

Chapter Fifteen - Competition

Why Compete?

You may not be interested in the highest levels of formal showing, but nearly every driver or trainer is tempted by some form of competition. Aside from satisfying your competitive spirit, showing can be a useful training experience. Your young horse will learn to handle himself calmly in unfamiliar surroundings, with groups of strange horses around him. You can also use competition to measure your horse's progress and education, and--especially in dressage--you can gain valuable information about how an expert (the judge) feels your horse is doing.

Of course, you may not be immediately successful in showing. There are always frustrations and disappointments. You may disagree with a judge's decision (which is, after all, just one person's opinion). Competing in shows can be stressful for both you and your horse if it becomes a major activity. You may learn that your horse may just not be as talented as those he's competing against. Serious showing involves a serious financial outlay, also--not only for entry fees, overnight accommodations, meals, and vehicle expenses, but also for the fancier harness and carriage you'll probably want to purchase "just for showing."

However, if you are competing or would like to, it's a good idea to learn what each of the various competitions consist of and what is expected in each.

Driving competitions in the United States are governed by the American Driving Society (ADS), which was formed in 1975 to promote driving and to establish criteria for judging in various types of driving competition. Anyone seriously interested in driving should join the ADS. If you plan to show, you should--at the very least--obtain a copy of the ADS Handbook, which contains the rules for all driving competitions recognized by that organization.

The ADS rule book goes into great detail regarding the rules, but there are some generalizations that can be made about nearly all forms of driving competition.

Correct Attire for Drivers

In almost every type of show ring competition, each driver is required to wear a driving apron, hat and gloves (preferably of natural tan leather), and carry a whip. The driver should be dressed "conservatively, according to the style of the present day." Any attempt to introduce period costumes or gaudy trappings is discouraged, and the dress should conform to the turnout (that is, formal, informal, or country) and be neat and clean.

Gentlemen are required to wear a coat or jacket (unless they've been excused because of very hot weather), and ladies

must wear a conservative dress, tailored suit, or slacks. Floppy hats are discouraged. Shoes should be comfortable, and match the rest of the attire.

Proper Ring Etiquette

When a lady greets the judge (as in a dressage class), she takes both reins in her left hand and raises the whip with her right hand, holding it vertically with the butt end even with her face, or horizontally with the butt end before her face.

A gentleman can do the same he greets the judge, or he can hold the reins and whip in his left hand and remove his hat briefly with his right hand.

When you are driving in the ring, do not shout at your horse, unless it is necessary to prevent an accident. Verbal commands should be given as unobtrusively as possible. Constant clicking with the tongue is discouraged. Excessive use of the whip--for instance, constantly hitting the horse hard to keep him moving--is inappropriate. If this is the only way you can keep your horse going, you shouldn't attempt to show him. Judges do, however, like to see the whip used as an appropriate aid.

As to styles of handling the reins, the ADS encourages "that all reins be held in the left hand with most of the direction done by the right hand, which also holds the whip. However, except for the use of hand holds, which is prohibited, a person's method of driving is optional."

For safety's sake, a pair turnout is required to carry a passenger, and any junior driver under the age of 14 must also be accompanied by an adult passenger.

TYPES OF COMPETITION DRIVING

There are four major types of driving competition recognized by the American Driving Society:

1. Pleasure Competition (including pleasure driving classes, obstacle classes, and marathons)
2. Coaching Competition
3. Combined Driving
4. Dressage

There is also a fifth category--endurance driving--which is fairly new and not yet regulated by the ADS.

Besides these, each breed registry that promotes driving will have its own list of driving classes for its recognized shows. The American Horse Shows Association recognizes several other types of driving competition (such as fine harness and roadster); there are also all sorts of rallies, organized by local driving clubs as fun gatherings for their members.

It would be impossible to review all of the different types of driving competitions, but here is a summary of what you can expect in each of the major categories that fall under ADS regulations.

PLEASURE COMPETITION

In a pleasure class, horses are shown together in groups and required to execute different gaits and transitions, in both directions and at the command of the judge. Competitors may also be asked to perform individual tests that may include circles, figure eights, or other ring figures. Horses are expected to stand quietly in the line-up and back readily. They are generally judged on performance, way of going, manners, condition, the fit and appropriateness of the harness and vehicle, the neatness and appropriateness of the driver's attire, and the overall impression.

There may be several divisions, defined by the size, type, or number of horses, or the size or type of carriage. Classes may be further restricted to drivers of a certain age, gender, experience; or by the prior performance records of the horse or driver. "Pleasure Turnout" classes place more emphasis on the appearance of the turnout; "Pleasure Driving Working" classes emphasize the performance of the horse over the quality of the turnout; and "Reinsmanship" classes judge the driver's handling of the reins and whip, his or her posture, control of the horse, and overall appearance.

There may also be combination classes, which involve "Ride and Drive" phases, "Combination Hunter" tests, or "Sporting Tandem" requirements.

Gaits

The required gaits in a pleasure class are walk, slow trot, working trot, and strong trot ("trot on"). The walk should be "free, regular and unconstrained," with "moderate extension. The horse should walk energetically but calmly, with even and determined steps."

The slow trot (formerly called the collected trot) requires a slight elevation of the forequarters, "thus enabling the shoulders to move with greater ease in all directions, the hocks being well engaged and maintaining energetic impulsion" The slow trot requires shorter steps than a working trot, "but they are lighter and more mobile."

The ADS defines the working trot as a "pace between the strong and the slow trot and more round than the strong trot. The horse goes forward freely and straight, engaging the hind legs with good hock action, on a taut but light rein" and "the hind feet touch the ground in the foot prints of the front feet." The ADS also places great importance on the working trot, stating that "the degree of energy and impulsion displayed at the working trot denotes clearly the degree of suppleness and balance of the horse." The strong trot ("trot on") requires the horse to show both a "clear but not excessive increase in speed and lengthening of stride while remaining well balanced and showing appropriate lateral flexion on turns; light contact to be maintained. Excessive speed will be penalized."

The halt is described as "a complete square stop without abruptness or veering. At the halt, horses should stand attentive, motionless and straight, with the weight evenly distributed over all four legs, and be ready to move off at the slightest indication of the driver." Horses may also be asked to rein back correctly, setting the feet down in diagonal pairs "with the hind legs remaining well in line." In Pleasure classes, the rein back is considered to have two parts: first, the horse steps back for at least four steps, "unhurried, with head flexed and straight, pushing back evenly in a straight line using light contact and quiet aids." Then the horse is expected to "move forward willingly to [his] former position using the same quiet aids."

From the description of the required gaits, it would appear that a horse trained in dressage would do very well in pleasure classes. However, checkreins are allowed in these classes, and there are very great differences of opinion among judges as to exactly what a pleasure horse should look like. In one class, a judge may pin a very sluggish horse first, on the justification that he "is a real pleasure to drive." Another judge might favor a nervous, agitated horse wearing a tight checkrein and unable to relax enough to stand still--because that judge's background is in judging park horses.

The ADS rules for pleasure driving do state that a horse should exhibit lateral bend through his turns, but it seems that correctly bent horses are not rewarded for this. (Tight checkreins prevent bending anyway; if the driver also carries both reins in one hand, he certainly can't ask his horse to bend properly.)

Many people enjoy pleasure classes, but many other drivers find them boring. The judging is highly subjective; it can be very frustrating because you may never know exactly why a judge selected one horse over another; and the classes themselves can be extremely long and tiring, especially for a young horse.

Obstacle Classes

There are parts of a pleasure competition that can be a lot of fun, of course, because obstacle classes fall into this category. Obstacles are usually created from rubber traffic cones with tennis balls balanced on top, and you are judged both on the time it takes you to complete a course and on the number of penalties (if any) you incur by knocking over the cones and/or balls. The cones are set in pairs at measured distances; the width between cones depends upon the width of the vehicles in the class.

There are seven different kinds of obstacle courses:

1) Timed Competition: This is driven over a prescribed course of obstacles, usually made of cones and sometimes bridges (often made of plywood sheets, painted in every possible combination of horrifying colors and patterns), and an L- or U-

shaped chute made of rails on the ground. The driver with the fastest time and the least number of penalties wins, with ties decided by a drive-off.

2) Pick Your Route: In this, you must go through each one of several obstacles, but you can decide on your own path, direction, and the order in which you tackle the obstacles. Scoring is similar to that of a regular timed obstacle competition.

3) Double Jeopardy: This requires a team of two drivers and one turnout. The first driver completes the course and then hands the reins to the second driver (without changing seats) and the second person must drive through the course, but in reverse order. Scoring is the same as for the first two classes.

4) Fault and Out: This class is similar to Fault and Out jumper classes. Each driver is given a chance to negotiate as many obstacles as possible in a prescribed course, until he either dislodges a cone or runs out of time. Each obstacle successfully negotiated earns points. The winner is the one who makes it through the most obstacles (and gains the most points) within the time limit.

5) Progressive: This is similar to Fault and Out, but in this class, the obstacles become progressively narrower as you travel through the course. There may be 20" clearance for the first obstacle, narrowing down to only 2" by the end of the course. Scoring is similar to Fault and Out.

6) Gambler's Choice: The obstacles in this class are widely varied to provide a real test of a horse's calmness and obedience. Elements may include garbage barrels, mailboxes, water, simulated bridges, and various patterns on the ground made from jumping poles. Each obstacle carries a point value--the scariest and most difficult ones, of course, are worth the most points--and you must make your own choices as to which ones to drive and in which order. No points accrue for obstacles that are knocked down; the winner is the one who accumulates the most points within a certain time limit.

7) Cross Country: This is driven over a prescribed course of natural and artificial obstacles, simulating those that might be encountered on a country drive. Typical obstacles include negotiating bridges or water, picking your way through log piles, passing real or pretend farm animals, traveling close to clotheslines, tents and road signs; and performing tasks such as removing the mail from a mailbox. Course faults are converted to time penalties, and the fastest time wins.

Pleasure Marathons

Another enjoyable division found under the heading of Pleasure classes is the Pleasure Marathon. There are three different types:

1) Turnout: A very subjective class, judged on the style and looks of the turnout. Part of the class is run very much

like a regular Pleasure class. Because antique vehicles are often used, the cross country part of it is generally run on smooth ground and level footing.

2) Timed Marathon: This class is similar to a combined driving marathon (described later), and is very popular. It is driven over a prescribed, measured course and is made up of two phases, a trot section followed by a walk section. Each is scored independently, and each carries time requirements (minimum time and/or allowed time) that must be met to avoid penalties. Up to four obstacles may also be included on the course; each obstacle can have one to four "gates," or openings that you must drive through accurately and in the correct order to avoid penalties. Ties are broken by judges determining which horse is most suitable to "provide a pleasant drive."

3) Marathon Pace: The scoring for this competition is similar to that of a ridden hunter pace. The driver is told the length of the course and the speed he is supposed to drive, and he must try to come to the finish line exactly on time. The course has specified trot and walk sections, but to make it more difficult the last kilometer has to be driven at the trot, with no circling, serpentines, stopping or walking allowed. Ties are broken as in a Timed Marathon, above.

More and more often, dressage classes are being offered also at pleasure driving shows. These are discussed under Dressage, below.

COACHING COMPETITION

Coaching classes are limited to horse or pony four-in-hand teams, put to a road coach, private coach or park drag. Rules for competition are based on the old coaching traditions. Although it is growing in popularity, coaching competitions are not as common as other types of driving shows, simply because the cost of maintaining horses, vehicles, manpower, and equipment is often quite high.

Coaching is a formal sport, and two grooms in livery must accompany the driver. Passengers may ride in the coach, also. In a park drag or private coach team, the horses should be matched in size, color, style, action and temperament, and good manners are important. In a road coach team, horses should be matched in size, weight, temperament and way of going, and they should be of sufficient weight to pull the coach without appearing to labor at all.

Classes are often restricted to drivers of certain status (amateur or open), or classes may emphasize different aspects of driving (working coach, reinsmanship). Different classes may include Best Team (judged on overall impression, quality of the team and its performance at a "smart trot" and walk); Turnout (judged on performance, quality, manners of the horses and correct appointments); and Obstacles (held as a timed or untimed competition, somewhat different from regular pleasure obstacle

classes).

Although it is lovely to see a properly turned out coach, with superb horses and elegant drivers, grooms and passengers, it is hard not to feel some sympathy for the horses. Many of them wear short sidechecks and, because of the sidechecks, have absolutely no back muscle development. Most often, the wheelers are hitched right to the roller bolts on the splinter bar; there's no movement of a singletree to help their hard work. (See the discussion of roller bolts and singletrees in Chapter 16, Pair Driving.) Tradition is fine, but we can only hope that coaching enthusiasts will be able to adapt their equipment to ease the job of their wonderful horses.

COMBINED DRIVING

Combined driving has developed as a parallel to the Olympic sport of combined training, or eventing, in which the three phases of dressage, endurance, and stadium jumping are offered as the "ultimate test" of horse and rider.

In combined driving, the three phases are Dressage, Marathon, and Obstacle driving. There are competitions for singles, pairs, and four-in-hands. Penalty points accumulated in each phase are totaled to produce a final score, and the horse and driver with the lowest combined penalty score are the winners. At major competitions, each phase is held on a separate day; at smaller or lower-level events, two or even all three phases may be held on one day, especially when the Marathon phase is fairly short.

There are four levels, each requiring a greater degree of strength, education, obedience, and accuracy from the horse and an increase in the skill of the driver: Training, Preliminary, Intermediate and Advanced.

Dressage Phase

Dressage, or Competition A, judges the freedom and regularity of paces, harmony, lightness, ease of movement, impulsion, and the correct positioning of the horse on the move.

The driver is also judged on his style of driving, accuracy, general command of the horses, and presentation of the turnout.

The dressage phase of combined driving uses the same tests and is judged in the same manner as a regular dressage test (see Dressage, below), with three exceptions: all tests must be driven from memory (including Training level); the scores are converted to penalty points; and there is an additional brief section, called Presentation.

In the Presentation, you are judged at a standstill, before the dressage test. You are scored on neatness, cleanliness, the style and safety of your turnout; you are also judged on the completeness of your "spares" kit (rein or rein splice, trace or trace splice, hole punch, and extra singletree if you are driving a pair). Your score is based on the 0-to-10 scale, and converted

to penalties.

Dressage is always the first phase of a combined driving event because one of its purposes is to prove to the judges that the horse is fit and obedient enough to handle the marathon phase. Figure 16- shows a pair competing in the dressage phase of a combined driving event.

Marathon Phase

Competition B is the Marathon, designed to test the standard of fitness and stamina of the horse, and the judgment of pace and horsemanship of the competitor. Before going on course, each competitor is given a safety check to ensure that his horses, vehicle, equipment and spares kit is in good order. (The spares kit required for the marathon contains far more emergency and repair equipment than the one required for dressage.)

At Preliminary level, the marathon course is 8 to 16 kilometers long, and consists of three sections:

A. Roads and Tracks -- Four to seven kilometers in length, with a set speed. Any gait is allowed, and there is a two-minute time "window" for completing the course without incurring penalties. If you finish Roads and Tracks outside the "window," time penalties accrue.

B. Walk Section -- Usually one kilometer long, with a set speed. Arriving after the time allowed incurs penalties.

E. Trot Section -- About three to eight kilometers long, with a set speed. You have a two-minute time "window" in which to finish without incurring penalties. One of the difficulties of this section is that the required gait is a trot, with penalties incurred if your horse breaks into either a walk or canter for longer than five seconds. This is the most difficult section, because it comes last when the horse is most tired, and because it includes hazards.

The "hazards" (up to six in the lower levels) may involve driving through water, or around trees, rocks or fences. Each hazard has two to four gates that you must negotiate in the correct order and direction, with penalties for failure to drive them correctly.

As in the cross-country phase of combined training, there are penalty zones marked around each hazard; in combined driving the penalty zones exist for the purpose of timing how long it takes a turnout to negotiate a hazard. At all levels except Training Level, you are timed from the moment you enter a penalty zone until the moment you leave it after driving through the hazard. Any gait is allowed inside the penalty zones. This hazard time (separate from the overall course time) is converted to penalty points and added to the overall penalty score. The less time you spend negotiating a hazard, therefore, the lower your penalty score will be. Figures 16- and 16- show a pair negotiating hazards in a marathon.

At the higher levels, the speeds are faster and the sections are longer. There are also additional sections (Section C,

completed at a fast trot, and Section D, another walk section). In the higher levels, Section E contains more hazards and each hazard is more difficult.

Obstacles Phase

Competition C is held in an arena or field; its purpose is to test the fitness and stamina of the horses and the judgment of pace and horsemanship of the competitors. It is very similar to a pleasure-show obstacle course, except that time is not a factor of the judging unless you are very slow and complete the course after the time allowed. In lower levels, this is very generous. Accuracy, therefore, counts more than speed, and as this is held as the last phase of the combined driving event, it can be quite exciting. The fall of a single ball can dramatically change the placings for the event.

Combined driving events are gaining in popularity, and are an excellent challenge, a "complete test" for you and your horse.

DRESSAGE

Ridden dressage has a long history, both as a training program and as competition. Driven dressage competition, however, is a fairly new addition to the world of equestrian sports. It first became internationally recognized in 1969, when the Duke of Edinburgh (then President of the Federation Equestre Internationale, the governing body for international horse sports) organized a committee to write the first rules for combined driving competitions.

In 1976, the ADS formed a committee to adapt the FEI rules, and combined driving became officially recognized in the United States. The only dressage competitions at that time, however, were at the Advanced Level, and few drivers were ready or willing to tackle showing at that level. The ADS appointed a special dressage committee in 1983 to create a progressive competition program (and tests) beginning at Training Level.

Dressage competitions are run as one phase of a combined driving event, or as separate classes offered at a Pleasure show.

As the interest in driving dressage increases, we can also expect to see "dressage only" driving shows.

In dressage competition, each competitor is required to drive a dressage test, alone and under the critical eye of one or more judges. The judge gives each horse and driver a score for the different gaits and movements, and adds written comments. The score sheet is tabulated by the show personnel, and is returned to you later, after the class is pinned.

Scores are given for the individual movements and transitions as follows:

10 Excellent	4 Insufficient
9 Very good	3 Fairly bad
8 Good	2 Bad

7 Fairly good	1 Very bad
6 Satisfactory	0 Not executed
5 Sufficient	

After the competitor completes the test, "collective marks" are also awarded for:

- 1) Gaits.
- 2) Impulsion.
- 3) Submission.
- 4) The driver's handling of the reins and whip; correctness and effect of the aids.

Any errors of course (going the wrong way, executing a movement not included in the test or forgetting part of it) are penalized five points for each error. The score is totaled and then converted into a percentage figure. Receiving a "10" for each individual score would yield 100 percent (and that has never happened!); a good score for a first attempt would be 60 percent or above, reflecting mostly sixes in the score boxes, with an occasional five or seven.

Both the scores and the judge's comments can be a valuable training tool, because they give you a yardstick to measure your progress by. If you also come home with a ribbon, that's fine,

but the real value of dressage competition lies in the information you can gain about your horse's training.

You are asking an expert to give you an opinion about your horse's skills and abilities, but you are also comparing each performance to all the previous performances--trying for a "personal best" for what you know you can do, and looking for progress that the judge may not see. The judge, after all, can't judge your horse's progress from one show to the next or from one month to the next--he can only judge what he sees in that single performance. You may be thrilled to earn a six on a halt, because you've had so many problems with the halt; or you may be disappointed with a seven in a trot lengthening, because you know your horse can do even better. Setting the standards for your horse's performance, and then meeting them, can be tremendously satisfying even if you never earn a blue ribbon.

Object and General Principles

The object of dressage, the ADS rules tells us, is:

The harmonious development of the physique and ability of the horse. Through progressive training the horse becomes calm, supple, and flexible as well as confident, attentive and keen in his work.

These qualities are revealed by:

- 1) The freedom and regularity of the paces;
- 2) The harmony, lightness and ease of movement;
- 3) The lightness of the forehand and the engagement of the hind quarters, originating in a lively impulsion;

4) The acceptance of the bridle, without any tenseness or resistance.

These are all qualities we've been working to develop throughout our training program, and if we've been successful "the horse, confident and attentive, submits generously to the driver, remaining straight in any movement on a straight line and bending accordingly when moving on curved lines."

The Gaits

The ADS defines the horse's gaits as follows:

His walk is regular, free and unconstrained. . . .

His trot is free, supple, regular, sustained and active. . . . In all his work, even at the halt, the horse should be 'on the bit.' A horse is said to be 'on the bit' when the hocks are correctly placed, the neck is more or less raised and arched according to the stage of training and the extension or collection of the pace, and he accepts the bridle with a light and soft contact and submissiveness throughout. The head should remain in a steady position, as a rule slightly in front of the vertical, with a supple poll as the highest point of the neck, and no resistance should be offered to the driver.

All of our training objectives are mirrored here in the ADS rules. The only phrase that isn't quite clear is the reference to "correctly placed hocks." Since this is rather vague, we can only interpret it to mean that the hocks are placed always well underneath the horse's body--in the working gait this is more forward, and a little less forward in the collected gait (because of the shortening of the stride). In the collected gait, however, there is a more pronounced flexion of the hocks.

The Walk

ADS rules tell us that "the walk is a marching pace in which the footfalls of the horse's feet follow one another in four-time, well marked and maintained in all work at the walk. When the four beats cease to be distinctly marked, even and regular, the walk is disunited or broken. It is at the pace of the walk that imperfections in progressive training are most evident."

A horse who has a tendency to pace rather than trot will be most likely to show this at the walk. Since the pace is a two-beat lateral gait, a "pacey" walk is one in which the regular, steady, one-two-three-four walk rhythm is replaced by a one-two, three-four beat (with each lateral pair of legs moving nearly in unison).

The ADS recognizes two types of walk for the dressage driving horse:

a) The lengthened walk is a pace of relaxation in which the horse is allowed the freedom to lower and

stretch out his head and neck. The hind feet touch the ground clearly in front of the footprints of the forefeet. The horse is to be driven on a long rein, with the head and neck stretched to the utmost. The reins, however, should not be loose enough to loop.

b) Working Walk: a regular and unconstrained walk. The horse should walk energetically but calmly with even and determined steps, with distinct, marked four equally spaced beats. The driver should maintain a light and steady contact with the horse's mouth.

In our training program, we have referred to the first type of walk as a "free walk on a long rein," which is what it used to be called in all of the dressage tests. (It still is called this in the Preliminary Short Test.)

We have to take issue with the ADS definition of a lengthened walk; this should not be a "pace of relaxation," but an energetic walk that requires a definite increase in effort to lengthen the steps. The lengthened trot, after all, is not a pace of relaxation. (See below.) In the free walk, which is what the ADS actually describes, the steps become longer only because the horse has full freedom of his neck, not because the driver is purposely working to lengthen the strides.

Also, some horses--because of their build--will never be able to overtrack in the walk when they are pulling a load, and they should not--in our opinion--be punished for this, as long as they show full relaxation and freedom in the movement.

In ridden dressage, a lengthened walk would be equal to a medium walk. The 1991 ridden dressage tests include a working walk and a free walk on a long rein in First Level; Second Level requires a medium walk and a free walk on the long rein, with no lengthened walk at all.

The Trot

The ADS defines the trot as:

A pace of two time on alternate diagonal legs (near fore and off hind leg and vice versa) separated by a moment of suspension.

The trot, always with free, active and regular steps, should be moved into without hesitation.

The quality of the trot is judged by the general impression, the regularity and elasticity of the steps--originated from a supple back and well engaged hindquarters--and by the ability to maintain the same rhythm and natural balance.

The ADS recognizes the following trots:

a) Collected Trot: The horse, remaining on the

bit, moves forward with his hocks well engaged, maintaining the energetic impulsion, thus enabling the shoulders to move with greater ease. The horse's steps are shorter than in other trots, but he is lighter and more mobile.

b) Working Trot: A regular and unconstrained trot, in which a horse, not yet trained and ready for collected movements, shows himself properly balanced and remaining on the bit, goes forward with even, elastic steps and good hock action. The expression "good hock action" does not mean collection, but is a required quality of the working trot. It only underlines the importance of an impulsion originating from the activity of the hindquarters.

c) Lengthen Stride in Trot: This trot is used as a preparation for the extended trot. While maintaining the same rhythm, the horse covers more ground than in the working trot. He must lengthen and lower his frame and stride while remaining on contact.

d) Extended Trot: The horse covers as much ground as possible. Maintaining the same rhythm, he lengthens his step to the utmost as a result of great impulsion from the hindquarters. The driver allows the horse, remaining on the bit, to lower and extend his neck in order to prevent his action from becoming higher.

The Halt

According to the rules, at the halt "the horse should stand attentive, motionless and straight, with the weight evenly distributed over all four legs." The halt should be square, and the horse may chew the bit quietly while he maintains "a light contact with the driver's hand . . ."; he "should be ready to move off at the slightest indication. The halt is obtained by the displacement of the horse's weight on the quarters by properly used aids, driving the horse forward towards a restraining but allowing hand, causing an almost instantaneous but not abrupt halt. . . ."

The Reinback

The ADS rulebook stresses the principles and performance of the rein back as we have practiced it:

The Rein Back is a backward movement in which the feet are raised and set down simultaneously by diagonal pairs. The feet should be well raised and the hind feet remain well in line.

At the preceding halt as well as during the rein back, the horse, although standing motionless and moving back respectively, should remain on the bit, maintaining his desire to move forward.

Anticipation or precipitation of the movement,

resistance to or evasion of the hand, deviation of the quarters from the straight line, spreading or inactive hind legs and dragging feet are serious faults.

If in a dressage test a trot is required after a rein back, the horse should move off immediately into his pace, without a halt or intermediate step.

Transitions

This is how transitions are to be executed, according to the ADS rules:

Transitions: The changes of pace should be clearly shown when the horse's nose arrives at the prescribed marker: they should be quickly made, yet must be smooth and not abrupt. The rhythm of a pace should be maintained up to the moment the pace is changed or the horse halts. The horse should remain light in hand and calm, and maintain a correct position.

In the lower levels, transitions from trot to halt and from halt to trot may be executed progressively through the walk by making two or three well defined walk steps.

Collection

The ADS refers to collection as follows:

The Collection:

- a) The aim of the collection of the horse is:
 - 1. To further develop and improve the balance and equilibrium of the horse, which has more or less been displaced by the additional weight of the carriage.
 - 2. To develop and increase the horse's ability to lower and engage his quarters for the benefit of the lightness and mobility of his forehand.
 - 3. To add to the "ease and carriage" of the horse.
- b) Collection is, in other words, improved and effected by engaging the hind legs, with the joints bent and supple, forward under the horse's body.
- c) The position of the head and neck of a horse at the collected pace is naturally dependent on the stage of training and, in some degree, on his conformation. It should, however, be distinguished by the neck being raised and unrestrained, forming a harmonious curve from the withers to the poll, the poll being the highest point, with the head slightly in front of the vertical.

It is too bad the rulebook doesn't say anything about the degree of collection that can be expected from a driving horse. The rules state that the position of the head and neck is dependent upon the stage of training, but exactly what stage of training would be sufficient for an Advanced Level test? (See

the discussion of collection in Chapter 13.)

Because of the inherent difficulties in asking for extreme collection in a driving horse, we can only assume that the ADS is calling for moderate collection--the only kind possible in a horse pulling a carriage. If the ADS expected a greater degree of collection, we can assume that there would be additional, higher levels of dressage tests to aspire to--as is true in ridden dressage.

Submission

"The submission," according to the ADS rules, does not mean a truckling subservience, but an obedience revealing its presence by a constant attention, willingness and confidence in the whole behavior of the horse, as well as by harmony, lightness and ease he is displaying in the execution of the different movements. The degree of submission is also manifested by the way the horse accepts the bridle with a light contact and a supple poll, or with resistance to or evasion of the driver's hand, being either "above the bit" or "behind the bit" respectively.

Putting out the tongue, keeping it above the bit or drawing it up all together, as well as grinding the teeth and swishing the tail, are mostly signs of nervousness, tenseness or resistance on the part of the horse and must be taken into account by the judges in their marks for the movement concerned, as well as the collective for "submission."

The Tests

The ADS is responsible for creating and occasionally updating the official tests used in driving dressage competitions. There are two or three tests at each level, and each level is designed to meet certain objectives in the training of both the horse and driver.

The purpose of Training Level Tests 1 and 2 is "to establish that the correct foundation is being laid for the training of the driving horse, requiring the green horse to move forward in the lengthened walk and the working trot, in rhythm, while accepting the bit with relaxation, through transitions and 40m circles. This level is also intended to encourage the inexperienced driver."

At Preliminary Level Tests 1, 2 and 3, the purpose is "to establish that the horse has acquired a degree of balance and suppleness in addition to the rhythmical, free forward motion expected at the Training Level. While consistently accepting the bit, the horse exhibits more activity of the haunches in the working trot and lengthened walk. To be demonstrated in: 30m circles, 20m half-circles, 3-loop serpentine, and lengthened trot."

Intermediate and Advanced Levels carry similar statements of purpose, with increased impulsion and engagement required at each level. A five-second halt, rein back, and some collected trot are introduced at Intermediate Level; Advanced Level also requires a 10-second halt, collected trot, and extended trot.

The Arena

The ADS prescribes two sizes of arena. The large arena is 100 meters long by 40 meters wide, and the small arena is 80 meters long by 40 meters wide. Intermediate, Advanced, and international-level tests must be held in the large arena; lower-level tests may be held in the large or small arena. The same letter markers are used for driven dressage as for ridden dressage competitions, with their placement respective to the larger dimensions of the driving arena.

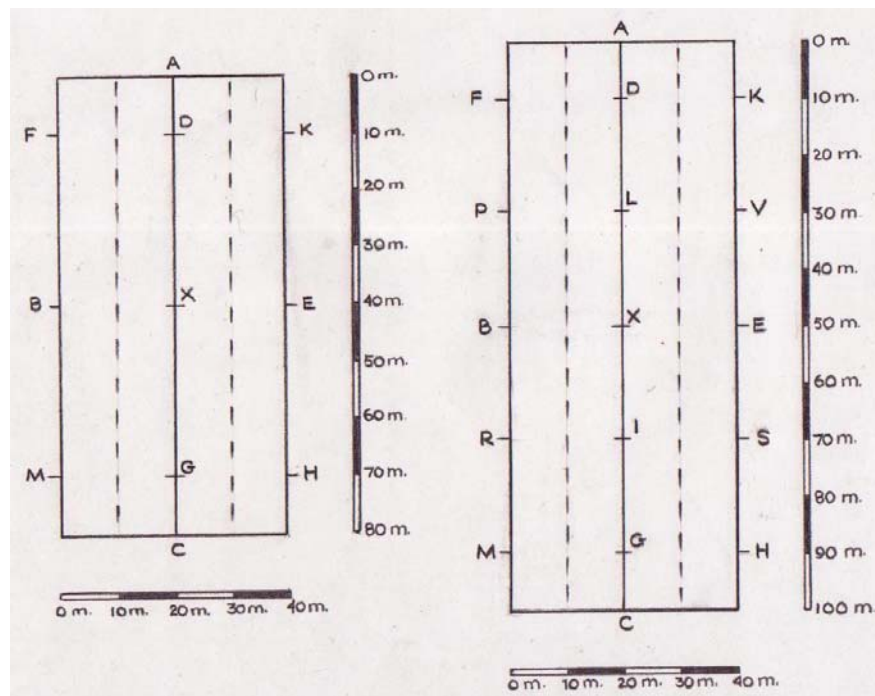


Fig.15-1
The small and large Dressage arena

Execution of the Tests

The dressage tests must be driven from memory, except for the Training Level test, which may be called by a helper; the driver, however, is still responsible for any errors made by the caller. Unless you are very nervous about forgetting your test, you should rely on your memory to drive it. Having a test called does not allow you to concentrate fully on your horse's performance; you'll always be listening for the next movement in

the test. In combined driving, all dressage tests must be driven from memory, including Training Level.

Practice and Preparation

If you are new to dressage competition, you might look at a Training or Preliminary Level test and think, "How simple this is! My horse can certainly handle this well." You may be quite confident that you can execute all the required movements and gaits, but it won't be until you try to put them together that you'll realize how difficult it is to perform an entire test well, with smooth transitions and precise figures performed exactly at the letters.

Strive for smoothness before accuracy. Once you are certain you and your horse can describe precise figures and execute smooth transitions on demand, you should train for accuracy. In competition, the judge will expect the movement to be executed when the horse's nose is at the mark. You must determine the exact spot at which your horse is to execute a movement or transition, and aim for accuracy as well as smoothness. If you can drive a perfect 40-meter circle at C or A, practice circles at E and B. Without the fence or wall on three sides to help you structure your circle, you'll find it far more difficult.

Change the locations frequently, or your horse will quickly learn to anticipate a particular movement at a certain location.

It is especially difficult to avoid having your horse anticipate the halt at X, because every test calls for at least one halt at this point. Many of the tests, however, also ask for a final halt at G, and if your horse habitually attempts to halt at X, he's going to embarrass you! Study a copy of the test you intend to drive to learn the individual movements, and then practice these in various locations, always using your letter markers as reference points.

When you feel you have mastered the individual movements with a good degree of accuracy and consistency, you can try to put them together into a test. But don't expect perfection yet!

At first, you should concentrate either on smoothness or accuracy, and don't be frustrated if you can't always get both right away.

If, for example, you intend to perform a transition from a working trot to a walk at E, but your horse does not feel balanced and ready for the transition as you approach E, you must make a decision: Do you insist on the transition exactly at E, whether he's ready or not, or do you wait a few steps longer to be sure he is balanced before asking for a smoother transition?

Your early training stressed smoothness and correct balance over accuracy. However, if you have serious problems with this and find yourself constantly sacrificing accuracy to keep your horse correctly balanced, then he's not really ready to perform a dressage test.

By asking for increased accuracy, you'll be able to pinpoint any problem areas and learn to plan for them. This is one of the

benefits of dressage competition, because the different tests are designed to gauge the horse's level and correctness of training.

Perhaps your horse has some difficulty with performing a transition from the trot to the halt. At Training level, you can make the transition through a few steps of walk, but if your horse needs more than a few steps of walk to adjust his balance and prepare for the halt, you know this is something that needs more attention. It may not have been much of a problem before, because your driving didn't demand this movement, but because you are now practicing for a dressage test, you realize that first, your horse should be able to do this properly; and second, that he needs more work on it.

Putting the Test Together

Once you have become familiar with your selected dressage test, you need to drive it frequently to learn where you must prepare your horse to execute each movement. The problem is, however, that if you drive the same test over and over your horse will quickly learn to anticipate each movement. The solution to this is to create a few different tests of your own, incorporating the same movements as those required in the test you're learning. Simply perform the required movements in different locations, and put them together into different combinations so your horse must always pay attention to your directions and not make plans of his own.

If you vary the patterns enough in between, you'll be able to practice the correct test several times without your horse realizing it's the "real" one. To memorize the test perfectly, you can also borrow another horse to drive, walk the test yourself in the arena, recite the test to friends, or set out letter markers in your living room and perform it by yourself.

Now that you feel your horse can perform a decent dressage test, you should be more exacting with him (and with yourself!).

Make a definite point of correcting him any time he does something wrong or does not perform as well as you know he can--even if you are in the middle of a test. Do the movement over or start the test over again, and strive for perfection. You won't be able to do this in a show, of course, but you don't want your horse to learn that performing a dressage test means he can get away with laziness or disobedience. Some horses seem to know that their drivers won't seriously correct them for misbehavior when they are "performing," and they will gladly take advantage of this.

Of course, when you are actually in the show arena, you will simply have to make the best of any mistakes or problems, and you may have to ignore behavior that would earn a quick correction at home. But if your horse has come to understand that you expect only the best effort from him, he will be more likely to give you what you ask for even in the show ring.

Show Strategy and Techniques

At the show, you'll want to keep everything as organized and as simple as possible. Many people fail to do their best because of the mistakes they make before they even get into the ring.

The way you warm up your horse, for instance, may have a great deal to do with your success or failure. Keep these points in mind:

1) Don't tire your horse in warmup. It is important to relieve your horse of excess nervous energy, but don't carry on so long that he becomes exhausted. A lot of calm walking may do you much more good than strenuous work in the trot. Allow plenty of time for walking around and looking if you feel he may be nervous, but don't actually work him more than is necessary in his warmup. You will want him to show his full power and impulsion during his test, and not leave it all outside in his warmup.

Of course, this depends on your horse. Sometimes a light warmup can prove disastrous, as your normally placid (but somewhat inexperienced) horse turns into a maniac when he's asked to "Enter at A." You'll just have to practice to find out what sort of preparation works for your particular horse. With experience, you will both know what to expect and what adjustments to make.

2) Don't school your horse. If there's something missing in his education, he isn't going to learn it in the warmup area.

If he does not reinback well at home, he's not going to do it well at the show, either. If you keep harping on problems in your warmup, it will just frustrate you both. Just do what "warmup" means: Limber his body, warm up his muscles, and tune his mind for the job at hand. Use exercises he is comfortable with and enjoys doing, and give him plenty of praise. Concentrate on relaxation, trust, and obedience to your commands.

3) Try to avoid the crowd. Often, this is impossible, but do your best. Look for a quiet corner and try to stay away from other turnouts so you can concentrate on your horse and don't have to worry about collisions. And forget about trying to impress anyone, especially the judge, in your warmup; that's not what it's for.

4) Keep your horse comfortable. In hot weather, look for shade. Have plenty of fly repellent with you, and have your groom ready with cool water, a sponge and a towel. In cool weather you may want a cooler or blanket in case you have to stand around for a while.

Considerations for the Test Ahead

Try to find the time to walk your test in the arena before you have to perform it. This may be difficult to do, and depends a great deal on when the arena is set up, what the show schedule is, and how much time you have allowed yourself before your class. Try to watch at least a few other tests in the arena you'll be showing in. Look for uneven footing, find landmarks to

help you locate X and a straight centerline. Driving arenas are much larger than arenas for ridden dressage, and it's easy to become lost. The small arena for driving, after all, is four times the size of the small arena for riding.

At Training Level, you are allowed to have your test read by someone sitting next to you on the carriage. Unless you are a total nervous wreck, and absolutely cannot memorize the test, you should drive it from memory. If you do forget part of the test or go the wrong way, the judge will blow the whistle, correct you and tell you what to do next. You will be penalized for the "error of course" (five points off your total score), but this is far better than having your concentration divided between your horse and your caller.

You want your test to appear as smooth and flowing as possible, so you will not want to correct your horse severely during his performance. When you have a problem with part of the test, get through it as best you can and concentrate on making the next movement better. If he trots when he should be walking, you will act quickly to correct this, but if he simply doesn't bend as well as you know he can, don't get after him--just try to improve the quality of the next turn.

Stay cheerful. This isn't life or death! Learn from the experience, be generous with your horse, and try to think of how you can improve your performance. Your horse isn't a machine, after all, and neither one of you is perfect. (His problems were probably all your fault, anyway!)

The Question of the Circle

There is one special difficulty with driving circles in dressage competition. It may seem like a small problem, but when you are searching for a way to perform an absolutely perfect circle it can become both confusing and frustrating.

To execute a 40-meter circle that begins at A or C in a 40 meter x 80 meter arena, the rules demand that your horse must pass through X. If the horse goes through X, however, the circle will not be perfectly round, because the driving horse cannot travel as close to the wall or dressage surround as can a riding horse. Allowing for the width of the carriage means that the driving horse is always traveling at least one meter in from the outside perimeter--and with a Training Level horse, you may be more comfortable with the horse traveling as much as two meters in from each side of the arena. The diameter of a "40-meter" circle, therefore, may be only 36 to 38 meters in diameter when measured across the arena, from one long side to the other. If you still attempt to drive the horse through X, your circle will become an oval.

Obviously, some accuracy must be sacrificed because of the width of the carriage. The same problem occurs to a lesser degree in the execution of smaller circles, but it is not nearly as drastic--nor as noticeable.

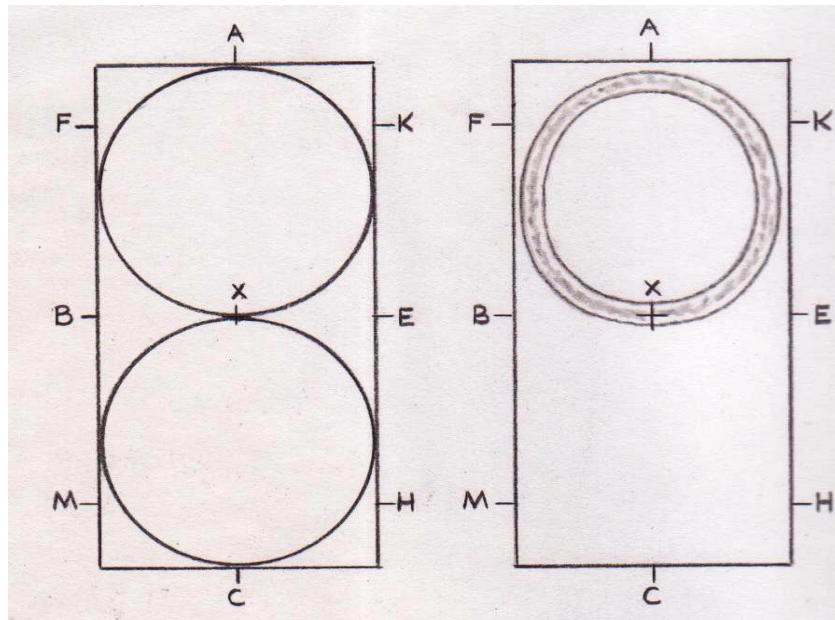


Fig. 15-2

To drive a 40 m circle through X as required in the rules, it will actually be necessary to drive a slightly oval figure.

The Call for Your Test

Since you know the time you are scheduled to begin your test, you will be able to complete your warmup and run through a last-minute check of your equipment just before your test.

You will be called for attention by the ring steward when the competitor before you starts his test, and you will be called again as soon as the previous competitor finishes his final salute. Then you may drive around the outside of the arena to familiarize your horse with the terrifying sights of the judge's booth (perhaps with a sun umbrella), letter markers, flower pots, the arena surround, and all those spectators.

Simply concentrate on your horse and convey to him your determination to go quietly by all these things. Give him as much confidence as possible. When the bell rings, you still have 90 seconds before you must begin your test. If your horse is still spooky and tense, use those 90 seconds to settle him down; you can easily go around the ring once more in a calm working trot. If your horse doesn't seem very tense, begin your test quickly. Waiting may make you both more nervous; besides, the judge and show management will appreciate it if you enter promptly.

Driving a Training Level Test

Now for the actual test. We'll take you through Training Level Test 2, movement by movement, to give you an idea of what

you should be doing, and when.

1. At A, enter working trot.
At X, halt and salute.

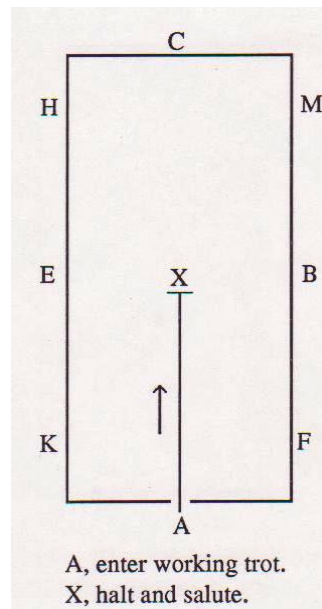


Fig. 15-3a

Choose your entrance wisely. If you can approach the center line from a straight line, do that. If you have to enter the ring off a turn, and you know your horse turns and straightens better to the left than the right, you should plan your approach off a left-hand turn. Keep your eyes fixed at C and head for it as straight as possible.

If the centerline is clearly marked by a mowed or raked strip, this should not be difficult; but if you waver from a clearly marked centerline, the judge will be able to see this very easily. Keep your horse forward and confident, and don't think about your halt at X until it is time to prepare for it. If you think too much, too early, about that halt your horse may feel this and begin to slow down or waver.

However, you mustn't wait too long to begin the halt, either, or you will either overshoot X or have to stop very abruptly. Remember that in Training Level you are allowed to walk two or three steps before coming to the halt. A brake is a great help in achieving a smooth halt, but be sure you are braking only the carriage, not the horse, too, as we often see.

When X is clearly marked on the ground, it should be easy to halt accurately. When it isn't marked, you must rely on your peripheral vision to locate X precisely between B and E. You are trying for a square halt, but if you don't get it, don't fiddle around with the horse. If he halts and raises his head to look around, you can play with his mouth a little, but be careful not

to make him step backwards.

Make your halt appear confident and secure, take your time for the salute, and calmly take up your rein position again. If your horse is nervous and you're afraid he will fidget or move off, don't waste time in the halt, but a brief halt will always look rushed and destroy the first good impression.

2. At X, proceed working trot.
At C track left.

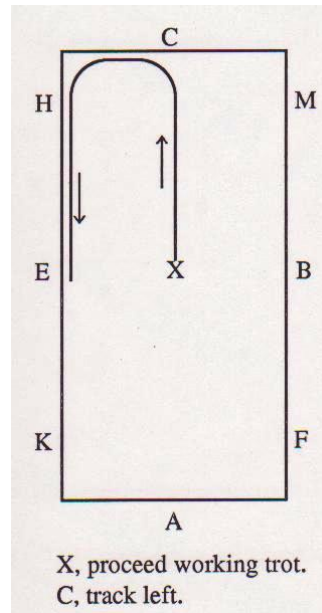


Fig. 15-3b

You are allowed to walk a few steps between the halt and the trot, but more than three walk steps will be penalized. Be sure to move off perfectly straight from X, keep C fixed with your eyes, and try not to let your horse sway or anticipate which way he'll be turning at C. Drive as if you intend to drive straight through C.

Then, about 12-15 meters before you reach C, you will prepare for your turn. Keep your horse on the outside rein and start bending him smoothly to the left. This turn often proves to be very difficult, because the horse is fascinated by the judge's booth and may not listen to your reins until he is almost on top of the judge, which will result in an extremely abrupt turn. If this happens, take him firmly on the mouth and half-halt him continuously. Talk to him and tap him with the whip on his left side.

The turn at C and the upcoming corner will be pretty much like a 20-meter half-circle; if you manage to straighten the horse out in between the turn and the corner, fine, but don't try for it if you don't feel good about it. Proceed straight along the long side to E and start preparing your horse right away for

the next movement, the circle.

3. At E, circle left 40 meters.

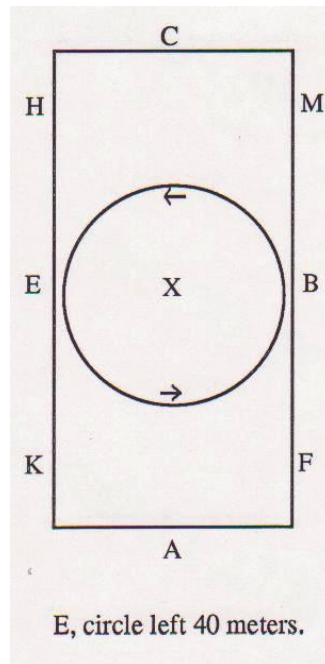


Fig. 15-3c

When your horse's head is at E, you must leave the track with a correctly bent horse. If you haven't sufficiently prepared for that bend as you approach E, your horse will fall over his left shoulder and this will be difficult to correct. The 40-meter circle beginning at the middle of a long side is not easy to drive. Your only other marked reference point is B, and there's a lot of arena to get lost in between the two markers. If you have found reference points for your circle on the centerline (20 meters on either side of X), look for these now to help you make your circle round and accurate.

The most important thing is to maintain your horse's bend and his forward rhythm. A single judge sitting at C may not be able to determine whether the circle is a precise figure, but he will certainly be able to tell if your horse loses his rhythm, bend, and impulsion. The quality of the movement itself is more important than the accuracy, but you should strive for both. (If there's a second judge sitting at B or E, he will be better able to judge the accuracy of the circle.)

4. At E, working trot.
F-X, change rein.

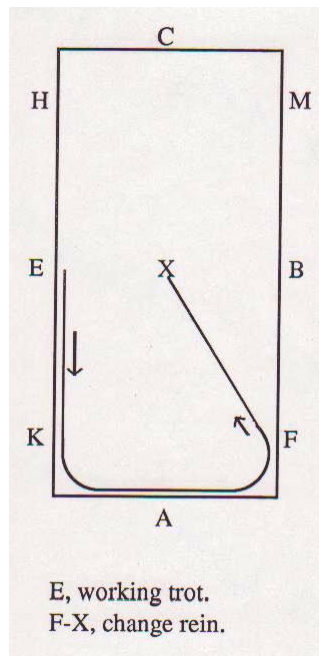


Fig. 15-3d

At E, straighten your horse, repair any loss of rhythm, and prepare for the two upcoming corners. You should make a definite difference in your horse's lateral flexion, bending him for the first corner, straightening for the straight short side, and bending again for the second corner.

Aim to leave the track just as your horse's head is at F. For a Training Level horse, this is a fairly tight turn; if you don't quite make it, leave the turn a little late instead of sacrificing smoothness and forwardness. Above all, avoid having your horse throw himself over the left shoulder in an attempt to make the turn.

While you are turning at F, look ahead to H to ensure your straight line across the diagonal. If your turn at F was a little late, you must bring your horse back onto the diagonal line to meet X precisely.

5. X-H, Lengthened walk.
H-C, Working walk.

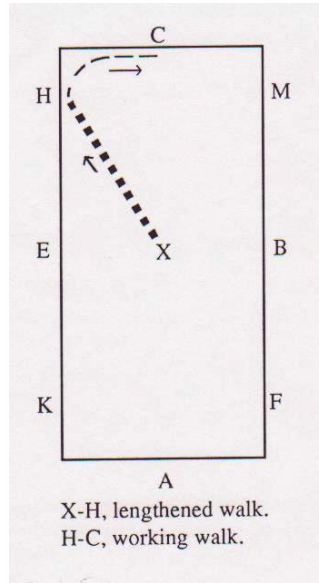


Fig.15-3e

Regardless of whether you meet X accurately or not, you must concentrate on a smooth downward transition to the walk as close to X as possible. If you have managed to stay on the diagonal line, prepare for your walk transition in plenty of time so you will walk when your horse's head is at X. If you feel you are going to overshoot X, work for a smooth--if somewhat late--transition rather than an abrupt but accurate one.

This is a fairly difficult movement for a green horse. You must come down to the walk and then instantly give your horse a very long rein in order to get the longer walk strides--which can put him too much on the forehand right after the transition, and may cause him to jig or rush in the walk. If you have this problem, give the reins gradually, even if it takes you several strides to get into the free walk.

If your horse looks around or pokes his nose up, try to gently massage his mouth to persuade him to stretch down again. You will not get a good mark on this movement if your horse does not markedly lengthen and lower his frame and if he does not show free forward movement.

Keep your eyes fixed on a point just short of H and begin to carefully shorten your reins (without losing your rhythm) a few meters before you reach the track.

If you head directly for H, you will not be able to make the turn. It will feel to you as if you arrived too late at the track. So, when completing your change of direction through a diagonal, always aim for a spot on the track one or two feet ahead of the letter.

Soften your horse's jaws right away as much as possible to achieve a bend through the turn. This again is very difficult to do without losing the rhythm. A downward transition followed immediately by a bend is a very difficult combination for a Training Level horse. If you don't manage to keep your horse forward enough in his working walk through this turn, your transition to the trot will lack impulsion.

6. At C, Working Trot.

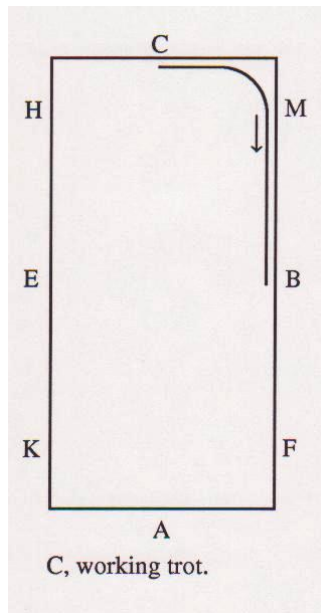


Fig. 15-3f

Compress the last two to four walk strides a little more toward the bit, so your horse has enough energy to promptly pick up a forward trot without throwing his head up. If he did put his head up, don't become flustered; you still have a few strides on the straightaway to regain your horse's longitudinal flexion before tackling the corner.

7. At B, Circle right 40 meters.

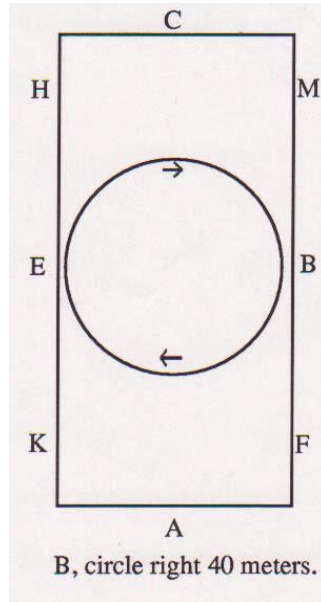


Fig. 15-3g

The same applies here as for the previous circle to the left, although you must compensate for any problems if your horse is less supple to the right than to the left.

8. B to F, Working trot.
At A, Down center line.
At X, Halt 3-5 seconds.

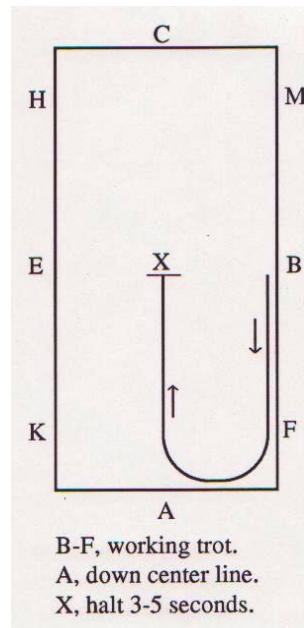


Fig. 15-3h

The command "B to F, working trot" is a bit confusing, since you will actually stay in the working trot all the way to X. When you enter your corner at F, you must think ahead for the turn at A. Plan it again as a 20-meter half-circle, or, if you feel confident, straighten your horse for a few steps in between the corner and the turn onto the centerline.

In any case, it is better to turn a little too early than too late onto the centerline.

If you turn too early, you can still drift your way over to the centerline without trouble; if you wait too long to begin your turn at A, the judge will certainly notice and you will get the comment, "Overshot the center line." No matter how you turned, fix your eyes at C and try for a straight line, whether you're exactly on the centerline or not. Prepare for and execute the halt the same as you did for your entrance.

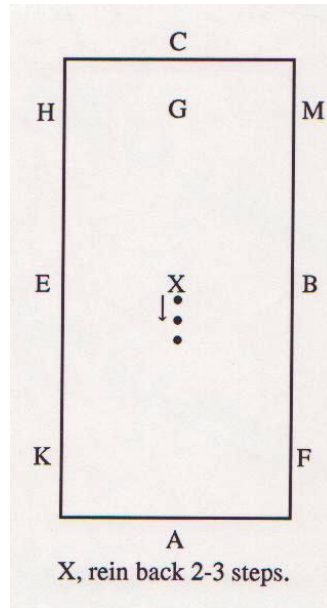
9. At X, Rein back two to three steps.

Fig. 15-3i

Make sure your horse is soft in the jaws before you ask him with your voice command to rein back. If he does not react to your voice, start massaging his mouth and apply some backwards pressure with both reins, while repeating your command. If he still does not react, try your whip and let him step forward one step, then immediately apply your backwards rein pressure. Stay calm; don't get angry or tense. If he doesn't step back at all, that is still better than rearing or plunging. Green horses sometimes have a hard time backing at a show, even if they do it willingly at home.

Ideally, of course, he will step back willingly on command, moving in an even, diagonal footfall. If he moves back a little crooked, that is okay; the primary quality being judged at Training Level is his willingness to rein back on command. Straightness, of course, is an added plus, and will be rewarded.

10. X to G, Working walk.
At G, Halt, salute.

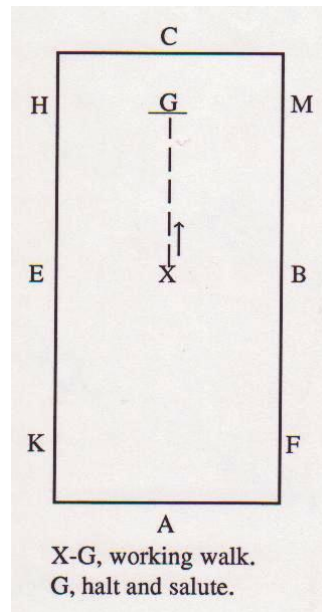


Fig. 15-3j

Let him step forward immediately out of the reinback without a stop in between, and make sure you give him plenty of rein to allow for the first walk step. Try to walk straight and as rhythmically as possible up to G, looking for the exact location of G.

Try for your smoothest, straightest halt, and salute.

You did it!

Anyone who has never attempted to drive a dressage test cannot appreciate its difficulty. Even a supposedly simple test at Training Level is quite complex; you must be planning and thinking every step of the way.

The higher you go in dressage competition levels, the more accuracy will be an important factor in the scoring. This, also, reflects our training program, as we continue to ask the horse for increased precision as he progresses through his education.