

Dressage Freestyles Move into the Future

New software suite including “floor plans” heralds exciting innovations in judging, commentary, and audience outreach

By Janet Foy

Freestyles began as part of dressage competition in 1980 amidst a lot of worrying about “circus,” harming the sport, and other gloom-and-doom predictions. The reality today is that freestyle is one of the only dressage events that consistently plays to a sold-out house.



GUINEA PIGS: Riders, scribes, and judges at the International Omaha (NE), the 2017 FEI World Cup Dressage Final test event, were the first to use the FEI's Dressage Freestyle Scoring Suite software. Pictured is Canada's Karen Pavicic on Don Daiquiri, winner of the Grand Prix Freestyle.

The first FEI World Cup Dressage Final—in which freestyle competition decides the title—was held in 1986, and freestyle was introduced into the Olympics in Atlanta in 1996. So what does the future hold for freestyle?

The dressage sport is trying to evolve to become more global and more popular with the general public. To achieve these goals, dressage must be more understandable to those without a lot of knowledge. In jumping, it is easy to learn that if the fence falls down, that is bad. It is also easy to see the horse working against the clock. Simple. Dressage, not so much! But the *Fédération Equestre Internationale* (FEI) hopes that its new Dressage Freestyle Scoring Suite

system will improve the sport for the spectator by making it more understandable, and by doing so that it will help to ensure the continued inclusion of dressage in the Olympic Games.

The Freestyle Scoring Suite Explained

Based on the FEI's new Degree of Difficulty Freestyle Scoring System, the Freestyle Scoring Suite has been in development for several years. It is the brainchild of FEI 5* judge Katrina Wüst of Germany and of German national judge and software developer Daniel Göhlen, who has turned Katrina's hard work into a reality.

The Scoring Suite consists of two core applications. Using the first, called **Floorplan Creator**, the competitor enters the movements of his or her freestyle. The app is available on the FEI website (fei.org); a FEI login is required for access to the input system.

The second core element of the Scoring Suite is **Judge Assistant**. According to Göhlen's website, BlackHorse88.com, Judge Assistant “manages and displays the various floorplans

Test	Mark Coefficient	Variation	Code of Points	Repetition
Halt				
Difficult transition	<input type="checkbox"/>	Halt - Passage	0,05	
Passage (min. 20m on one track)	2			
Piaffe (min. 10 steps straight)	2			
Transition: Passage - piaffe - passage				
Passage (min. 20m on one track)	2			R
Extended trot				

→ Achievable Degree of Difficulty: 6.57

Drag & Drop your entries from the left-bar into the table above. You can also rearrange entries in the table by just dragging them into the right position!

FLOORPLAN CREATOR: Screen shot of the app shows required elements for a Grand Prix-level freestyle. The rider drags and drops the choreographic elements from the list at left and chooses variations from the drop-down menus to create a “floor plan” of the test. When complete, the app calculates the freestyle's degree of difficulty and assigns a DoD mark.

submitted by the riders. It is the second part of the system which enables judges to score the freestyles." Judge Assistant creates a printout of each rider's "floor plan" and also displays the floor plan on the judge's computer.

Floorplan Creator and the competitor. Within FEI rules, riders can strive to achieve higher freestyle scores by making their choreography more challenging to execute. Floorplan Creator incorporates the FEI's Degree of Difficulty Freestyle Scoring System: The software automatically calculates the freestyle's degree of difficulty and assigns the floor plan a degree-of-difficulty mark.

Here's an example of how the degree of difficulty works in the judging process. Let's say the choreography has a degree of difficulty of 8.7. The competitor will achieve that mark only if all of the movements with difficulty added earn scores of 7 or higher. The rider would get no difficulty credit for a score of 6, and a score of 5 or below would result in a deduction.

"As a result, the final degree-of-difficulty mark is highly dependent on the actual execution," says Göhlen.

Floorplan Creator also displays the following choreographic elements:

- **Combination:** a grouping of movements to which the computer will assign bonus points for difficulty. Example: extended canter to double pirouette to flying changes.
- **Difficult transitions:** transitions beyond the standard requirements. Example: halt-passage.
- **Particle:** a short piece of a movement that is not to be scored, as it doesn't meet specific requirements (e.g., 20 meters minimum for the passage). A particle may be part of a difficult combination.
- **"Joker":** If the rider wants the option of repeating a line of one-tempis changes, two-tempis, or extended canter in case the first one doesn't work, she may include a "Joker" line in the floor plan. A "Joker" won't increase the freestyle's degree of difficulty but could salvage the mark for the movement in question.

GRAND PRIX FREESTYLE								
Alice Scheuren								
Test	Mark	Correction	Coefficient	Variation	Remarks	Code of Points	Repetition	
1. Halt								
2. Difficult transition	<input type="checkbox"/>			Halt - Passage		0.05		
3. Passage (min. 20m on one track)			2					
4. Piaffe (min. 10 steps straight)			2					
5. Transition: Passage - piaffe - passage								
6. Passage (min. 20m on one track)			2				R	
7. Extended trot								
8. Passage (min. 20m on one track)	<input type="checkbox"/>		2	Half-pass (min. 5m sideways)		0.2	R	
9. Half-pass right (collected trot)								
10. Combination of the last movements	<input type="checkbox"/>			2 movements		0.1		
11. Extended trot								

JUDGE'S FLOOR PLAN: Section of a competitor's freestyle-choreography printout for the judges



COURTESY OF DANIEL GÖHLEN

Artistic marks (half points may be given)	Mark	Coefficient	
41. Rhythm, energy and elasticity	8	4	
42. Harmony between rider and horse	8,5	4	
43. Choreography. Use of arena. Inventiveness	8,5	4	
44. Degree of difficulty. Calculated risks	8,5 8,54	4	<input type="radio"/> 8,3 <input type="radio"/> 8,4 <input checked="" type="radio"/> 8,5 <input type="radio"/> 8,6 <input type="radio"/> 8,7 ×
45. Music and interpretation of the music	7,5	4	
Total marks for technical execution in %	78,75%		
Total marks for artistic execution in %	82%		
Final Score in % (Technical + artistic marks in % divided by 2)	80,375%		<input type="button" value="Confirm and Finish"/>

In case two competitors have the same final score, the one with the higher marks for artistic impression will have the better placing

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY VARIATION: *Using the Judge Assistant software, the judge can adjust the mark for degree of difficulty up or down by as much as 0.2 point*

Judge Assistant and the judging and scribing process. Thanks to the software, the judge is provided with freestyle tests that include each competitor's floor plan. Communication with the writing scribe is now

very important, as the scribe will ask the judge, "Do you accept?" when the rider executes a combination or a difficult transition. If the judge accepts the difficulty, then the scribe ticks the corresponding box on the test sheet.

The mark for degree of difficulty will appear on the judge's computer. The judge has the option of moving this mark up or down by a maximum of 0.2 point.

For spectators. So what brings the audience into the fold? First, the TV commentator also has the floor plan—so he'd be able to say, "Here comes a difficult combination," just as we're accustomed to hearing when we watch figure-skating coverage. Skating audiences know that a triple combination is difficult, so eventually perhaps the general public will know that flying changes on a curved line are difficult!

Two optional add-ons to the Freestyle Scoring Suite have the potential to further enhance the spectator experience. The first is live scores and results, which spectators already enjoy at many dressage competitions. The second is an app called Spectator Judging, which allows spectators to "score" tests in real time in one of three modes—movement by movement, in a simplified manner, or as one final score at the end

The Freestyle Evolution: Learn More

To learn more about the Freestyle Scoring Suite and its components, visit software developer Daniel Göhlen's website at BlackHorse88.com/projects.

The FEI has published a manual, "The New Degree of Difficulty (DoD) Freestyle Judging System," on its website. The "Freestyle Creator Manual," as the document has been dubbed, contains detailed instructions on how to use Floorplan Creator as well as screen shots from the application. View or download the manual at dressagefreestyle.fei.org/data/pdf/Creator-Manual.pdf. (To access the actual floorplan input system, the user must be given an FEI account by his or her national federation.)

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*American Farriers Journal. Jan/Feb 2015. Page 87.

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of the ride—and then compare their marks to those of the actual judges. This new feature is proving popular with spectators, who are finding it fun, exciting, and educational.

A Promising System

The Freestyle Scoring Suite is in an optional testing phase. It made its debut at the International Omaha in Nebraska in May, which was the test event for the 2017 FEI World Cup Dressage and Jumping Finals. Training sessions on the new system were held for the scribes, judges (I was a member of the ground jury), and riders.


Going forward, use of the system will be mandatory only in Europe, and only at CDI-Ws. Other events may apply to use it, as well. After the 2016-2017 FEI World Cup season, the system will be adjusted as necessary.

More experience is needed for all of us to feel at ease with this system, but I think it shows great potential. From the various test events that have been held, riders, judges, and trainers all

seem to be on board with the Freestyle Scoring Suite. I am excited to see how it can be developed and used to draw more spectators to our sport. The sport of dressage knows that it needs to be more transparent, and with this system open scoring could also be used, as the existence of a floor plan means that there is a “test” that can be followed. Another benefit is that the riders seem more comfortable knowing what score they can achieve for degree of difficulty if everything goes well. ▲


Janet Foy, of Colorado Springs, CO, is an FEI 4 dressage judge, a USEF “S” dressage judge, and a USEF “R” sport-horse breeding judge. She is a USDF L Education Program faculty member; a USEF Dressage Committee member; and a member of the USDF Judges and L Program Committees. She is the author of Dressage for the Not-So-Perfect Horse and Dressage Questions and Answers.*

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