



RIDE THE PERFECT TEST

WHEN YOU ENTER A DRESSAGE TEST, YOU ARE THERE TO SHOW HOW WELL YOUR HORSE IS TRAINED AND HOW ACCURATELY YOU RIDE BUT DO YOU ALWAYS ACHIEVE THIS? ANDREW SHOWS US HOW, WITH A LITTLE PLANNING AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL, YOU CAN PICK UP AS MANY MARKS AS YOU CAN.

When choosing which tests to enter, be sure your horse is established at the level you want to compete at before taking the plunge - there is no point struggling in the arena and being disappointed. Ideally, you want to be working at home slightly beyond the level of your chosen test as, when you get to a competition and the associated stresses and pressure kick in, you want to find the test relatively easy. Andrew doesn't advocate endless test-riding at home since this can encourage the horse to start anticipating. Ride through certain movements and put two or three together, if there are any you are worried about.

Andrew says:

"I always learn my tests off by heart but am lucky enough to have the back-up of a caller, if I want one. You aren't allowed a caller in championship classes (affiliated and unaffiliated) or for eventing dressage so, it's probably as well to get into the habit of having the test in your head."

Warm-Up

Have a plan for your warm-up but be prepared to adapt it to how your horse is feeling on the day. Find out if things are running to time so that you can produce your horse at his best for the test, rather than 'peaking' too early or needing another 10 minutes. Don't forget to remove boots or bandages in good time before you need to enter the arena. Anything you and your 'team' can do to keep additional pressures to a minimum will help you stay calm and focus on the task ahead.

Accuracy

Not riding accurately is simply wasting marks so is one of the most important aspects of test riding. Practice riding to and from the markers, as well as round and correctly-sized circles and evenly-shaped serpentine, and be happy to ride them in any part of the arena. If you are aiming for a test in a 60m x 20m arena and don't have one at home,



Body Language

How you ride can say a lot about how you and your horse are feeling so, to maintain the impression of softness and harmony, stay as relaxed as you can and keep smiling! Don't tell the judge that your horse is getting a bit strong by moving or yanking with your hands; keep still and ride as if everything's going fine! The judge will still spot any real failings but tenseness and grimacing from you can only make things look worse so the art of showmanship comes in again.

Things Going Wrong

There's always more pressure riding a dressage test than riding at home but good preparation will keep this to a minimum. You may need to adapt your horse's way of going for the test, for example, if you tend to ride him rounder at home, you will need to allow him to come up to the bridle a bit more in the test so that his poll is the highest point. If you go wrong in the test, don't panic. The judge will help you, if your mind's gone blank, so pick up where they tell you to and don't dwell on your mistake. Refocus and complete the test then consider afterwards why you went wrong so that you can learn from your mistake.

Andrew says:

"Always collect your test sheet and read the judge's comments. I focus on the individual movements rather than the remarks at the bottom but they should all be helpful. If you don't understand any marking or comment, feel free to talk to the judge when the class is over - they are there to help you. Be polite, though, as you never know when you will see them again!"

And Finally

As long as you are in the arena, you must remain the showman - salute and smile at the judge and pat your horse - no matter how you feel the test went. Leave the arena at the appropriate place and be considerate to any incoming competitor. If you have another test to ride that day, start planning ahead for that bearing in mind how things have gone so far.

Andrew says:

"Your overall attitude will have a huge influence on your performance. Believe in yourself, your horse and your abilities, almost to the point of arrogance, and practice being a showman! Good luck!"



Have a plan for your warm-up but be prepared to adapt to how your horse is feeling

Quick fire questions with Andrew

- Sunbathing or skiing? Skiing
- Radio 1 or Classic FM? Radio 1
- Cinema or DVD? Cinema
- Control freak or easy going? Easy going
- Early morning person or night owl? Night owl
- Fast food or Cordon Bleu? Cordon Bleu
- Nicole Kidman or Angelina Jolie? Angelina Jolie
- Red or white wine? Neither I hate wine!
- X Factor or Strictly Come Dancing? X Factor
- Playing cards or Playstation? Playstation but I do love cards!
- Ice lollies or ice cream? Ice cream
- Early morning cup of tea or late night hot chocolate? Early morning cuppa!



Your body language and expression say a lot! Keep smiling!



Accuracy is essential to avoid throwing away marks

SPONSOR'S CORNER

Andrew works closely with a Baileys Nutritionist to ensure all his horses receive a fully balanced diet to keep them looking and performing at their very best. "I've learned a lot from the team at Baileys," says Andrew, "but it's always good to know there's someone to talk to if you've got any particular queries. Getting an objective view on a horse, and discussing what's best for them, is invaluable." This sort of support is not exclusive to leading riders and is available to anyone who has a question about feeding their horse. Baileys Nutritionists are highly trained yet practical and understand the challenges faced by today's horse owners. What's more they are accessible and can be contacted by phone during office hours, by email or via the web site, and will even come out and visit, especially if you've more than one horse to discuss. They won't advocate change for the sake of it but may show you how to streamline your feed room, whilst still doing the very best for your horse.

Contact Baileys Horse Feeds, Tel: 01371 850247
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