



THE RIGHT START: Faculty member Willy Arts works with a horse and rider at the 2020 USDF Sport Horse Prospect Development Forum in Florida

# The Equine Pipeline

From education to competition, the USDF and the USEF offer a progression for success

BY CHRISTINE TRAURIG AND KRISTI WYSOCKI

**B**oth USDF and US Equestrian (USEF) have a common goal: the success of American-bred dressage horses. For several years, the USDF Sport Horse Committee has worked closely with the USEF Dressage Sport Committee to develop, promote, and expand a “pipeline” of educational and competition opportunities for US-bred dressage sport horses. These programs are designed to promote the breeding of quality dressage horses in this country that can achieve success in the sport.

The USDF programs—for horses from current-year foals through green four-year-olds—feeds into the USEF Dressage Young Horse Emerging Program, which is for four- through seven-year-olds. This collaboration of effort between the two organizations is designed to ensure that US-bred dressage horses have opportunities for exposure to good educational and training programs, as well as to competition of a high standard. Our collective goal is that quality dressage sport horses are US-bred, US-trained, and US-ridden to a level of excellence, both nationally and internationally.

In this article, we’ll give an overview of the various components of each organization’s young-horse pipeline.

## USDF Programs

USDF’s sport-horse programs focus on dressage sport-horse prospects (defined as current-year foals up through their fourth year) and on breeding stock.

*USDF Breeders Championship Series.* This series of competitions, which culminate in Series Finals around the country, was developed to provide opportunities for sport-horse breeders to showcase their youngsters and expose them to a competition environment even before they are under saddle. In addition to in-hand competition opportunities, dressage sport-horse breeding (DSHB) shows also offer Materiale (under saddle) classes for three-, four-, and five-year-olds. These classes offer a low-stress way for youngsters to enter the ring without the added pressure of having to perform a dressage test. In a Materiale class, the horse’s three gaits and general impression (ridability, development for its age, and other criteria) are evaluated. Because the entrants compete in the ring together at the same time, the experience is less daunting for the young and green horse.

*USDF Sport Horse Prospect Development Forum.* This newer addition to USDF’s sport-horse offerings was created

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as an opportunity for owners and riders of green three- and four-year-olds to train directly with highly respected dressage trainers with extensive expertise in starting young dressage horses. The forum's faculty members—currently, Scott Hassler, Michael Bragdell, Willy Arts, and Craig Stanley—help participants to create a foundation focused on the pyramid of dressage training.

In the past, the forum, which is open to auditors, has been held once a year in different areas of the country. As the forum has developed, faculty members and members of the USDF Sport Horse Committee have discussed ways to improve and advance this program in order for more people to be able to benefit. With the onset of COVID-19 pandemic conditions, these additional opportunities are a higher priority to implement in the near future.

## USEF Programs

As horses advance in their age and training, they may be able to progress into the next phase of the pipeline: the USEF Dressage Young Horse Emerging Program. The term *Young Horse* is used to define horses from the age of four through seven for competition purposes, both nationally and internationally. Three-year-olds are not considered part of this program due to their immaturity and degree of training.

USEF provides both educational and competition opportunities as part of its Young Horse program. It's worth noting that, because of the rigorous standards for this division, horses in this program are fairly advanced for their age in terms of their development and training. Young Horse division competition is quite challenging, and it is designed for talented horses with advanced performance markers related to their development.

The USEF holds Young Horse training and evaluations sessions throughout the country, led by USEF national dressage young-horse coach Christine Traurig. In addition, Willy Arts has recently been added to the USEF Young Horse coaches' network. The goal of these sessions is to reach more horses and riders throughout the country, and to identify horses that may have the potential to contribute to medal-podium positions for the US in the next quadrennial.

## Pathways for All

For the horse that might not be the next "NFL league player," educational opportunities still abound. The USDF Sport Horse Prospect Development Forum many times has included four- and even five-year-olds that are less mature and greener in their training. It is important for trainers and breeders to understand that USDF Materiale

## HOW TO ENTER THE PIPELINE

For information about the USDF Sport Horse Prospect Development Forum and USDF's other sport-horse educational programs, go to [usdf.org/education/other-programs/sport-horse-seminars/index.asp](https://usdf.org/education/other-programs/sport-horse-seminars/index.asp).

USDF Breeders Championship Series program rules and other information, including links to the current USDF Materiale and other sport-horse tests, are housed under [usdf.org/competitions/competitions-championships/sporthorse/index.asp](https://usdf.org/competitions/competitions-championships/sporthorse/index.asp).

US Equestrian (USEF) maintains several avenues for entry into its Dressage Young Horse Emerging Program, including applying for acceptance into a USEF Young Horse training and observation session, competing in designated observation events, performance at USEF national Young Horse championships or Young Horse CDIs, and qualifying for the FEI WBFSH Dressage World Breeding Championships for Young Horses. Find the program summary and selection criteria at [usef.org/compete/disciplines/dressage/emerging-program/young-horse-emerging-program](https://usef.org/compete/disciplines/dressage/emerging-program/young-horse-emerging-program).

classes are a great opportunity for all three-, four-, and five-year-olds, whereas the Young Horse classes (USEF Four-Year-Old and FEI Five-, Six-, and Seven-Year-Old) are designed for the equine dressage prodigy with relatively advanced training. Too often, horses are entered in Young Horse classes when they might not be ready from a developmental, training, or quality-of-gaits perspective. The USDF Materiale division is a super alternative, as the classes do not include any movements (judges of four- and five-year-olds may request trot and canter lengthenings), so the degree of difficulty is much lower.

## Outreach Efforts

The sheer size of the US creates hurdles regarding access to dressage training and competition. The COVID-19 pandemic has created even bigger complications in this area. Innovative methods to reach horse-and-rider combinations throughout the country are being developed. The USDF Sport Horse Committee and the USEF Dressage Sport Committee, along with the faculty and coaches for these programs, regard these challenges as an opportunity. Even when the current pandemic is behind us, we feel that these new ideas will make both programs even better.



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