

## Introducing the 2023 Dressage Tests

*The new USDF/USEF tests take effect December 1.  
Get the scoop on the changes from the horse's mouth—the test writers themselves*

By Gary Rockwell, Mike Osinski, Lilo Fore, Janet Foy,  
Kristi Wysocki, Nadine Schwartzman, and Janet “Dolly” Hannon  
Photographs by Jessica Farren Photography

Every four years, the USDF Test Writing Committee releases updates to the USDF and US Equestrian dressage tests (dressage-seat equitation, dressage sport-horse breeding, freestyle, and Introductory through Fourth Levels).

### The Revision Process: An Overview

*By Gary Rockwell*

For more than a year before the USDF Test Writing Committee begins work on a new set of tests, we welcome suggestions from mem-

sues regarding rideability, visibility for the judge (especially if there is only one judge at C), and time limits.

We also considered the movements that we felt are not generally ridden well, and in some cases changed the test directives to clarify the intent.

This year, the “single loop” received a new description, and the test sheet will include a diagram. Because the single loop was often ridden as a sharp turn before the corner letter, it often appeared as a diagonal line. We now describe finishing the corner and then starting a curved line, changing uniform bending at the quarter line.

In the review process, the Test Writing Committee also considers the progression of the tests and the current and proposed USEF and FEI dressage rules. Our goal is to design tests that give competitors the best opportunity to showcase their horses and their riding.

### Equitation Updated

*By Mike Osinski*

Two years ago, USDF appointed a Dressage Seat Equitation (DSE) Task Force to review and update rules and patterns of the DSE tests. As a member of the task force, I served as the liaison to the USDF Test Writing Committee.

One of the task force's accomplishments was to come up with language clarifications that also removed references to specific rules so as to avoid potential future confusion if rules are revised and renumbered.

The DSE test sheets were redesigned to include left and right categories as well as language changes that reflect the new test cycle.



HERE THEY ARE: The 2023 USEF/USDF dressage tests take effect December 1, 2022. Pictured are new-test demo pair Lindsay Burgner on Midsummer Night's Dream.

The current (2019) tests are in use through November 30, 2022, and the new 2023 tests take effect December 1, 2022. To explain what's changed and why, six committee members each contributed a section on a specific topic.

bers, riders, trainers, and judges. We receive many ideas and review each of them. We also receive requests *not* to change some of the tests because the current ones ride very well.

Decisions to make changes to the 2019 tests generally resulted from is-

We created new patterns for testing competitors' riding ability. These new patterns are designed to supplement current existing patterns, which are still available for use, as well as a "judge's choice" to make up unique patterns within standards.

## Purpose of the Levels

By Lilo Fore

The Test Writing Committee made some changes to the "purpose of the level" text that appears on each USDF/USEF dressage test sheet.

**Introductory Level.** We revised the purpose of this level with the goal of making it friendlier and less intimidating to beginner riders and those starting out in dressage. We want to invite riders to join this sport, and we know how vital it is for new dressage riders to understand the goals of this beginning level. Introductory Level is our basic level—but not less important!

The Intro Level purpose statement now reads: *to introduce the rider and/or horse to the sport of dressage, confirming that they are beginning to develop an understanding of correct dressage basics. The horse should be ridden freely forward in a steady tempo and clear rhythm, accepting contact with the bit. An understanding of test accuracy and geometry should be demonstrated.*

- *Understanding the correct dressage basics* is of foremost importance. Dressage can be a little intimidating, but please don't be put off.
- At this level, riders should *allow horses to move freely forward* with a steady tempo and a clear rhythm. Regardless of the horse's breed or type, dressage judges want to see a four-beat walk, a two-beat trot, and a three-beat canter. We want riders to know that this is more important than being fancy!
- *Acceptance of contact with the rider's hands* is the start for the horse. Later on in the training we'll want the horse to be truly on the bit, but at this point we would like to see the horse accept a connec-

tion: confident enough to hold the bit in a steady way without feeling trapped and while being allowed to reach forward to the rein.

- Even in the beginning, horses and riders must learn about correct *geometry and lines of travel*. Every time the horse is allowed to drift or to wander about through the arena, the rider is giving up one of the most important training tools throughout all levels. The benefit of paying attention to correct geometry is that you learn to guide your horse and to keep him between your leg and rein aids to the best of your ability. Doing so also improves the horse's confidence because he doesn't have to guess where you want to go next. Riding without secure, accurate geometry is like wandering through town without knowing the street names or your intended destination.



PONY POWER: Charlotte Green and the Welsh cross Comanche focus during their Intro B demo test

**Training Level.** As riders will notice, the correct basics are always mentioned and will never go away in any purpose of any level. The purpose statement now reads: *to confirm that the horse demonstrates correct basics by showing suppleness both laterally and longitudinally, moving freely forward in a clear rhythm with a steady tempo and readily accepting contact with the bit. Correct geometry and lines of travel should be shown.*

Let's look at the key elements of this purpose statement in more detail.

- *Correct geometry* is stressed. At

Training Level, judges expect more precisely ridden circles, transitions (including proper preparation), and other figures.

- *Longitudinal suppleness* is a new and important requirement. There is slightly different wording than the prior purpose of Training Level, but only because we want riders to pay attention to the importance of developing lateral and longitudinal suppleness. These will influence the quality of the free walk and the development of the correctly executed "stretchy circle."

**First Level.** There were a few significant changes to the wording of the purpose of this level, which now reads: *to confirm that the horse demonstrates correct basics and, in addition to the requirements of Training Level, has developed improved balance, lateral suppleness, and throughness, as well as the thrust to perform lengthenings of stride. The horse should be on the bit.*

Key elements of this purpose statement are:

- Horses and riders must now show *improved balance*.
- The horse should show a slightly higher degree of *lateral suppleness*. First Level tests contain more complicated gymnastic exercises, which makes lateral suppleness more challenging.
- The word *throughness* is added to the the purpose of First Level. Throughness will be from this level on a very important part of the training, as it influences the quality of the transitions within and between gaits.
- The purpose now also states that the horse should demonstrate the *thrust to perform lengthening of strides*, to indicate that the thrust needed to perform these forward-going transitions is a part of throughness.
- One very important new clarification is that judges now expect the horse to be *on the bit*, not just accepting of the bit. The horse should become more confirmed

in the connection from hind-quarters to front.

**Second Level.** Second Level introduces collected and medium gaits. The purpose statement now reads: *to confirm that the horse demonstrates correct basics and now begins to accept more weight on the hindquarters as the collected and medium gaits develop. A greater degree of straightness, throughness, and balance are required to perform the movements with ease and self-carriage.*

- *More weight must be distributed onto the horse's hindquarters as the collected and medium gaits develop. If the hindquarters do not become more weight-bearing, the horse's forehand and shoulders are without the needed support system to manage the increased difficulties of this level.*
- The Second Level horse should demonstrate a greater degree of *straightness, suppleness, and throughness.* In addition, the *balance* needed for the more difficult exercises of this level must improve in order to enable the horse to perform with ease and to show the development of *self-carriage.*

**Third Level.** The new purpose is *to confirm that the horse demonstrates correct basics while maintaining consistent uphill balance and self-carriage. Increased engagement facilitates clear differences in collected, medium, and extended gaits with well-defined, balanced transitions. Movements should be accomplished with harmony and ease due to the increased balance and collection. The horse must demonstrate a greater degree of throughness, suppleness, straightness, and bending.*

- The development of *uphill balance and self-carriage* is stressed.
- *Increased engagement* facilitates clear differences among collected, medium, and extended gaits, coupled with well-defined transitions.
- The *rider's skills* must also continue to develop. The rider must be sufficiently competent and sit sufficiently well to enable the horse

to develop increased impulsion. Without impulsion, there cannot be increased engagement.

- *Lateral and longitudinal suppleness* must now become more confirmed.
- A higher degree of *throughness* must be achieved.
- Movement then can then be accomplished with *harmony* and *ease* due to the increased balance and collection.

**Fourth Level.** The purpose statement for this level now reads: *to confirm that the horse demonstrates correct basics and has developed sufficient throughness, suppleness, balance, and impulsion to perform with ease the exercises at this medium level of difficulty. The horse has established consistent self-carriage and lightness through improved connection, engagement, and collection. The movements and transitions are performed with greater straightness, impulsion, and cadence.*

- *Throughness.* The horse should demonstrate the combination of suppleness, balance, and impulsion needed to perform the exercises with ease.
- *Adjustability* between and within gaits should be more confirmed. This includes being able to execute transitions with subtle aids.
- More complicated lateral movements are now required, so the rider should be able to demonstrate a greater degree of *suppleness* without losing *balance.*
- Increased *impulsion* is needed to develop greater engagement, collection, self-carriage, and lightness through the improved connection. Also, the development of *cadence* is now possible as all the above requirements are being developed.

## Overview of the Test Changes: Four-Year-Old Through Third Level

By Janet Foy

Here is a summary of what's changed in the actual test patterns

themselves for the 2023 test cycle. I'll focus on the USEF Four-Year-Old through Third Level tests.

**Four-Year-Old.** The trot work stays the same. A longer line (now H-P) has been added for the free walk, and there is less medium walk. This longer line will allow horses more time to relax. This also flops the canter patterns. The canter departs are now between letters (A and K; A and F), and the stretching circle is on the left rein due to the canter work's being reversed.



DEVELOPING PRIX ST. GEORGES: Amanda Olson rides Seraphims (St. Moritz Junior x Sir Donnerhall I)

**Developing Prix St. Georges.** No changes.

**Developing Grand Prix.** No changes to the test pattern. There are, however, now two collective marks:

1. Implementation of General Principles (freedom and regularity of the gaits; engagement of the hindquarters; elasticity of the steps; suppleness of the back; straightness; acceptance of the bridle; self-carriage)
2. Harmony of Presentation (attention and confidence of the horse; harmony in the presentation of the rider/horse combination; rider's position and seat; discreet and effective influence of the aids).

**Training Level. Test 1:** The transition to medium walk (movement 6) is now between letters so it is more gradual.

**Test 2:** No changes.



**SHALLOW LOOP:** This friendlier figure has replaced the three-loop width-of-arena serpentine in Training Level Test 3. Pictured are Training 3 demo pair Claire Darnell and the KWPN gelding Matthew S (Geniaal x Fidermark).

**Test 3:** The serpentines, width of the arena, have been removed and the shallow loops have been restored (H-X-K and M-X-F). This will be more inviting and easier for horses at this level.

**First Level. Test 1:** Canter lengthenings have been removed, as we felt that it is too early for the horse to show clear transitions.

**Test 2:** Prior to the leg-yields, the horse will now turn up center line rather than using the half-circles. This will give the horse and rider a bit more time to prepare for the leg-yields.

**Test 3:** The movements remain the same; however, the order of gaits is now trot, canter, walk, trot, canter. The committee felt that the canter work in the previous Test 3 was too long and required too much strength for a horse at this stage of training. With Second Level and collection coming up, we did not want horses to learn to run through the canter work.

**Second Level. Test 1:** This test has been shortened at the end with the removal of the last canter depart. Both canter leads have already been shown from the walk, so this was unnecessary. The trot is at the same place (at P), but the last medium will be from K to R.

**Test 2:** The medium trot has been put before the lateral work to help get the horse thinking forward.

The shoulder-in pattern follows. The rein back has been removed. The rest of the test is unchanged.

**Test 3:** No changes.

**Third Level.** There were no changes to these tests, except that all flying changes now have double coefficients. The committee liked how the tests were being ridden and judged and had no suggestions for improvement.

## Changes to the Fourth Level Tests and the DSHB Score Sheets

By Kristi Wysocki

**Fourth Level Test 1:** The shoulder-in was moved from the center line to the rail to make it a little less challenging. Now that the degree of difficulty of these shoulder-ins has been reduced, the double coefficient is shifted to the trot half-passes instead.

**Test 2:** The extended canter is now placed before the working pirouettes to help the rider create more activity in preparation for the pirouettes. The trot half-passes no longer have double coefficients, but the canter half-passes now have double coefficients.



**REDESIGNED TEST:** Fourth Level Test 3 should now be more user-friendly, with changes including canter half-pass to the center line, followed by a diagonal line with a half-pirouette. Jessica Wisdom rides the Dutch Warmblood Falcon (UB40 x Flemmingh).

**Test 3** has been modified significantly to make it more user-friendly for both horse and rider. It is much shorter than the previous version,

especially the canter tour. The major change is the removal of the canter half-circles in true and counter-canter. The canter tour is now somewhat similar to that in Third Level Test 3. The canter half-pass is ridden to the center line, followed by a diagonal line. The canter half-pirouette is then asked for on that diagonal line. This more “open” line for the canter half-pirouette is designed to help the horse have an easier time in executing the movement with ease.

In the trot, the shoulder-ins have been moved to the rail (they were previously on the center line), and they are no longer double coefficients. Be aware that the transitions into and out of the extended trot are now double-coefficient movements. This change was made to make riders more aware of the importance of these transitions.

**Dressage Sport Horse score sheets.** A significant modification was made to the Materiale score sheet, with the directives being revised to better clarify what is and is not allowed. The judge is allowed to ask for basic gaits only, not for any movements (stretch circles, leg-yield, lateral work, halts, and so on). Lengthenings at the trot and canter are allowed only with four- and five-year-olds. If a three-year-old is in the same class as four- and five-year-olds, then lengthenings are not allowed.

An explanation about dividing large classes has also been added. Prior to the class, show management should divide classes with 12 or more horses into groups. Management can assign times for each group to enter the ring. Horses are judged in groups of six or fewer at a time. The entire class is then placed as a whole. No more than six horses at a time should be allowed to canter at the same time.

The Dressage Sport Horse Prospect score sheet was modified to include a Four-Year-Old Prospects division for four-year-old mares,

geldings, and stallions. We added this newer division to give four-year-olds the opportunity to compete as dressage sport-horse prospects in addition to four-year-old mares and stallions competing as breeding stock. The Dressage Sport Horse Four-Year-Old Prospect division classes must be judged using the DSHB Sport Horse Prospect score sheet. Note that four-year-old mares and stallions may compete in either or both of these divisions.

## Making the Dressage Tests More Horse- and Rider-Friendly

By Nadine Schwartzman

Three years ago, when Gary Rockwell asked me if I would be interested in joining the USDF Test Writing Committee, I accepted enthusiastically. I have loved dressage tests ever since I was a little girl riding in Germany, and the opportunity to be involved in writing them was incredibly exciting to me.

I have ridden every test from Training Level to Grand Prix on multiple horses and also have clients competing at all levels. My primary goal as a committee member was to make the 2023 tests as horse- and rider-friendly as possible. Here are a few of my thoughts on the changes at each level.



LAYING THE FOUNDATION: Training Level remains the bedrock of correct gymnastic development. Pictured are demo pair Lindsay Burgner on Midsummer Night's Dream.

**Training Level.** In Test 1 the transition from working trot to medium walk is now between C

and H, rather than at C. It's a small change, but it's one that I believe will give riders more time to prepare a smoother transition, especially on greener horses.

Test 2 remains unchanged. In the past this test has been criticized as being too long, but as a rider of young horses I have always appreciated this test. It flows well and gives me more time in the show ring with less-experienced horses to build their trust and confidence.

You will see the biggest changes at this level in Test 3. The three-loop serpentine has been replaced with a single loop, which allows the horse to remain in better balance while still showing changes of bend. In the 2019 version of the test, the transitions from working canter to working trot to medium walk came up quite quickly, often resulting in unbalanced transitions. This issue has been addressed by placing the transition from working canter to working trot on the H-X-F diagonal at X, followed by the medium-walk transition at A. This new sequence will also prepare horses and riders for some of the movements in First Level, such as the change of lead through trot on the diagonal. The new diagram of the shallow loop on the score sheet is a great added visual resource.

**First Level.** The lengthening of stride in canter has been removed from Test 1. This gives horses and riders the opportunity to develop a more balanced canter in the 15-meter circles of Test 1 before demonstrating the lengthening of stride in Tests 2 and 3, thus allowing for a more gradual increase in difficulty throughout the level.

In Test 3, the canter work has been divided for better balance, as the previous canter tour was quite long. Both leg-yields are now ridden toward the judge at C, which enables the judge to better assess the connection and flexion.

**Second Level.** In Test 1, the end was shortened to allow for a more

fluid finish. The canter down the long side to the trot transition at E in the 2019 version was lengthy and not necessary in a Second Level test.

Test 2 received the most changes at this level. Medium trots before each set of lateral work allow the horse to gain impulsion before he is asked to demonstrate collection. In the 2019 version, all lateral work was done consecutively after the initial center line. This was too much collection without the ability to go forward in between, and it often resulted in labored lateral work. The medium trot on the last center line has also been removed, making for a less-overwhelming test.

Test 3 remains unchanged. It's a lovely, balanced test with good flow and symmetry.

In Second Level as well as Third, the direction to "shorten stride in walk" before the canter transitions has been removed, and before the turn on the haunches it has been replaced with "collect." As a trainer, I'm always striving to preserve the purity of the walk. I believe that these changes are a great step in the right direction. Now riders can focus on preparing for the transition or for the turn on the haunches instead of on shortening the walk.

**Third Level.** Not much changed at Third Level in this test cycle. The most notable difference is that the flying changes now have a coefficient of 2 starting with Test 1. As a rider and trainer, I appreciate that this brings focus to the flying changes, which are an integral part of Third Level and a necessary stepping stone to moving up the levels successfully.

**Fourth Level.** This saw the most changes of any level. Our goals were to make Fourth Level more attractive to riders and to increase test utilization. Fourth Level is an important bridge between Third Level and Prix St. Georges. I hope that the new tests will encourage combinations that confirm the skills needed to move up to the FEI levels successfully.

## Bringing the New Tests to Life

Test 1 has always been a favorite of mine. Small changes, such as moving the shoulder-in from the center line to the long side, were done with the intention of allowing for better balance in the shoulder-in along the rail.

In Test 2, the extended canter has been placed before the canter working pirouettes. With this change, the horse/rider combination can gain more impulsion and activity in preparation for the collection required in the working pirouettes.

Test 3 has been completely rewritten. The most notable change is the removal of the half 10-meter circles at canter and counter-canter, which I never found particularly pleasant to ride or helpful in my training. They have been replaced with a fluid pattern of a half-pass to the center line, a half 10-meter circle after 12 meters of straightness, to a diagonal on which a half working pirouette in canter is ridden. I find this pattern quite inviting to the developing horse, who is still learning to maintain balance in these movements.

The shoulder-in has also been moved to the rail in this test. This makes the tests more consistent with the requirements of the Prix St. Georges, as now the first shoulder-in on the center line will be required in the Intermediate I.



**HELPING THE YOUNGSTERS:** The first canter transition in the USEF Four-Year-Old test will now be performed between letters, which should bolster young horses' confidence. Rachel Marie demonstrates the Four-Year-Old test aboard the Oldenburg mare Debutante (Benidetto x Don Frederico).

Special thanks to Donida Farm, Auburn, Washington, for the use of its beautiful facility to film the new 2023 dressage tests; to on-site organizer Gwen Blake and off-site organizer Janet Foy; and to our film narrators and technical experts, FEI 3\* judge Kari McClain and FEI 4\* judge Mike Osinski.

We couldn't have done it without the following talented demonstration riders and horses. Thank you for lending USDF your time and talents over two scorching-hot days in July 2022!

Gwen Blake and the Hanoverian Enigma (Scudaria x Furstin de Charry)  
Lindsay Burgner and the pony Midsummer Night's Dream (by Fürst Class)

Claire Darnell and two mounts: the KWPN Matthew S (Geniaal x Fidermark) and Harrold S (Vivaldi x Fidermark)

Nina Diaz and the Lusitano/Dutch Warmblood cross Fahdi DE C

Charlotte Green and the Welsh cross Comanche

Carrie Gregory and the Hanoverian Hummer Thyme (by Sir Gasperon)

Dannelle Haugen and the Arabian HM Nahar ++++/ (by Akma D Day+++/)

Tabitha Hopp and the half-Arabian Diamond Bey (Diamondhead x Winchester Bey)

Teresa Leahy and the Dutch Warmblood Dominique (by Sandroo)

Rachel Marie and four mounts: the Oldenburg Debutante (Benidetto x Don Frederico), the Arabian/Hanoverian cross Serena M, the Oldenburg First Dibs (by Fürstenball), and the German Riding Pony Hermes (North Forks Cardi x HS Wistar)

Lucy Matulich and the Oldenburg mare Sophera CR (by Sempatico)

Kristin Miller and the Norwegian Fjord Bergen Sandra (by Heljos Solar)

Christine Murray and the Oldenburg Incandescent (Danciano x Sempatico M)

Michelle Newman and the Friesian/Gypsy Vanner cross Spott On (Gabriel x Gries Tjeerd)

Sophia Nimon and the Lipizzaner Maestoso II Gabriola (by Maestoso II Ambrosia)

Amanda Olson and the Hanoverian Seraphims (St. Moritz Junior x Sir Donnerhall I)

Sarah Cohen Steadman and the Oldenburg First Romance (Fürst Romancier x First Class)

Jessica Wisdom and the Dutch Warmblood Falcon (UB40 x Flemmingh).



**CALLING ALL BREEDS:** The USDF film and photo shoot featured a wide array of breeds and types. Pictured are Training Level demo pair Michelle Newman and the Friesian/Gypsy Vanner cross Spott On.

**Young Horse and Developing Tests.** As somebody who shows a lot of young horses every year, the revision that I am most excited about is the seemingly minor change of the first canter transition in the USEF Four-Year-Old test from at the letter to between two letters. This will allow us to better prepare and support our young horses, preventing tension and mistakes that can compromise a youngster's confidence in the ring. I also really appreciate the longer free walk, which allows for optimal space to present the young horse's walk.

There are no changes to the Developing tests except that the collective marks were updated to match the FEI tests' new collectives. The collective marks going forward will now be the

implementation of general principles and harmony of presentation. I believe that emphasizing the importance of harmony can only be a win/win for both horses and riders.



*Gary Rockwell, chair of the USDF Judges Committee and the USDF Test Writing Committee, is a USEF "S" judge and a retired FEI 5\* judge from Wellington, Florida. Equitation is one of the judging special-*

*ties of FEI 4\* judge Mike Osinski, Lacey, Washington. USEF "S" judge Lilo Fore is a retired FEI 5\* judge and a longtime USDF Instructor/Trainer Committee co-chair from Santa Rosa, California. Janet Foy, of Colorado Springs, Colorado, is an FEI 5\* dressage and young-horse judge. Kristi Wysocki is an FEI 4\* dressage and young-horse judge, USEF sport-horse judge, and longtime USDF Sport Horse Committee chair from Coupeville, Washington. Nadine Schwartzman is a USDF bronze, silver, and gold medalist and an FEI-level trainer/competitor from Eagle, Idaho. Janet "Dolly" Hannon, of Arvada, Colorado, is a USEF "S" judge and chair of the USDF Freestyle Committee.*

## Changes to the USDF Freestyle Score Sheets

By Janet "Dolly" Hannon

The USDF Test Writing Working Group, with input from the USDF Freestyle Committee, has made some major changes to the USDF freestyle score sheets for the 2023 test cycle.

The main changes are to the artistic marks and their coefficients. These are now more in line with the FEI artistic marks: with the mark for rhythm, energy, and elasticity (REE) moved from the technical side of the score sheet to the artistic side.

With a few exceptions for degree of difficulty, all artistic marks now carry a coefficient of 4 for REE, choreography, and degree of difficulty (which varies according to the level).

At all levels, the music score now has a coefficient

of 2, as does the interpretation score. This is a reduction from previous test cycles.

The chart below shows the coefficients for the artistic marks.

Coefficients have been added to most walk scores, and more coefficients have been added to key movements at the various levels. Be sure to look at the score sheets to see where coefficients have been added, as these have an impact on the technical marks.

In addition, competitors and choreographers should review the bottom of the score sheet to see what elements are "clearly forbidden" (usually anything from a higher level, including transitions) and what elements are considered "additionally allowed movements or transitions." This information is critical in ensuring that your freestyle stays within the rules and guidelines.

Collective Mark	Training Level	First Level	Second Level	Third Level	Fourth Level
Rhythm, Energy, & Elasticity	4	4	4	4	4
Harmony	4	4	4	4	4
Choreography	4	4	4	4	4
Degree of Difficulty	1	2	3	4	4
Music	2	2	2	2	2
Interpretation	2	2	2	2	2

New Freestyle Coefficients for Artistic Collective Marks