

Dressage, the Value of Knowledge

By: Beverly J. Lynch

In the real horse world there are many equestrian disciplines to learn if one desires to expand their horizons. But one of these disciplines has the ability to increase the level of performance of all others, some exponentially. No matter where horsemanship leads you, from the model horse community, riding, teaching, training or just being a good spectator; learning the basics of dressage will improve your abilities in all equestrian disciplines. We who ride, teach and train dressage see a learning opportunity each time we interact with a horse and or rider. The value of learning a bit more about this versatile discipline will reveal itself for you as an individual within this virtual clinic.

Dressage by definition literally means "Training". By that definition it can be related to aerobics for the horse and rider. By the very nature of dressage it builds strength, endurance, flexibility, agility, power, coordination, balance, accuracy and stamina. The end goal is complete harmony of the horse and his rider, executing the highest level movements with precision, self carriage, balance, grace, harmony and control of power. This is the listening discipline. The horse listens to the riders aids and responds in measured kind. The rider learns how to ask for exactly what is desired and the horse learns to perform exactly as directed. It is as true for dressage as it is for anything else; that for every action there is an equal or greater reaction. Changes in signals as subtle as a slight weight shift, pressure applied by the rider's knee, slight change in the position of her lower leg, a firmer rein; become more and more invisible to the untrained eye as the horse and rider proceed up the levels of dressage.

At the highest competition level of this discipline, the physical development of a horse into a Grand Prix dressage champion spans 8 or more years of consistent and patient training. This level of performance is commonly referred to as; Olympic level or World Champion level (<http://www.alltechfeigames.com>). Of course like in any sport, this level is reserved for the most dedicated, the hardest workers and the most gifted horse and rider pairing. Through the many years of physical and mental training that begins at the "Introductory" levels, then "Training" level, and so on; many horses & indeed many riders will find that they are not capable of mastering all levels of dressage. That said, all horses and riders can benefit from the aerobic and gymnastic exercise that is dressage. Dressage training produces horses and riders that have the ability to perform other disciplines without being physically and mentally prepared to do so. These would include such disciplines as 3-day Eventing, Show Jumping, Trail/Obstacle courses, Endurance, Driving competitions, Reining, Cow handling, Gaming, Police & Military work along with many others. These are the real world benefits of a formal education in dressage.

The value of a formal dressage education has helped me as a rider, trainer, teacher and coach. There have been many times where within the first few minutes of being on any horse or pony that I have effectively communicated my needs and desire to him in a way that transforms him from the old lesson pony to a desirable training or first level frame. Owners are astonished with how very different and "together" the old lesson pony can become when given the proper aids and signals to accomplish it even just at walk. The smoothness of the gaits for the rider immediately improve as the horse/pony is asked to "make me a bridge" to sit on please. Their ability to be attentive and focused on the task at hand improves immensely when given the opportunity to accomplish it with proper communication.



Dutch Rider, Edward Gal and Morelands Tortilas, A 10 Year Old Black Dutch Warmblood Stallion –New World Record Score at Grand Prix December, 2009, of 92.3% at the UK's Olympia's World Cup Qualifier. Current market value of Toto is approximately 32Million US dollars.

Understanding dressage if you don't ride it and train it can seem daunting. Becoming an educated spectator alone is very challenging yet can be very rewarding with many benefits. It is my intention through this virtual clinic to combine my knowledge of dressage and my knowledge of the model horse hobby to help improve the understanding of this complex

discipline within the model horse community and thereby improving our judges ability to produce accurate outcomes at live and photo shows and for showers to create more accurate and realistic presentations and displays.

Dressage begins with basic paces and movements and builds from these by adding additional requirements of horse and rider as the strength and mental ability of horse and rider grow. For the purposes of this virtual clinic I will be discussing the "levels" of dressage beginning with *Introductory Level* and ending with the complexities of the *Musical Kur, Pas de Deux and Quadrille* as used by the [United States Dressage Federation \(USDF\)](#) and the [United States Equestrian Federation \(USEF\)](#) which includes the levels of the [Fédération Equestre Internationale \(FEI\)](#). I will be referring to material provided on their websites along with additional websites as added resources. I have also added a section to this article which will describe "other" competition dressage offered through these groups that are not as well known but are interesting in their own right. As we discuss each level I will clarify the tack and attire required at each level which will help the model horse enthusiast to be more accurate with their displays.

Dutch Rider, Anky van Grunsven and Hanoverian Gelding Keltec Salinero, Olympic Gold 2004 and 2008



Oh My, So Much to Learn!

As a model horse judge it is common place that I see a model performing a Grand Prix movement is entered into a Training level class with a snaffle bridle but a rider with a top hat and Shadbelly (tails) jacket displaying poor rider position as seen in this photo below. There is much confusion and I am hoping to provide some clarity for everyone.



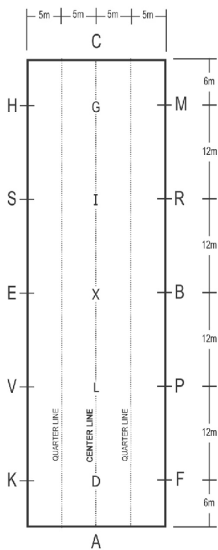
Common Competition Levels

- *Introductory*
- *Training Level*
- *First Level*
- *Second Level*
- *Third Level*
- *Fourth Level*
- *Prix.St. Georges Level*
- *Intermediate I*
- *Intermediate II*
- *Grand Prix*
- *Grand Prix Special*

Each level increases the demands on both horse and rider. Strength, impulsion, flexibility, self carriage, straightness, relaxation, control, harmony grow with each level completed. Each competition entered is called a "test". Each test is judged in small sections; called movements. The scoring system used to judge how well the pair perform on each movement runs from zero (not performed) to ten, (perfect). There are also weighted movements that count for double, triple and even quadruple points. These are formulated in this way to impress upon the pair their importance toward the ultimate outcome. At the bottom of every test there are scores called "collective marks". These marks measure several things, including; the quality of the horse's paces (freedom and regularity), his impulsion (desire to move forward, elasticity of the steps, suppleness of his back and engagement of his hind quarters). Also in this section of scoring the test, double points are awarded for correct rider position, seat and correctness of and effectiveness of the aids. Double points are also awarded in this section for submission (attention, confidence, harmony, lightness, ease of movements, acceptance of the bridle (on the bit), and lightness on the forehead).

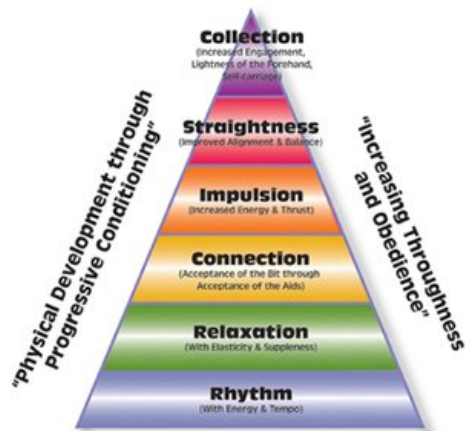
For the purposes of this clinic I have created a separate section devoted to understanding the gaits/paces of the horse. I will discuss these gaits/paces as they apply to specific, correct dressage movements. I will also talk about and attempt to explain in text and pictures the required movements of each level; the required or optional tack and attire of each level. There will be a special section on "Musical Freestyle", (Kur), "Pas de Deux" and "Quadrilles" as they apply to competition dressage and the model horse community. Included in this clinic will also be examples of and discussion of correct rider position. There is a separate section of this clinic that will show you exactly how much of this knowledge will help you make improvements to your dressage display or presentations.

Dressage Arenas and the Pyramid of Training:

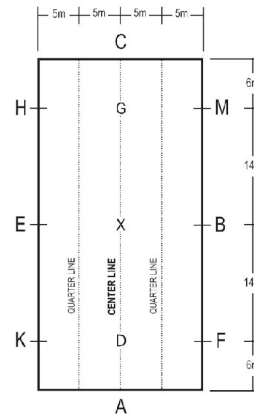


Standard Dressage Arena

Pyramid of Training



The Pyramid of Training



Small Dressage Arena



Standard Dressage Arena

Basic equipment

For training and first level any English saddle will be sufficient though introduction of a dressage saddle at any level will immediately help the rider with a more balanced, correct position and the effectiveness and application of the riders aids as dressage saddles are made specifically for this purpose. A snaffle bridle with brow band, throat latch and cavison are required. Proper adjustment and fit are critical for real or model horses. Attire of the rider at this level is usually a hunt jacket, light or white breeches, hunt or field boot or paddock shoes with the appropriate jodhpurs. A hunt cap is appropriate at training and first levels, though it is required for all individuals under age 18 to use a hard hat with a harness. This is also recommended for all riders at the early levels for safety.



Attire for Training And First Levels



Dressage Saddle



Snaffle Bridle with a Drop Noseband



Snaffle Bridle with a flash noseband

Introductory Level

The "*Introductory Level*" tests, I and II are meant by the very nature of their name to "introduce" the pair to dressage. Movements and requirements are basic and are only performed at the walk and trot. At this level a coefficient of 3 is used for scoring the riders position which is considered to be of utmost importance at this early stage of development. I have provided a link below to this test so that you can review it as needed.

Link to USDF competition dressage "Introductory Level" test: <http://www.horsetop.net/introa.pdf>

Training Level

At *training level* the horse and rider are introduced to the working gaits/paces. Working gaits prove that a horse is not lazily plodding along, but actively engaged in his work, he is paying attention to his rider and obeying her commands. He is also not rushing around like a race horse in the arena and demonstrates a good ability to obey commands and prompts in a fairly balanced and timely way, and shows minimal resistance to the aids and to the bit. A horse that is "on the bit" does not toss his head in the air or pull the reins from the rider's hands, but shows a fairly low but rounded frame. The horse is willing to move forward with out pulling himself along with his front legs and begins to learn to push himself forward with his hind legs. In creating this low rounded "frame" he provides a comfortable "bridge" for his rider to sit. See pictures below. A horse with his nose out beyond the vertical (where the front of the horses face makes a straight up and down line perpendicular to the ground) inevitably has a hollow or swale to his back making him very uncomfortable

to ride. The horse whom tucks his head in toward his chest beyond the vertical is avoiding the aids and thereby avoiding the work he is presented with, which is of course is to no one's benefit. The working trot shows that the horse is stepping into his own tracks or "tracking up". He is learning to travel with straightness and without leaning to the inside or outside. He also learns to halt, standing more or less squarely while remaining "on the bit" (vertical). He learns several reaching and stretching down, reaching for the bit exercises at this level as well. His paces should be regular and rhythmic.



Square halt on the bit



Working Trot



Long & Low Release Exercise

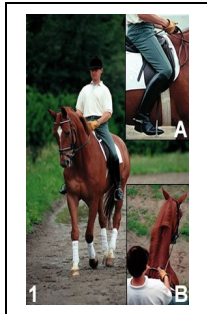


Working canter

This is one of many useful links to the USDF dressage tests, this one is Training level 4, the fourth of four tests for this level. <http://www.usef.org/documents/disciplines/dressage/tests/abridged/Training%204.pdf>

First Level

At *first level* the horse uses the strength he has gained from his training level work to push himself forward with his hind legs rather than pulling himself along with his front legs, with better balance and control. The new gaits/movements mastered at this level include; lengthening of the stride in trot & canter, medium walk (a walk where the horse "over-tracks" reaching beyond his front footfall with his hind hoof placement), completing a shallow serpentine that does not encompass the entire width of the arena at working canter without a change of lead. This shows improved balance, flexibility and obedience as well as a certain degree of relaxation. Leg yielding is introduced at this level as a way to teach the horse to move away from his rider's leg when asked to do so without moving his entire body. Additional work on the ability of the horse to relax and stretch is shown at the free walk.



Leg Yielding



Working canter



Working Trot



Lengthen Stride in Trot

This is the link to the **USDF First Level Test 4**. <http://www.usef.org/documents/disciplines/dressage/tests/abridged/First%204.pdf>

Second Level

At *second level* the team is introduced to new movements that will increase their flexibility and rhythm, such as the shoulder in and renvers. The ability of the horse to push himself forward with more power and strength from the hind quarters through the medium trot & canter is shown. The ability of the pair to control forward motion is shown through simple lead changes at canter and by completing the rein back. Also part of this level the bringing together or collecting of the trot and canter is improved at the end of this level. The collected trot and canter bring the length of each stride shorter or closer together while maintaining rhythm and the position of the head and neck are higher than in the previous levels. The rider should begin to feel the horse working more "up hill" with better carrying power from the hind quarters.



Shoulder-in



Collected Trot



*Appropriate Attire
for 2nd-4th Levels*



Medium Trot



Collected Canter



Collected Trot



*Transition from Medium Canter
to Collected Canter*

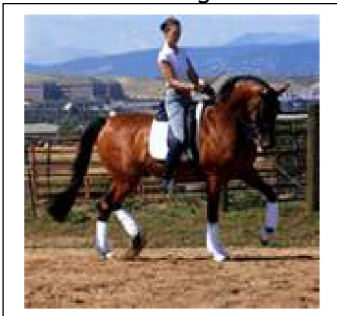


Medium Canter

This is the USDF dressage tests, link to [USDF Second level Test 4](http://www.usef.org/documents/disciplines/dressage/tests/abridged/Second%204.pdf). <http://www.usef.org/documents/disciplines/dressage/tests/abridged/Second%204.pdf>

Third Level

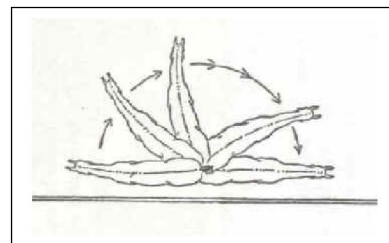
At *third level* the horse and rider further the development of what they have mastered on the collected paces of walk, trot and canter. Added at this level are the extended paces of walk, trot and canter. More carrying weight is moved to the haunches as the horse learns to complete the turn on the haunches at walk. The shoulder in work started at second level continues into third level. The added movement called half pass is added at this level and is performed at the trot in short spurts. Third level brings also the introduction of the single flying change of lead at canter.



Collected Trot



Collected Canter



1/2 Turn on the Haunches



Canter, Single Flying Change of Lead



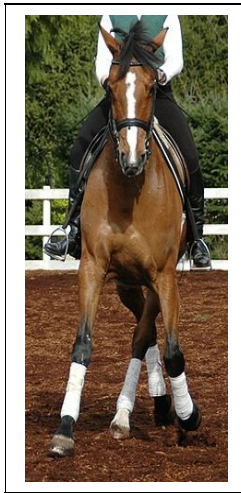
Extended Canter



*Extended Canter
(note the uphill look of this canter)*



Extended Trot



Half Pass Right at Trot



Canter, Single Flying Change of Lead

This is the link to the USDF dressage tests, *USDF Third Level Test 3*. <http://www.usef.org/documents/disciplines/dressage/tests/abridged/Third%203.pdf>

Fourth Level

At *fourth level* further elevation and collection of the trot and canter are continued with more extensive work at collected walk, trot and canter. This helps to continue the strengthening of the horses back, haunches and top line. The half pass is further developed as the horse reaches under himself to move forward yet sideways with rhythm and self carriage. Flying changes of lead at the canter of every three & four strides is introduced at this level as is the half pirouette at the canter. The extended gaits are introduced at this level, extended walk, extended trot as well as canter. Transitions between the gaits become quicker yet remain controlled and smooth. The smoothness of all transitions are heavily weighted when scoring dressage tests. Between third and fourth levels the option to use the full bridle is introduced though it is not a requirement at these levels. Rider attire requirements of derby and hunt jacket change at fourth level, adding the option of the top hat and shadbelly tailed jacket shown below.



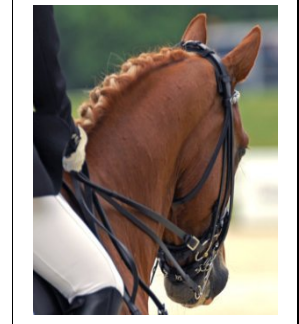
Proper Attire for 4th Level and Above



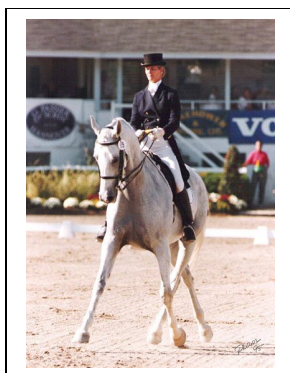
Correct fit of a Double Bridle



Curb Bit and Bridoon Snaffle of the Double Bridle



Acceptable Double Bridle Hand/Rein Placement



Half Pass Right



Collected Trot



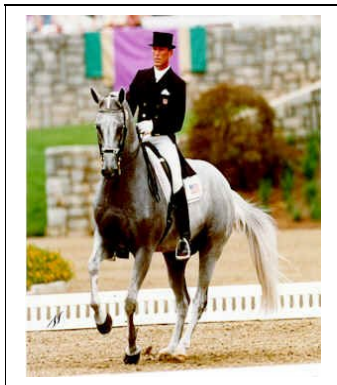
Collected Trot

Prix St. Georges Level

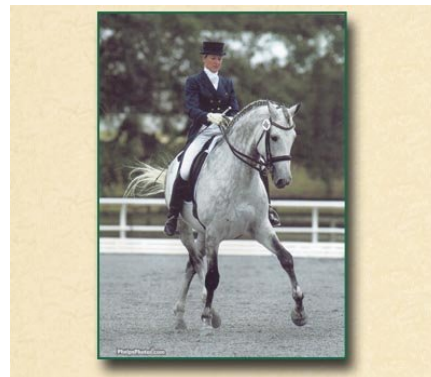
The *Prix St. Georges level* introduces the movements of half pirouette at canter, 8 meter trot and canter circles, additional work on flying changes and extended gaits. Collection, balance, self carriage, impulsion and the "up hill" work will improve during work at this level. This level prepares the team for more complex movements of Intermediate.



Extended Trot



Canter Pirouette



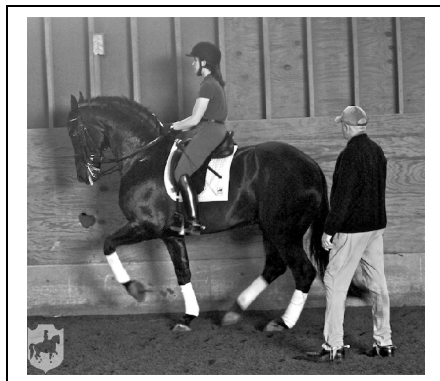
Half Pass Left

This is the link for the Prix St. Georges dressage test.

<http://www.fei.org/sites/default/files/file/OFFICIALS%20%26%20ORGANISERS/ORGANISERS/DRESSAGE/Dressage%20Tests/Prix St Georges 09.pdf>

Intermediate Level I and II

Training at *Intermediate Level I and II* will teach the pair the multiple (3) half pass at canter incorporating flying changes of lead, the full pirouette at canter and an overall improvement in elasticity, collection, quality and smoothness of the transitions, self carriage, impulsion and improve the strength yet again of the ability of the hind quarters to carry additional weight and deliver power. The pair will also learn to complete flying changes of lead every third and every other stride. The accuracy, placement and precision of each movement improves at these two levels along with the correct bend, flexion, submission, suppleness and obedience to the aids. The Intermediate Level II test introduces the new movements of "passage" (an elevated, animated trot that calls for additional flexion of the hocks and knees as well as additional raising of the limbs) and the "piaffe" (trot in place) though some forward movement is acceptable at this level for this movement. Performing the piaffe at this level calls for 5 steps and the passage is limited in length as this is the introduction level for these movements. The paces must be very regular, rhythmic show cadence and straightness and self carriage. The piaffe requires that a certain height of lift of the "up" legs must be reached to be counted as completion of the movement. In order to attain good scores the up leg must lift higher than the coronet band of the opposite limb. The extended gaits of walk, trot and canter must show that the horse is "over tracking" (placement of the hind hoof is in front of the past footfall of the corresponding front) by a large distance, typically a foot or even more. Inadequate "throughness" from the hind quarters will cost the pair dearly in scores if not achieved. Harmony and lightness are further developed at these levels.



Schooling the Piaffe



*Flying Change of Lead
every other Stride*



Canter Pirouette

Further information: To see the "passage" in motion go to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Passage_animated.gif. To see the "piaffe" in motion go to: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piaffe>

USDF link for Intermediate Test I.

<http://www.fei.org/sites/default/files/file/OFFICIALS%20%26%20ORGANISERS/ORGANISERS/DRESSAGE/Dressage%20Tests/Inter I 09.pdf>

USDF link for Intermediate Test II

<http://www.fei.org/sites/default/files/file/OFFICIALS%20%26%20ORGANISERS/ORGANISERS/DRESSAGE/Dressage%20Tests/Inter II 09.pdf>

The Grand Prix and The Grand Prix Special

This, the highest level of competition Dressage is called the *Grand Prix*, each movement will reach the maximum FEI requirements for quantity and quality. This is the pinnacle of dressage competition. The requirement of 12 to 15 steps of piaffe is introduced along with longer selections of passage, more precise canter pirouettes, changes of lead every other (9) and every stride (15) are also required. The difficulty of the transitions between movements has increased to its maximum level; Halt to collected canter, passage to piaffe and back to passage, then to extended trot. The movements of collected canter to canter pirouette then back to collected canter transitions are all heavily weighted at this level. Half pass at trot and canter are more demanding and longer with multiple changes in direction with flying lead changes at each change of direction make this level extremely demanding of both horse and rider. Self carriage, cadence and quality of all movements reaches its highest competition level. An unprepared pairing will find only frustration at this level. The pair must be relaxed and confident in their work, signals and aids from the rider become invisible at this level.



Piaffe



Piaffe



Canter Pirouette



Extended Trot



Passage



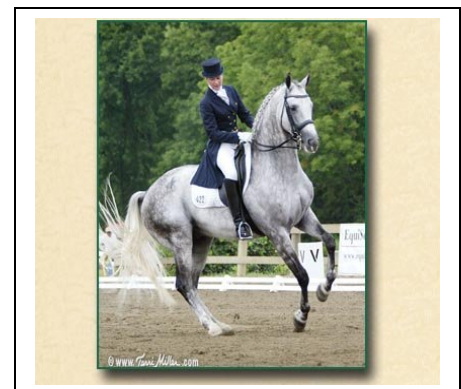
Extended Trot



Extended Trot



Half Pass Left



Canter Pirouette

USDF link for Grand Prix test:

http://www.fei.org/sites/default/files/file/OFFICIALS%20%26%20ORGANISERS/ORGANISERS/DRESSAGE/Dressage%20Tests/GP_09.pdf

USDF link for Grand Prix Special test:

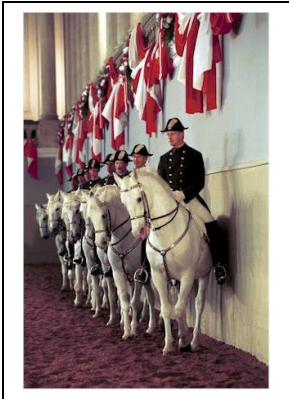
http://www.fei.org/sites/default/files/file/OFFICIALS%20%26%20ORGANISERS/ORGANISERS/DRESSAGE/Dressage%20Tests/GPS_09.pdf

Less Common Types of Competition Dressage

The USDF offers several other types of competitive dressage levels that have not been mentioned earlier in this article. I separated these mostly because of the uncommon nature of these particular levels or types of Dressage.

The Quadrille

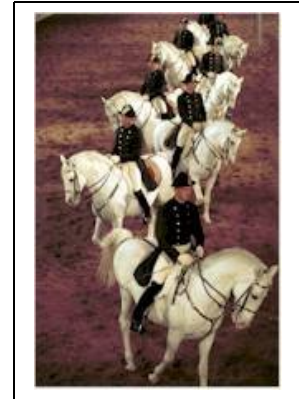
An additional section of tests called the "*Quadrille*" are also provided by the USDF for five levels of dressage performance of groups of horses, typically four or 6 horses, less often 8. Quadrilles have been performed since way back in the "Baroque" period of horsemanship but today teams of four riders perform compulsory movements using the musical freestyle routine of their choice. The most common of quadrilles are those performed at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Austria. The "Cadre Noir" is another, as well as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.



Spanish Riding School of Vienna Austria Lipizzaner Stallions and their Riders Performing the Shoulder-in



Performing the Collected Walk



Performing alternating Half Pass'



Grand Prix Quadrille of Eight, Performing the Collected Trot

Groups are judged on the spacing (longitudinal and lateral), synchrony (timing of turns, circles and transitions, cross-over's and pass-through's), impulsion, submission (obedience to the aids in order to perform patterns accurately), as well as their performance as a group (uniformity and harmonious).

Link to USDF competition dressage "Quadrille" tests: Basic - Training - <http://www.horsetop.net/quadrilletraining.pdf>, Level 1 - <http://www.horsetop.net/quadrille1.pdf>, Level 2 - <http://www.horsetop.net/quadrille2.pdf>, Level 3 - <http://www.horsetop.net/quadrille3.pdf>

The Pas de Deux

The *Pas de Deux* (ride of two) provides the horse/rider pairing with the opportunity to combine the elegance of a dressage musical freestyle with the added complexity of two horses performing together. In competitive Pas de Deux there are required movements and figures that must be performed at what ever level of dressage is being shown. The technical requirements are then choreographed with music to highlight the capabilities and strengths of a particular pair of horses and riders. This is an awesome event to watch as a spectator due to the dynamic of having two horses and riders literally dancing together to music. There are many occasions when a Pas de Deux is also performed as

entertainment or a featured attraction at special events and charity functions. Demonstrations of the Pas de Deux are common and costuming can be an added attraction at non-competitive events. Both horses and riders must be secure and competent in the execution of the technical requirements for the level they choose to show. The better their command of these elements the more successful they will be with their final scores. My sister and I used to do this kind of exhibition riding during the lunch breaks of horse shows we held on our farm "Petersen's Equestrian Academy" here in Southern NH in the early 80's.



*Grand Prix Pas de Deux
Performing the Piaffe*



*Grand Prix Pas de Deux
Performing Half Pass Left*



*Third Level Pas de Deux
Performing the Collected Trot*

Link to USDF competition dressage "Pas de Deux" training through grand prix levels, test score sheet/requirements: <http://www.horsetop.net/pasdedeux.pdf>, & also: <http://www.usdf.org/education/other-programs/pasdedeux/index.asp>

Musical Free Style (Kur) in Competition Dressage

If you have ever had the pleasure of watching any level dressage competition you know the exacting nature of this discipline. Development of the horse paired with his rider through the various levels of competition dressage to a strong, harmonious, light, attentive, supple/flexible, obedient, calm, precise, and utter fluid team is the culmination of that which is inherently dressage. The musical free style rides are a spectators dream...watching horses literally dancing to music, especially at the upper levels.

For the competition levels listed on page two of this document, first level through grand prix there can often be the opportunity at many large dressage shows for the horse and rider team to perform a judged ride that changes the order of the mandatory movements and paces to that desired by the rider matched to music of their choice. This is called a "musical free style" (Kur) ride or test.

The musical Free Style (Kur) was introduced into competition with the 1986 World Equestrian Games (WEG) by the FEI. It was added to the requirements at the Olympic Level in 1996 Atlanta games, and now accounts for 50% of the overall score for each pairing in determining medal placement for overall dressage performances.

Currently the USDF national rules for first through fourth levels state that "in order to enter a freestyle class at any level, a minimum score of 58% in the highest test of the declared freestyle level or any test of a higher level at a USEF recognized competition must have been reached and written prove submitted.

The design of the free style ride itself has an added scoring section within the test as part of what is called "artistic impression". These collective marks carry a coefficient of 4! They include; choreography, use of the arena x 4, degree of difficulty, calculated risks and inventiveness x 4, and Music and interpretation of the music x 4. The one hard fast rule that cannot be overlooked is that at any level performing movements not required of that level but of a level higher than that show is not allowed and may cause disqualification.

Link to free style requirements guide for first level through grand prix, (two handy sites): http://www.horsetop.net/freestyle_tests.pdf & <http://www.usdf.org/docs/competitions/handbook/Chapter8.A-Freestyle.pdf>

Link to the FEI Intermediate I Musical Free Style (Kur) test: http://www.fei.org/sites/default/files/file/OFFICIALS%20%26%20ORGANISERS/ORGANISERS/DRESSAGE/Dressage%20Tests/Inter_I_Freestyle_09.pdf

Link to the FEI Grand Prix Musical Free Style (Kur) test: http://www.fei.org/sites/default/files/file/OFFICIALS%20%26%20ORGANISERS/ORGANISERS/DRESSAGE/Dressage%20Tests/GP_Freestyle09%20Final%20Proposal%20.pdf