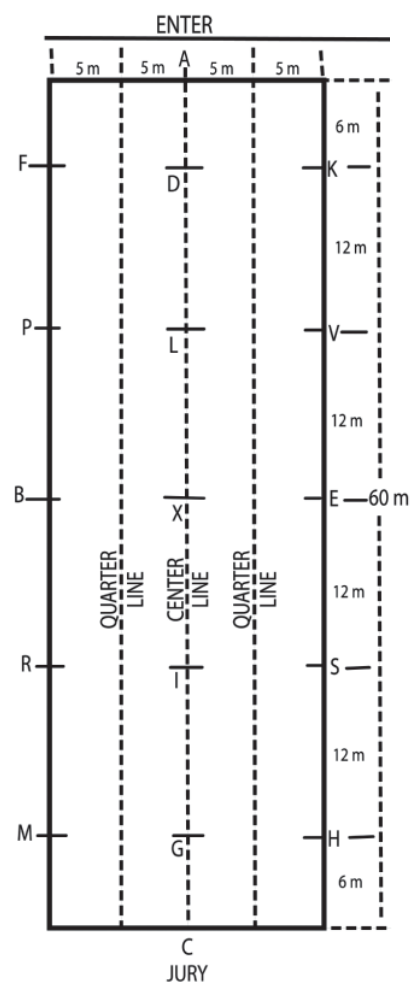
Another common error is the egg-shaped circle. Think of the four points of the circle as the points on a diamond. You don't want the figure to be diamond-shaped, but riding from point to point will help you stay on your line during each quarter of the circle.

Ten-meter voltes are introduced at Second Level. Impress the judge by not drifting through the outside aids into a 11-meter circle or making a 10-meter egg. To practice, try going around the perimeter of the arena and riding a 10-meter volte at every letter.

The eight-meter volte, introduced at Prix St. Georges, is even harder and

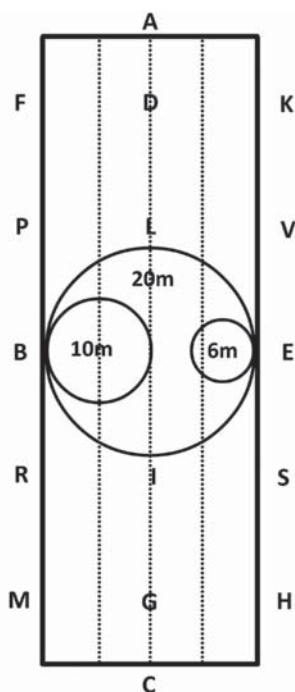
takes lots of practice. Have someone look at your voltes from both the side and in front; each view will provide a different picture of your inside and outside aids. If the judge's comment is "too large," we are really saying that the horse is drifting through the outside aids and that you are avoiding the difficulty of the exercise. This is a movement where even good riders lose points.

➔ **Show-ring tip:** Ride circles so that your outside leg is on the arc. Your outside leg and rein control the horse's outside shoulder and hind leg, so if your outside leg is on the arc, you know that he is on the correct circle line.



THE ARENA: Learn the spacing of the letter markers, the quarter lines, and the center line so that you ride accurate turns, figures, and movements

ILLUSTRATION BY KARL LAWRENCE; USEF ILLUSTRATION



CIRCLE DIMENSIONS: *Riding perfectly placed, round circles is a real test of your skill and your arena-geometry mastery. Pictured are a 20-meter circle and a 10- and 6-meter volte.*

Loop-de-Loop: Loops and Serpentes

Loops and serpentes are S-shaped figures. The wider the loops and the greater the number, the more challenging the figure.

The trot loops in Training Level Test 3 (H-X-K and M-X-F) are not diagonals with sharp turns (see illustration on page 30). Strive to show clear but fluid changes of bend in each loop.

First Level Test 3 contains the same loop, this time in canter with no change of lead. This figure should also be fluid with rounded curves, not pointy tips. Keep your horse's body organized and aligned; judges often see the horse's haunches leading or trailing. The foreleg should be on the same track as the haunches, with the horse maintaining slight flexion to the leading foreleg. No leg-yielding!

Second Level requires a three-loop canter serpentine, the width of the arena (see illustration on page 31). The serpentine geometry can be

difficult to master. Learn it by using cones to mark three equal 20-meter half-circles. It's one thing to look at a diagram of this figure, but it may help you to actually draw it out yourself.

A correct serpentine requires one straight stride on the center line between loops, parallel to the short side of the arena. Riding this figure accurately requires a great deal of balance. Common serpentine-geometry errors are diagonal lines instead of half-circles, and three-loop serpentes with the first and third loop too small and the second loop too large.

Transitions

A transition doesn't require geometry per se, but it does call for accuracy. There are two types of transitions: between gaits (say, from walk to trot) and within a gait (such as from working trot to a trot lengthening).

Between gaits. It takes lots of practice to be able to produce fluid, accurate transitions. Your horse must be responsive to your aids but not antici-

Rider Saddle Fit Checklist by Jochen Schleese CMS, CSFT, CSE Part 2

If the saddle doesn't fit the rider well, the rider's pain and discomfort will translate down to the horse. This checklist will help you determine if the saddle fits you well.

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 9. Do your thigh/knee rolls support you? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Can you post comfortably? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Is there enough room in front and behind your pelvis so that during posting you don't hit your pubic bone? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. During sitting trot you are thrown out of the saddle at the cantle area? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Is the saddle flap long enough so your boot top doesn't catch on it? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Is the seat seam comfortable and unnoticeable? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Do you have enough support from the saddle to be able to sit properly in position while the horse is walking? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Did you answer 'No' to any of the questions?
Book your personal 80-point saddle fit evaluation to horse and rider.

Points 1 - 8 were published in the previous issue.



The *female* Saddle Specialist
Infinitely Adjustable for Optimal Comfort

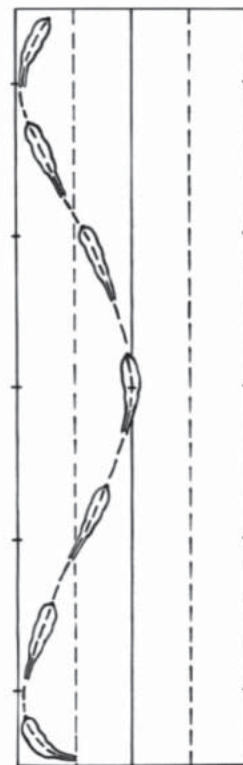
saddlesforwomen.com | info@schleese.com | 800.225.2242 © 2016. Schleese Saddlery Service Ltd. All rights reserved.



YOUR DRESSAGE

now available on the
USDF app!

USDF's newest publication, *YourDressage*, features stories written by participants from throughout the dressage community. Experience their stories as they navigate through the wonderful world of dressage. Download the free USDF app, *USDF: Your Dressage Connection*, and get connected!

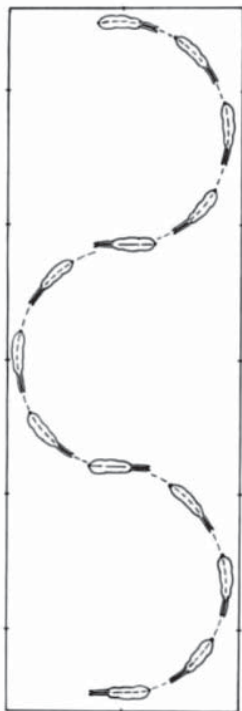


SINGLE LOOP: Loop as ridden at Training and First Level

pate the transition. To keep him really on your aids for transitions, practice riding five steps of walk to five steps of trot to five steps of canter to five steps of trot to five steps of walk. Or make a trot-walk-trot transition at every letter as you ride around the arena.

➔ **Show-ring tip:** The dressage tests call for transitions executed at specific letter markers, meaning when your horse's shoulder is opposite the letter. If you wait until he arrives at the letter to ask for the transition, it will be late. You must plan and ask preparatory questions of your horse before you reach the letter. If he is attentive, he will make the transition exactly where asked.

Within the gait. Judges often remark that transitions are gradual or unclear. However, we don't want you to charge forward at the start and pull back abruptly at the end. In the trot, think of the gait being adjustable on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being passage and 5 being extended trot. Practice making transitions from a "3" trot to a 4 and then to a 5; and then from 5



SERPENTINE: *The classic three-loop serpentine comprises three 20-meter half-circles, each connected by one straight stride over the center line, parallel to the short side of the arena*

to 4 to 3 to 2. Eventually you will be able to go from 3 to 5 and from 5 to 3 smoothly and effortlessly. Your horse should maintain a correct balance and outline during the transitions.

Transitions within the gait at the canter take even more practice. Ride the above exercise; then, on a 20-meter circle, try riding five strides of a bigger canter (lengthening, medium, or extended) to five strides of working or collected canter. Repeat the sequence for three or four circles; it will give you a clear idea of how adjustable your horse needs to be.

At Fourth Level and above, the rider performs extended canter on a diagonal to collected canter with a flying change. Frequently we see the horse collect as he is turning the corner and then change in the corner, after he has passed the letter. You must collect on the diagonal and make the change when your horse's nose is approaching the letter but he is still on the diagonal line. Practice collecting two strides before the letter and then

making the flying change one stride before the letter. As a judge, I will be very impressed with your precision and your horse's response.

Center Lines: Look at Me!

The turn onto the center line and the halt and salute punctuate your test and are the first and last impressions the judge gets of you and your horse.

A good halt starts with a balanced turn onto the center line. Many riders overshoot or undershoot the turn and therefore end up to the right or left of the center line. To the horse, being on the center line is like being out in the middle of the ocean, with no shore line visible to give him his bearings. To practice riding straight from A to C, try marking the center line with lime or chalk.

Good preparation for the halt involves maintaining an active trot or canter on the center line and then asking for smaller steps before the transition. Use your peripheral vision to make sure that your horse's body (ideally between

CEEEOACH®

Be Prepared to Train Like the Champions

CEEEOACH® continues to gain endorsements from professional trainers. See what everyone is talking about by visiting our website: ceecoach-us.com.



Joe Meyer
Olympic Eventing Athlete

"I really love this system.... It makes it so much easier to concentrate."



Isabell Werth,
Gold Medal Olympic Athlete



Shannon Peters,
Olympic Trainer and Dressage Gold Medalist



Angela Grzywinski,
Level II Certified Instructor



Lara Oles,
United States Paralympian





COMING SOON! CEEEOACH® XTREME:
In Case of Rain

Check out all of our devices and accessories at ceecoach-us.com



CEEEOACH®
powered by peiker




his shoulder and your boot) is at the correct letter when you ask for the halt.

Corners

Corners are judged as modifiers (they don't receive individual scores), but they are crucial in setting up the movements that follow. The horse that is straight going into the corner, shows clear balance and bend through the turn, and then is straight for one horse's length before the next letter will be balanced and ready for whatever the ride asks. If you cut the corner, you lose the opportunity to

prepare for the next movement and therefore the accuracy and clarity of the next transition will suffer. The US Equestrian Federation rules state that corners should be ridden as one-quarter of a volte appropriate to the level (10 meters at Training and First Level, eight meters at Second through Fourth Levels, and six meters above Fourth Level).

Good Basics + Good Riding = Improved Geometry

The more attentive the horse is to your aids, the better geometry you

will be able to produce and the more points you'll earn from the judges. Happy training and riding! ▲

Kathy Rowse is a USEF "S" dressage judge from Suffolk, VA, where she and her husband, Mike, own and operate Silverleaf Farm. She is a USDF bronze, silver, and gold medalist who has coached numerous students to their USDF medals. She is a faculty member of the USDF L Education Program and a member of the USEF Youth Committee.



US Dressage Finals

presented by Adequan®

Hospitality Sponsorship Opportunity

For more information about Hospitality or other sponsorship opportunities, contact:

Ross Creech
rcreech@usdf.org
(859) 971-7038

Show your support to competitors and event staff as a US Dressage Finals Hospitality Sponsor! Hospitality Sponsors will receive valuable onsite exposure to over four hundred of the top competitors from around the country, as they compete at this showcase event.

Hospitality Sponsorships are available starting at \$1000. Hospitality Sponsors will receive exposure in the event program and through onsite signage at hospitality events throughout the week. Additionally, Hospitality Sponsors have the opportunity to include a promotional gift item in the competitor gift bags.