

# PURPOSE OF DRESSAGE

## Definition

The word dressage is derived from a French term meaning “training.” It is not only a method of schooling, but also a competitive equestrian sport. Basic training is the same for every horse no matter what he specializes in later on.

## Objective

“The object of dressage is the harmonious development of the physique and ability of the horse. As a result it makes the horse calm, supple, loose and flexible but also confident, attentive and keen thus achieving perfect understanding with his rider.” [*USEF Rule Book DR 101*]

Dressage is considered “classical training” because it uses gymnastic exercises – a series of movements and figures – which have been studied and developed for centuries.

Dressage should be therapeutic for the horse. When the dressage exercises are done systematically and correctly, the horse will become stronger and supple on both sides and will respond willingly and obediently, moving freely and energetically, with pure gaits, and to the maximum level of its athletic ability.

The gradual, logical progression of the gymnastic exercises not only leads to an obedient, balanced mount, but it also improves the seat, coordination, and feel of the rider.

“One of the chief aims of dressage is to obtain clear and pure gaits. The natural gaits of the horse should not only be preserved but should also be improved by the fact that the horse has been strengthened by gymnastics. Therefore, if during the course of training the natural paces are not improved, it would be proof that the training was incorrect.” [*The Complete Training of Horse and Rider*, p 161]

## Purposes of the Dressage Tests

“The United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) approves and issues tests for use at licensed dressage competitions in the United States. The Federation Equestre International (FEI) is responsible for issuing tests for international competitions. The United States Dressage Federation (USDF) also issues tests which may be used at licensed dressage competitions. Tests cannot be modified or simplified without the approval of the USEF Dressage Committee, the Bureau of the FEI, or the USDF, respectively.” [*USEF Rule DR 118*]

## *Objective and Standards of USEF Levels of Competition – USEF DR 118*

### **Training Level**

To confirm that the horse’s muscles are supple and loose, and that it moves freely forward in a clear and steady rhythm, accepting contact with the bit.

### **First Level**

To confirm that the horse, in addition to the requirements of Training Level, has developed thrust (pushing power) and achieved a degree of balance and throughness.

### **Second Level**

To confirm that the horse, having demonstrated that it has achieved the thrust (pushing power) required in First Level, now shows that through additional training it accepts more weight on the hindquarters (collection), shows the thrust required at medium paces, and is reliably on the bit. A greater degree of straightness, bending, suppleness, throughness and self-carriage is required than at First Level.

### **Third Level**

To confirm that the horse has achieved the requirements of Second Level. It now demonstrates in each movement,

especially in the medium and extended paces and in the transitions to and from collected movements, rhythm, suppleness, acceptance of the bit, throughness, impulsion, straightness and collection. There must be a clear distinction between the paces.

#### **Fourth Level**

To confirm that the horse has achieved the requirements of Third Level. These are tests of medium difficulty designed to confirm that the horse has acquired a high degree of suppleness, impulsion, throughness, balance and lightness while always remaining reliably on the bit, and that its movements are straight, energetic and cadenced with the transitions precise and smooth.

### ***Objectives and Standards of the FEI Levels of Competition***

#### **Prix St. Georges**

Test of medium standard. This test represents the medium stage of training. It comprises exercises to show the horse's submission to all the demands of the execution of classical equitation and a standard of physical and mental balance and development, which will enable him to carry them out with harmony, lightness and ease.

#### **Intermediaire I**

Test of relatively advanced standard. The object of this test is to lead horses on, progressively and without harm to their organism, from the correct execution of the Prix St. Georges to the more demanding exercises of Intermediaire II.

#### **Intermediaire II**

Test of advanced standard. The object of this test is to prepare the horse for the Grand Prix.

#### **Grand Prix**

Test of the highest standard. The Grand Prix is a competition of the highest level, and the complete development of impulsion. The test includes all the school paces and all the fundamental airs of the Classical High School, of which the artificial paces, based on an extreme extension of the forelegs, are no part. For this reason, the school leaps, no longer practiced in a great many countries, do not figure in the test.

#### **Grand Prix Special**

Test of the same standard as Grand Prix. This is a competition of the same level as Grand Prix where especially the transitions are a matter of great importance.