

Title:

Dressage Competitions and Riding

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Summary:

At the lowest levels, dressage tests are very simple, with the emphasis on basic training. At its basic level, if you make your horse move forward, or stop, you have performed dressage movements.

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Article Body:

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The ancient Greeks were the first to practice dressage in preparation for war. Developed by the Greeks for cavalry officers, dressage evolved as a means of controlling the horse in battle. Dressage was well rooted in the military world of horsemanship, as the value of this training method was recognized by the cavalry. Later, dressage was used on the medieval battlefields of Europe and as a form of art and entertainment in the courts of Renaissance nobility. The marriage of the two most powerful families in Europe during the Baroque period secured the future of dressage. Prior to the French Revolution, dressage was expressed in ways that emphasized extreme collection and agility.

Dressage competitions evolved as early as 1806 to test the ability of cavalry officers.

Cavalry officers in the modern military also practiced dressage as recently as the 1940's. Consequently, because the Andalusian had always been a cavalry horse, he had always been a dressage horse.

Types of Dressage Horses: Although any breed is acceptable for dressage,

thoroughbreds or warmbloods (any of the larger or European-descended horses) are preferable. While warmbloods have dominated the Dressage scene for several decades, riders are increasingly seeking a more rideable horse. Athletically and in temperament, the Morgan horse is also well suited to the rigors of Dressage. The Iberian's success in dressage was pretty much preordained by the history of the development of the breed. As a breed they have athleticism, superb dispositions, great heart and soundness - all attributes needed in dressage. However, Dressage is an egalitarian sport in which all breeds are given an opportunity to compete successfully.

Competition Dressage

Like figure skating's compulsory figures, dressage tests require movements and gaits to be performed in certain sequences. The object of dressage is the harmonious development of the physique and ability of the horse. Competitive dressage is designed to show the horse carrying out, on request, the natural movements that it performs without thinking while running loose. All the movements performed in dressage are natural to the horse. Both horsemanship and the basics of riding should be mastered before attempting a dressage competition. At the more advanced levels, horses and riders have usually begun to specialize in dressage competition as a separate discipline.

The standard arena is 20 m by 60 m, and is used for upper-level tests in both dressage and eventing. The small arena is 20 m by 40 m, and is used for the lower levels of dressage and three-day eventing dressage. The invisible letter X is always in the center of the dressage arena. The dressage tests are a prescribed series of movements that each horse must perform. Dressage patterns are performed one rider at a time. Judged subjectively, dressage relies on a body of dedicated judges positioned at designated points around the dressage arena. As in any dressage show, each rider receives an individual score. Each rider is given a copy of their test along with the judge's comments.

A goal of dressage is to restore this naturalness under a rider, and to create an alert, supple and responsive animal.