

Dressed to Thrill

Color us adventurous:
Dressage attire gets fashionable

BY L. A. POMEROY



THE COAT THAT LAUNCHED A THOUSAND "LIKES": Social-media users went crazy for Mary-Cameron Röhlins' gray shadbelly with pink points in the 2012 USEF "Brentina Cup" competition. Varied color combinations have since become more common in the dressage arena.

Riding in general is hard enough without worrying about our clothes looking or feeling uncomfortable,” says Mary-Cameron Rollins, who tilted the dressage fashion world off its axis in 2012 while competing her mare, Rose Noir II, in the US Equestrian Federation Young Adult “Brentina Cup” Dressage National Championship while sporting a medium-dark gray shad-belly with pale pink points.

The 27-year-old Pensacola, FL, rider garnered more than the usual degree of media attention afforded a third-place finisher. Rollins soon gained a measure of celebrity as the first dressage rider in memory to have competed at a USEF national championship in such nontraditional color choices.

“I sure felt like I had won,” Rollins recalls. “Reporters surrounded me for interviews. Online forums talked about dressage getting a new, fresh look.”

Online, Rollins was hailed as a dressage fashionista. Social media spilled over with support: “It’s about time. You go, girl.” “Definitely caught my eye.” “I’m kinda loving some individuality.” “It’s about time that dressage got away from just black and navy coats.”

Paint Inside the Lines: Color and the USEF Dressage Attire Rules

Before you spring for that snazzy shirt or eye-popping jacket, make sure it’s legal for use in US Equestrian Federation-licensed/USDF-recognized dressage competition. Bone up on dressage rule (DR) 120, Dress, in the USEF rule book (online at usef.org).

Although many competitors seem to think that certain colors are either mandated or forbidden, the USEF attire rules don’t actually spell out much regarding color. In general, the only specifications are “white or light colored breeches” and a “dark” jacket or tailcoat “of conservative color.” Until recently, “dark” meant black or, if you were feeling daring, midnight blue. The attached vest points on a shadbelly coat were almost universally “canary”—a golden yellow.

The USEF rule book then wades into the murky depths as it attempts to describe what additional jacket and accessory colors are permitted. DR 120.3 states: “At all test levels, riders may wear jackets in other colors within the international HSV color scale, as described in FEI Dressage Regulations, Art. 427.1. Contrast coloring and piping is allowed. Protective headgear, stocks, ties, gloves and riding boots may be the same color as the coat.”

Let’s try to translate that into plainer language. In simple terms, HSV stands for Hue (basic color—red, blue,

In the three years since, both the national (USEF) and international (FEI) dressage competition rules have evolved to encourage more sartorial showmanship. (For a rules summary, see “Paint Inside the Lines: Color and the USEF Dressage Attire Rules” below.)

“Fashion,” says Rollins, “is about finding a trend or style where you can express yourself. When you feel good and feel confident, you’re always in style.”

Outstanding? Or Just Standing Out?

A competitor’s desire to leave the judges with a memorable impression can be a double-edged sword. Looking great and riding well are one thing. But should a test goes less than ideally, too much individualism, some fear, may impede slinking back to the barn in relative anonymity. ⇨



MATCHY, MATCHY: As long as the color is FEI/USEF-approved, you can match your boots, helmet, and other accessories to your riding coat, as Kayla Barteau is doing here at Dressage at Devon 2014

green, etc.), Saturation (purity or “colorfulness”), Value. Value refers to the darkness or lightness of a color, with 0 percent value being black and 100 percent value being white. The FEI rule (and therefore also the USEF rule) specifies that jacket colors must fall within the 0-to-32-percent value range (i.e., dark). This is a confusing and overly technical way of stating that, for example, a forest-green jacket would probably be OK, while Kelly green would not.

(The website color.yafla.com offers an easy online reference chart: Choose a color, enter 32 in the “Lightness” (Value) box, then slide the Hue and Saturation scales to view the resulting shades.)

“Customers tell me, ‘I don’t want to stand out. The judge will only remember my mistakes better that way,’” says New York City-based fashion designer Arianna Vastino of the equestrian-slash-street wear clothing line Le Fash. Vastino was in Las Vegas this April for the Reem Acra FEI World Cup Dressage Final to see firsthand what trends and choices were setting international style.

Her takeaway? Even the most traditionally-minded competitors are starting to push fashion boundaries beyond mere “bling in the ring.”

“Except for helmets, people are starting to step away from rhinestones,” Vastino says. “But they still want to push limits without ending up in left field. The good news is, there are ways to stand out that are more subtle than sparkle.”

In fact, more subtle style choices can actually work to the benefit of riders who feel less than confident in mastering the more subtle execution of their aids.

“If you’re not ‘quiet’ in a certain area, don’t draw attention to it,” advises Rollins. “If you don’t have quiet legs, if your hands move a lot, or your head bounces, then don’t go there. No bling on boots, gloves, or helmets.”

Style Council

Advances in technical fabrics have been a game-changer in riding wear in recent years, but so is a growing feminization of the sport’s traditionally militaristic silhouette.

Michele Hundt, who was a dressage rider and retail art director for two decades before she founded the dressage boutique ShowChic in Wellington, FL, says: Think ruffled as a practical alternative to a stock tie.

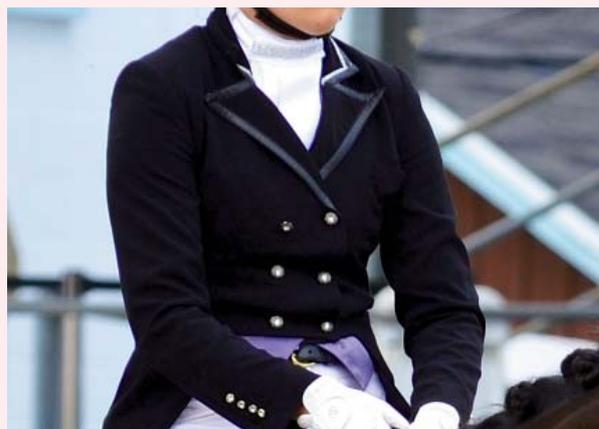
For the time- or tie-challenged, Rollins sees a plus to ruffles: “I personally feel you can’t go wrong with a stock tie. But if you can’t pin or tie well, ruffles are adorable yet

Seen in the Ring: Dressage Fashion Look Book

So what are riders wearing these days when they enter at A? Here’s a sampling of outfits that caught our eye.



Gray shadbelly with “bling” buttons and black crystal-edged collar and vest points



Lavender vest points and satin-edged lapels on a black shadbelly



White piping and silver vest points on a not-quite-royal-blue shadbelly



Dark-blue short jacket with military-inspired shoulder piping, dark lapels, and aqua buttons



POP OF COLOR: Red collar on taupe jacket as worn by Karen Monks Reilly at Dressage at Devon 2014



SUBTLE SHIMMER: Brocade-look stock tie (and patriotic-colored pin) on 2014 US World Equestrian Games para-dressage competitor Rebecca Hart

sophisticated, and take a rider zero time to look good.”

More delicate shirt styles are also opening palettes to color choices other than the traditional white. Pastels, for one, have “really taken off,” according to Hundt, who calls the Elvi ladies’ competition shirt by Equiline—in sky blue with contrasting buttons and breathable floral detailing at the yoke—“the most popular line I have.”

Vastino also sees riders opting for “pops” of color from inside a jacket’s lining: “Match your shadbelly’s lining with the color of your lapel trim for a choreographed look. You don’t need to be the brightest color in the ring to still get noticed.”

While those who dress dressage suspect that the love affair with rhinestones is beginning to wane, bling is finding new interpretation as shimmer woven into show-shirt fabrics. Otherwise traditional white shirts, when interwoven with metallic threading, lend a hint of eye-catching iridescence.

“In a short sleeve, it’s also a look that can serve double duty in and out of the ring,” Vastino says. “A hint of shine, like a hint of plaid or pattern, plays on both the modern and the traditional.”

Mainstream fashion charts predict that fall colors will grow richer and deeper in intensity than their summer counterparts, and riding styles are set to follow suit with emerald greens, royal plums, and burgundy/oxbloods leading the way.

Allyson Hall was a high-level amateur-owner rider and mom in northern Florida when she launched Huntley Equestrian and the figure-flattering black, Daewoo suede full-seat breeches, with sequined pockets and orange and yellow contrast seams, that have proven to be a favorite with dressage

Spinning the Color Wheel

Contrast or monochrome? Choose colors for a show ensemble that also complements your horse’s coat.

If your horse is:

Black: White or red for high contrast, or go elegantly low-key with gray.

Gray/white: Avoid “soft” pastels. Choose definitive tones (green, plum, blue) instead.

Bay/chestnut: Cool jewel tones, like blue or teal, add accent. Avoid reds.



UNDERSTATED ELEGANCE: Eye-catching dapple-gray horse is complemented by his rider’s gray-and-black ensemble, with her blue jacket buttons providing a hint of color



NO MORE BORING BREECHES: *Fashion-forward riders have embraced these colorful, sequin-adorned breeches from Huntley Equestrian*

riders in “Welly World” for schooling. Hall foresees grays and plums as the next hot colors (and predicts a void is just waiting to be filled by “a great brown breech”).

Afraid your color choice could be gone with the next season? Among the hottest options are shirts and shadbellyes whose points and collars are interchangeable, yielding a near-limitless choice of combinations.

Or make a statement uniquely your own (that won't bust the barn budget) by swapping buttons from an off-the-rack jacket or shirt with vintage or equestrian-themed buttons

The Least Practical Color: Tips for Keeping White Breeches White

Before the show, spray breeches with Scotchgard to help them stay clean and white. Do not spray the seat area—or else prepare to slip-slide away.

At the show, spot-clean with Tide To Go stain remover.

After the show, spot-wash with Simple Green or Tidy Pantz stain remover. Launder breeches inside out in gentle detergent with like colors. Do not bleach!

Remove promptly and roll up in a towel to remove excess water. Hang to dry.

you discover at an antique shop, secondhand store, or on-line retailer such as Etsy.

“Build a relationship with a tailor,” Rollins suggests. “If you're comfortable sewing, taking buttons off and on might be an easy change-up you can do yourself. But if you're worried about damaging the fabric, let a professional do the replacing.”

“While respecting the traditions of the show ring and, by design, following the principles of the FEI rules, our USEF dressage rules have made some allowances for current fashion trends,” says USEF Dressage Committee member, USEF “R” technical delegate and FEI dressage steward, and USDF vice president Lisa Gorretta, of Chagrin Falls, OH. “A reading of DR 120 on dress includes recent changes at Training through Fourth Levels to allow the use of riding shirts with integrated stand-up collars without additional neckwear, as few riding shirts come with separate chokers today. The ruffled-front shirts with decorative buttons to the neck are simply not designed to then be covered up by a stock tie. When weather dictates that coats are waived, gone are the color restrictions for shirts: Now any collared short- or long-sleeved shirt, sans decorations, may be worn. And the allowance of vests when coats are waived was a response to both the advances in cooling-vest technology and an accommodation for riders who feared all of the white did not present the ‘look they were going for.’”

Practical Matters

A garment's cut, line, and color are meant to work to the advantage of the less-than-perfect physique. Tailored jackets in structured fabrics and wider waistbands on breeches help smooth out “jiggly bits,” as will monochromatic colors in helping a rounder rider appear taller and trimmer. Color accents above the waistline and along the neck draw attention up to the smaller upper half of pear-shaped riders.

Alas, the classic style rule—lights and brights to emphasize, dark colors on parts you want to recede—never heard of white breeches, but here the rise of your waistband can complement as well as control. The “rise,” or distance from crotch to waistband, varies from low or modified (perfect for short-waisted riders but otherwise risking the dreaded shirt “poof” betwixt vest and belt line) to regular or more retro high-waisted cuts. If you have less than coltish long legs, a regular or higher waistband will create a more elongating effect.

And when Christian Dior quipped, “Without foundations, there can be no fashion,” he wasn't referring to the pyramid of training. For women riders, the most flattering

fit of any jacket, vest, or shirt begins with a proper fit beneath. Good high-impact sports bras offer either compression to limit motion (best for A to C cups) or encapsulation for all-around support (ideal for C to DD cups).

Beyond Black and White

To the delight of some and the chagrin of others, the days when every dressage rider dressed the same in the show ring are over. The wearer of that once-notorious gray-and-pink shadbelly (whose latest edition is bright blue with black points, set with black-and-white crystals down its tails) says riders should feel more confident than ever in fashioning their own style, within their own comfort zone.

“There are those who are comfortable with tradition and those who are ready for a revolution,” says Rollins.

Gorretta acknowledges that “there are fervent advocates on both sides of the ‘what to do with show attire’ in our

rules. For now, the USEF Dressage Committee works to try maintain balance between allowing fashion innovation in riding and athletic wear while still honoring the tradition and ‘look’ of our sport.”

That balance, some say, means not losing sight of our sport’s *raison d’être*.

“I like seeing some adjustment to the color scale,” says USEF “R” judge Anne Cizadlo, of Lebanon, NJ. “But what I don’t want to be saying to my scribe is, ‘Wow, will you look at *that?*’ I don’t want to be so distracted by the color of a rider’s shirt or jacket that I’m not looking at the horse.” ▲

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