

TIPS FOR A GOOD WEEKEND AT THE DRESSAGE SHOW

PREPARATION IN ADVANCE

- Make sure your show attire is according to the USEF/USDF rules. It can have things you never realized could cause elimination. Pack an extra shirt for riding without a jacket if needed. For example: *If jackets are waived due to the hot weather, you can ride in a shirt with a collar and sleeves (short or long). TIP: Don't add neckwear, it could cause elimination!*
- Clean and polish your tack the day before. Don't leave major tack cleaning to show day.
- Well before the show, make sure your new bridle and bit are show legal!
- If you have any questions about the USEF/USDF rules, you can contact them directly via email, and that way you will have a written copy of the answer in case it's needed. At the show, if you have questions about the rules, contact the Technical Delegate (TD)
- If you are going to braid your horse yourself, practice braiding at home in advance. Also, don't leave pulling the mane/clipping the horse to the show, do it 1-2 weeks before the show.
- If you plan to hire a professional braider at the show, make sure you reserve her in advance, don't wait until the show to make arrangements as the braiders are often very busy and fully booked.
- Study and memorize your test! *The USDF TestPro app can be a handy tool in learning and practicing your test.* Even if you use a test reader at the show, it is important that you know your test well! There could be loud noises preventing you from hearing the test, or you could misunderstand what your test reader says, or perhaps even your test reader accidentally misses something. It is your responsibility to ride the correct test. *In USDF tests the first error causes -2 penalties, second error adds additional -4 point penalty, and third error causes elimination.*
- Check that your dressage whip, including the lash, is less than 47.2 inches. *Tip: sometimes the length of the whip might be so close to the maximum allowed, I like to cut off half an inch just to be safe!*
- Get a spouse/friend/relative to help you with the show days, even if they just bring you water, snacks and help carry things. It will help your day stay less hectic!

ARRIVAL

- Check your horse did not pull shoes or get injuries in the trailer! Show farriers and vets are most often just on call, not continuously on the show grounds, so if you need help, contact them early to get assistance in time for your test.
- If you plan to stable at the show, allow yourself plenty of time to unpack your items, and to get your horse settled. Then you will have better quality schooling with your horse in the warmup arena and show arena (if allowed).
- You will most likely unload near the stalls, but the trailers will almost certainly be parked further away. Don't block traffic by parking in the middle of the lanes or leaving your trailer unnecessarily long into the unloading area.
- Be considerate of others!
- Check in with the show office to get your competitor packet, including the bridle number for your horse. There are often, but not always, two copies of bridle number. Fasten one

on your horse's halter, the other on a bridle. You'll have to have the number on your horse anytime he is out of the stall, whether mounted or leading the horse.

- Check your show ring and warm-up arena locations (some large shows may have multiple show rings and warmup arenas). Make sure you know where your show ring is, and check how many minutes it takes to walk from warm-up ring to show ring if they are not right next to each other. Also, as you are planning your warmup start time, take into account how long it takes from your horse's stall to the warm-up area
- At your arrival, and both in the morning and afternoon of each of the show day, check the updated schedule, because the schedule could have changed with ride times or show arenas.

SHOW DAY

- Use a skirt or loose lightweight pants over your white breeches when not riding to keep them clean
- Pack unscented baby wipes in your tack trunk. They are handy for cleaning your hands, minor stains from clothing, or do a quick spot cleaning on your horse
- Plan and write down your day's schedule, so you will know what time you will need to start grooming your horse, tack up, go to warm-up, and be at the show ring gate.
- When you are making your schedule, adjust the times and add tasks/items according to your needs, but my schedule below is an example of what to include.
- Being organized and on time helps the show nerves, too.

I like to think this backwards from my ride time: if my first ride time is 10:10 am, and I want 30 minute warm-up, and it takes 3 minutes from warm-up to show ring, and 5 minutes from the stall to the warm-up, my schedule would be

10:09 at the gate; enter for your test

10:06 stop warm-up;

9:36 start warm-up,

9:31 leave the stall;

9:20 don tall boots, spurs, hair net, stock tie, jacket, gloves. (I like to do a stretch at this point that opens up my hip flexors and elongates my spine, my favorite is a standing lunge stretch with arm extension overhead as it's easy to do anywhere)

9:05 tack up the horse and get the dressage whip ready;

9:00 final grooming (make sure there are no shavings in the tail, or hay in the forelock, and the horse has not created new stains while eating)

8:55 final look into the test I am riding, and visualizing riding the test. (I like using the USDF TestPro app for reviewing the test, and then I visualize how I am riding to keep the horse relaxed, supple and moving forward, and myself breathing)

8:40 take horse back to stall, I go and visit the bathrooms, and go and check the show seems to be moving on schedule

8:20 take the horse for a walk and/or grazing to get him stretching his legs and relax

8:00 am groom the horse, and wash any stains that appeared while the horse was sleeping (you may have guessed I have a gray horse). For small stains I use spot cleaning, but if there are lots of stains I will give him a quick bath and wash the stains with purple shampoo)

- If you have one, have your helper carry a clean rag or two to wipe off dirt and dust off your boots and offer you water before you start your test.
- Once in the warm-up, check in with the ring steward if the show is running on schedule or behind, so you'll know if you need to adjust your warm-up routine. Most often dressage shows stay quite well on schedule, but there could be a variety of reasons for show schedules falling behind. However, often the show is able to catch up with the scheduled times, so keep checking the schedule so you won't miss your ride time.
- Be respectful of others at the warm up ring. Pass left shoulder to left shoulder. Plan halts at the center. Be aware of your surroundings, and always check behind before you turn inside. Give space if a rider is having difficulties with a horse.
- Don't be late for your ring time! You'll have to be ready to enter the ring when your scheduled time is. When the judge rings a bell (or blows a whistle) you have 45 seconds to start your centerline from A. If you miss that, your ride is over.
- If someone scratches before your ride time, you don't have to go into the ring early, you can wait for your scheduled ride time if you prefer so.
- Wait at the designated area for your turn to enter into the competition area. Once the competitor before you does their final salute you can enter. If the show ring has riding space around the arena, you will be riding outside the arena. Some competitions you will enter inside the arena and wait for the judge's signal to enter the centerline at A.
- If you need to withdraw/scratch, notify the competition management asap, so that they can keep the judges and people on a waitlist informed.
- Be polite, courteous, and considerate to competitors and show personnel.

Helpful links:

USDF Dressage Protocol: <https://www.usdf.org/EduDocs/Competition/DressageProtocol.pdf>

USEF Rulebook: <https://www.usef.org/compete/resources-forms/rules-regulations/rulebook>