

# WESTERN DRESSAGE ASSOCIATION®

OF AMERICA

## *Western Dressage Judges Guidelines* *What to Expect*

**THE GOAL of Western Dressage** is to develop a partnership: a happy equine athlete working in harmony with his rider. A system of progressive training produces a horse that is physically strong, balanced, supple and flexible. This equine athlete also demonstrates a calm, confident, attentive attitude and is happy with his job.

Rider and horse achieve this goal using the principles of classical dressage training, combined with maneuvers of the stock horse, emphasizing the lightness and harmony with the rider, a hallmark of Western Dressage.

Western Dressage horses demonstrate free flowing, comfortable strides. The gaits are free, regular in rhythm and consistent in tempo, and enhance the natural gaits of the horse.

As the horse develops, he learns to engage the hindquarters, use the back freely, and therefore becomes light on the forehand.

The head carriage is different with different conformations and styles. A guideline is to look for the nose level with the point of the shoulder when the horse is maintaining uphill balance.

### **THE GAITS**

Clear four-beat walk, two-beat jog (trot) of alternate diagonal pairs with a moment of suspension, and a three beat lope (canter) with a moment of suspension after the third beat are all essential for all correctly moving horses.

Western Dressage (WD) is open to all breeds. Emphasis should be placed on the purity of gaits, a connection from pushing of the hindquarters through a supple back into a soft hand. Big suspended gaits are not to be favored, since the WD horse is a WORKING horse, but neither does WD favor the jog and lope seen in many Western Pleasure classes, where suspension and purity of gaits are not always exhibited. The horse MUST move naturally and happily in a manner consistent with its breed. Excessive speed or slowness to be penalized. Speed is the enemy of impulsion.

"Gaited" Horses have different rhythm of their footfalls, resulting in different gaits. The gaited horse will perform an intermediate or saddle gait in place of the jog. The intermediate or saddle gait is a 4 beat lateral or diagonal gait, timely and evenly performed. The tempo, rhythm and foot falls of the gait they choose to show must not change throughout the test. This true four beat gait the horse performs, should be able to be ridden in a working, lengthened, free and collected manner as the Western Dressage test calls for.

### **Western Dressage defines three walks:**

*The Working Walk:* A four-beat, active, energetic gait with ground covering strides and confident stretch to the bit. The head and neck should swing naturally as a result of a relaxed back and free

shoulders. The nose will be in front or on the vertical. The hind feet should track up to or beyond the prints of the front feet.

*The Free Walk:* A relaxed walk with unconstrained, forward reaching steps where hind feet touch the ground clearly in front of the footprints of the forefeet. The horse must be allowed complete freedom to lower his head and neck, stretching forward and then down, demonstrating length of stride, relaxation and swing through the back.

*The Collected Walk:* The horse, on the bit, moves resolutely forward showing upward balance and self-carriage. Hind legs are engaged with good flexion of the joints. The steps should remain regular, active, covering slightly less ground than the working walk.

### **Western Dressage defines four jogs:**

*The Working Jog:* Horse travels forward with even, ground covering, and elastic steps showing a relaxed back and free shoulders. The hind legs step actively up under the horse allowing the horse to balance properly and maintain light contact with the bit. In Introductory and Basic tests, the Working Jog may be ridden either sitting or posting. In more advanced tests from Level 1 up, it should be ridden sitting.

*The Lengthening of Strides:* The horse covers more ground through lengthening its frame while maintaining the same tempo as in the Working jog. Can be ridden either sitting or posting. In tests from level 2 on up horse will be allowed to lengthen frame, drop his head and neck slightly and point his nose forward and down, moving forward more actively, but still maintaining light contact with the bit.

*The Free Jog:* A pace which shows moderate lengthening of frame and stride. Without hurrying, the horse moves forward with impulsion and uphill balance. It is ridden on a loose rein. The neck will stretch forward and down, the nose must be in front of the vertical. *The steps must be clearly even*, the movement balanced and unconstrained. May be ridden posting or sitting.

*The Collected Jog:* The horse, remaining “on the bit”, moves forward with the neck raised and arched and showing clear self-carriage. The horse’s head (or face) approaches the vertical position and light contact is maintained. The haunches are lowered; hocks are well-engaged and flexed and must maintain an energetic activity. The horse’s steps are shorter than in the other jogs, with clear elasticity and impulsion. The Collected jog must be ridden seated.

*The gaited horse* will perform an intermediate or saddle gait in place of the jog (as described under “The Gaits”).

### **Western Dressage recognizes four lopes:**

*The Working Lope:* While maintaining a clear three-beat rhythm, the horse moves forward with even elastic steps. The back is relaxed; the shoulders are free. There is obvious push from the hindquarters, and the hind legs step actively under the horse. The horse maintains light contact with the bit with the nose slightly in front of the vertical.

*The Lengthening of Strides:* The horse covers more ground through lengthening its frame while maintaining the same tempo as in the Working lope.

*The Collected Lope:* The horse, remaining “on the bit”, moves forward with the neck raised and arched. The haunches are lowered; hocks are well-engaged and maintain an energetic impulsion,

enabling the shoulders to move more freely, demonstrating self-carriage and an uphill tendency. The horse's strides are shorter than in the other lopes, without losing elasticity and cadence while demonstrating a greater degree of suspension.

*The Counter-lope:* A balancing and straightening movement where the horse is asked to take the lead that is opposite to the direction of travel. Maintaining a correct bend is of great importance. (Left lead, bend to the left; right lead, bend to the right.)

## **ADDITIONAL MOVEMENTS AND METHODS**

### **Transitions:**

The changes of gait and pace should be clearly shown when the rider's leg is at the prescribed marker. On a diagonal the transition, change of rein or change of post is made when the rider's leg is at the letter at the end of the diagonal instead of making the change of diagonal at X.

### **Turn on the Haunches; Turn on the Forehand**

*Turn on the Haunches:* Two methods of performing a turn on the haunches are allowed

- a. The horse may walk a small circle with the rear feet, as to maintain the rhythm of the walk. (This method is found in Dressage.)
- b. In keeping with traditional Western Stock horse movements, the horse is allowed to pivot the inside hind leg and step around it with the outside hind leg. The horse pushes off with the outside hind leg. The pivot leg is allowed to pick up and reset when it reaches the point of stress.

Both methods must be judged equally. It is not allowed to switch off from one method to the other, if done 3 points will be deducted from the movement. If the horse takes a backward step with one or both of the hind legs, it will be a .5 deduction for each backward step.

*Turn on the Forehand:* This is the inverse of the turn on the haunches. It is executed out of a halt or a working walk prepared by half-halts to shorten the steps. The horse's hindquarters make a circle around the horse's stationary front end. The horse must bend slightly in his ribcage around the rider's inside leg. As with the turn on the haunches, it can be executed on a diameter of approximately one meter. The horse must maintain the same rhythm, contact and activity and show willingness to be on the outside rein. Stepping back is a fault.

## **THE TESTS**

There are 5 levels of Western Dressage Tests for the competitive year:

*Introductory Level*—The purpose of these walk/jog Introductory Level tests is to provide an introduction to the discipline of Western Dressage. The rider demonstrates correct basic position, use of basic aids, and understanding of figures. The horse should show relaxation. Harmony of horse and rider is important. The jog should be a natural gait within the horse's scope and should demonstrate a relaxed back.

*Basic Level*—The purpose of Basic Level tests is to confirm that the horse is supple and moves freely forward in a clear, steady rhythm, accepting light contact with the bit. The horse demonstrates a greater understanding of the aids and calm acceptance of the aids. Greater emphasis is placed on

relaxation, submission harmony, rideability and pure gaits. The horse is beginning to develop more power and balance.

*Level 1*—The purpose of Level 1 tests is to show the development of impulsion and improved balance. The horse begins to develop self-carriage and engagement. The horse accepts light contact with the bit. The Level 1 tests introduce collection, engagement and lateral balance. It emphasizes rideability.

*Level 2*— The purpose of Level 2 tests is to confirm the horse has developed impulsion; accepts more weight on the hindquarters; moves with an uphill tendency, especially at collected paces; and that the horse is reliable on the aids and light on the bit. These tests demonstrate greater degree of collection, engagement, lateral balance, straightness, bending, suppleness and self-carriage. Rideability emphasized.

*Level 3*— The purpose of Level 3 is to confirm that the horse has achieved the impulsion required in Level 2, now accepts more weight on the hindquarters (collection); moves with a greater degree of uphill tendency as required in the collected gaits especially in the collected lope. The horse must maintain a light contact on the bit showing balance, self-carriage and energy that result from improved engagement and weight-carrying by the hindquarters as performed in the halts. The movements should be performed with greater bending, suppleness, balance and self-carriage than in Level 2.

### **TACK (for more detail, please see the WDAA Attire and Equipment Booklet)**

*Bridles*—A western headstall is required. It may include a western cavesson (pencil bosal, braided or plain).

*Bits*—Snaffle bits as described in the WDAA rules may be used on any horse of any age at any level. If a snaffle bit is used the rider must hold one rein in each hand (right rein, right hand; left rein, left hand).

*Hackamores* (bosal) are permitted on a horse of any age at any level. The bosal must be rounded in shape, constructed of braided rawhide or leather and must have a flexible non-metallic core and be attached to a suitable headstall.

*Curb bits*—There is no discrimination against any standard western bit (standard western bit described in WDAA rules) on a horse of any age at any level. Rider may use either one hand or two hands but must be consistent *throughout the entire test*.

If the rider is riding with a curb bit he or she has the option of using Romal reins or Split reins.

- a. If Romal reins are used the Rider must hold the rein in one hand with no fingers between the reins. The free hand must hold the tail and popper, rolled or straight, and must be at least 16 inches from the rein hand.
- b. If the rider uses split reins they must hold the rein with one hand, held palm down rider is allowed to have one finger only, between the reins. The tails of the reins must fall on the same side as the hand holding the rein.

At the end of the Free Walk or Free Jog, riders using Split reins or Romal reins may use the free or off hand to pull the reins back to the desired length. This is the only time the Rider may use two hands on the reins.