

TEN out of TEN

Five ways to ace your next dressage test

Riding a polished dressage test takes lots of practice and skill. If you want to maximise your marks at your next comp, making a few small adjustments to your test riding technique can help you achieve a much higher percentage. Here are five things you can try that'll help you get a great score in no time.

1

Enter at A perfectly

The key to getting top marks for your centre line is how you ride the turn at A. Lots of competitors turn too late, so they're already off-centre from the get-go. A great way to ride it perfectly is to imagine there's a brick wall at A. Thinking about avoiding crashing into it will encourage you to turn at exactly the right time! Don't forget to look up and ahead around the turn, too, so your pony knows where you want him to go.

DID YOU KNOW?

Once the bell rings, you have 45 seconds to enter the arena, so don't hang about!

2

Use your corners

A lot of dressage tests are ridden in a 20X40m arena which, actually, isn't a very big area! This means you need to make the most of all the space you have by riding deep into every corner. Not only will this give you more time to prepare your next move, you'll also avoid losing marks for cutting corners. Judges like to see that your pony's supple and bending correctly round the corners, so make sure you practise riding into them at home.

3

Ride accurate circles

If you want to score top marks, you'll need to be able to ride round circles. A good place to start is to find out exactly how big they should be. You can do this by measuring out a 10m, 15m and 20m circle with a tape measure. You could place a cone in the middle of the circle, and practise staying an equal distance away from it all the way round. The last shape a judge wants to see you ride is a square or an oval!

TOP TIP

If you're riding your test in a 20X60m arena, make sure you get lots of practise riding in an arena that size beforehand. Otherwise, it can be tricky to ride circles and shapes accurately when you're not used to such a big space.

4

Work on your free walk

Even though it seems like you're just letting your pony relax, the free walk's a key move to master as it's worth double marks! The judge will be looking for your pony to walk with purpose, so swing your hips and squeeze his sides lightly with your calves to encourage him to stride out.

You should lengthen your reins, but don't let them go completely loose – keep a light feel on your pony's mouth. Try to encourage him to stretch his neck down and out, too, rather than round towards his chest.

5

Don't overthink your halt

Lots of competitors focus too much on getting their pony to perform a perfect square halt. However, the judge is more interested in whether he halts as soon as you ask, and that he stands still. So, once you've halted, don't be tempted to fiddle around trying to position your pony's legs correctly. If he's straight and still you're sure to get a good mark.

TOP TIP

When you're training at home, practise halting your pony at different markers around the arena, not just at X or G. This'll help encourage him to become more responsive when you ride your test.