

MYTHBUSTERS, TD EDITION

Dressage technical delegates are much more than “the enforcers.”
What they do and why you should make the TD your go-to competition resource.

BY THE USDF TECHNICAL DELEGATES COMMITTEE



PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILLI

KEEPING IT CLEAN: US Equestrian “R” dressage TD Kaye Phaneuf of Oregon checks the bit of Khobi Khopi, a 2008 Arabian gelding owned and ridden by adult amateur Jennifer Marietta

Uh-oh, I wonder who's in trouble now?" Startled at your friend's question, you look around the warm-up area at the dressage show where you've gone to watch your trainer ride. You see what your friend was referring to: The show's technical delegate (TD) is approaching.

The presence of the TD does indeed rattle some riders. Ask competitors what the TD does at a USEF-licensed/USDF-recognized dressage competition, and you're likely to hear everything from "they can tell you whether a certain supplement is legal for use at a competition" to "they eliminate competitors for violating the rules."

In fact, the TD's role could not be more different from these common perceptions. In this article, we'll explain how the TD helps to ensure the welfare of horses and riders at shows. We'll also hear from some TDs, who share their experiences.

Toward a Level Playing Field

Every licensed dressage competition in the US is required to hire one or more TDs, depending on the size of the show, and the US Equestrian Rule Book spells out the TD's role and responsibilities in detail.

The principal duties of the TD are to safeguard the welfare of the horse; to help show management provide a safe and fair competition for all; and to protect the interests of competitors, judges, and management. The TD investigates any issues that arise during a competition; advises competition management of any problems with arenas, schooling areas, or show facilities; and helps to ensure that the competition is run in compliance with the rules.

TDs play a major role in ensuring that all tack, equipment, and attire used by competitors is legal under US Equestrian dressage rules. TDs train ring stewards to perform equipment checks and are available to answer questions pertaining to tack, equipment, and attire.

Who Ya Gonna Call?

The TD can be a tremendous asset to show management, judges, and competitors alike. Perhaps you're a rider, and you think that that the competition arena looks lopsided. Or you're a judge, uncertain about the legality of the bridle on a horse that just completed a test in your ring. Or a warm-up-ring steward, worried about a horse that has been in there schooling for close to an hour on a sweltering summer day. Or a show secretary, and unsure who's eligible to compete in a qualifying class. Or the manager of a dressage sport-horse breeding show who needs to adjust the size of

the judging triangle because of the limitations of the facility.

In every one of these situations, the show's technical delegate is the go-to resource. The TD is working to help ensure that the competition operates in full compliance with the rules, but he or she is also there to problem-solve and educate.

"It's a more multifaceted role than [many competitors] are aware of," says Connecticut-based adult-amateur dressage competitor Cynthia Clarke Paolillo. "The TD is an approachable person, there to answer your questions and guide you in complying with the rules."

From the Horse's Mouth: TDs on TDs

Similar to the career of a dressage judge, it takes many hours of training to become a TD. At shows, TDs work long hours and sometimes must deal with angry or frustrated competitors (or parents). Why do TDs do it? To find out, we asked three TDs to share the challenges and the rewards of the job.

Sally Davenport is a US Equestrian "R" dressage TD from Scituate, Massachusetts. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, she was an active lower-level dressage competitor who also managed schooling shows in her area. At one licensed show, she saw the TD expertly explain the rules and diffuse the

Before the Show: Rules Resources for Competitors

If even trained professionals struggle to keep up with US Equestrian rule changes and the never-ending stream of new bits and bridles hitting the market, then it's no wonder that competitors can feel overwhelmed. Use these resources before you show to help stay on the right side of the law.

US Equestrian equine drugs and medications rules: Read the rules and access the latest updates at usef.org. Direct questions to medequestrian@aol.com or (800) 633-2472.

US Equestrian tack, equipment, and attire rules: Dressage rules (DR) 120 and 121 in the USEF Rule book (online at usef.org) explain what's legal and illegal at the various levels. For the latest updates, see the DR 121 supplement known as Annex A, which contains color photographs as well as handy charts (usef.org/forms-pubs/96D17ISsaCo/annex---bits-saddlery-equipment).



EQUIPMENT CHECK: Phaneuf checks rider Marietta's spurs. The TD dons a fresh pair of disposable gloves for each horse to ensure sanitary conditions.

What Does It Take to Become a TD?

Given the wide-ranging responsibilities of a dressage technical delegate, it may come as no surprise that the path to becoming a licensed TD is not simple.

US Equestrian oversees the training and licensing of TDs. A candidate must complete certain prerequisites prior to acceptance into the training program to become a recorded (aka "r," or "small r") TD. After entering the training program, a candidate must apprentice at a minimum of four different licensed competitions and pass an exam. Candidates must also complete the Pony Measurement Certification Program, which includes another exam. Similar requirements apply to those "r" TDs who wish to be promoted to registered ("R" or "large R") status. Licensed TDs must maintain currency through continuing education and periodic retesting.

Find the full US Equestrian TD program requirements at usef.org/forms-pubs/89owed2Wicg/dressage-technical-delegate---recorded. Then check out "Inside USDF" on page 4 of this issue to read about USDF Region 6 director Peter Rothschild's experiences in pursuing his TD's license.

anger of a father whose daughter was eliminated because of her elderly pony's lameness. Impressed, Davenport decided to pursue the goal of obtaining her TD's license.

Anne Sushko, an "r" TD from Dubuque, Iowa, is an adult-amateur dressage enthusiast who taught middle school for 37 years. As she was preparing to retire, she thought that becoming a TD would allow her to continue to pursue the things that she loved about teaching: education, working with people, reading, and sharing information.

Laurie Daniel, of Brentwood, California, is the newest of the three TDs we interviewed, having recently earned her "r" license. As the manager of several large West Coast dressage competitions, she realized that there is a shortage of TDs in her part of the country. She decided that becoming a TD herself would be a good way to give back to the sport and to fill a serious need.

Davenport, Sushko, and Daniel agree that the most difficult part of the TD's job is keeping up on the rules, staying current on all the new equipment, and being knowledgeable enough about them to be able to educate competitors.

"Although I expect things to change, the continuous addition of rules and equipment continues to surprise me," Sushko admits.

As vexing as it can be to try to keep up with the changes, many TDs find the element of ongoing education to be one of the most rewarding aspects of the job.

"Riding," says Daniel, "is probably the easiest part of showing. Knowing the rules and nuances, and getting through the paperwork, are the real challenges for both competitors and show management."

Davenport points to the travel and the opportunities to solve problems and to educate and interact with people as her main motivators.

At Your Service

TDs wear many hats: diplomat, advocate, umpire, arbitrator, facilitator, compliance officer, ring crew, problem solver, evaluator, and crisis manager, to name a few. Say hello to the TD at your next competition, and don't be shy about calling on the TD as a resource. We're here for you! ▲

Podcast Alert



Listen to episode 65 to learn more about the role of the Technical Delegate at usdf.podbean.com.