



Many can appreciate the magical beauty of a horse. But as we gear up for the annual Dressage at Devon horse show, being held from September 25 - 30, 2012, we know that the more spectators understand dressage, the more they can enjoy the show.

That's why we're creating stories about Dressage at Devon that appeal to your readers whether or not they are equestrians. These will include stories on the challenges of dressage, what to look for in the horse and rider, how to understand dressage lingo, what's involved in a dressage test, how a show is judged, and more.

For example, a spectator may be puzzled because it appears the rider does little. But did you know that in dressage less is more? The goal is to communicate quietly to achieve the desired result. A good rider makes it seem like the horse would trot in perfect circles and straight lines without assistance. It's likely, however, that no one has ever seen a horse creating accurate figures alone in the field.

Dressage at Devon takes place at the Devon Fairgrounds in Devon, Pennsylvania and also features many family activities, great food, and unique shopping.

Please contact us if you have any questions about dressage or Dressage at Devon. We will be sending out updates between now and the show, but if you have any questions in the meantime, please feel free to contact me.

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PS – We'd love to have you attend all or part of the show. For a press pass, please visit <http://dressageatdevon.org/cms2/pdf/DADMediaCredentials.pdf>



What is Dressage? A Spectator's Guide

From Balance to Ballet

The goal of dressage is to develop the horse's flexibility, responsiveness, and balance. Horses without dressage training tend to move with their weight toward the front of their bodies.

Dressage training enables a horse to carry more of his own and the rider's weight over his hindquarters. As a horse builds strength in his hindquarters, he is able to lighten up in the front and become balanced. This enables the rider to stop and steer the horse easily, directing him to move as gracefully and precisely as a ballerina.

What to Look For

Less is More

To the casual observer it appears that the rider does very little. That perceived lack of movement is an accomplishment. The dressage rider needs to use a high level of strength and balance to absorb the motion of the trot or canter and not be jostled like a sack of potatoes. She also must be sensitive to her horse in order to communicate intricate maneuvers to her horse quietly. And as the horse responds to those subtle communications, it proves he is attentive and the pair is working as a team.

Figures

Just like ice skating, dressage includes figures. The rider must guide the horse to complete, perfectly-sized round circles and straight lines. A 20-meter (65.6 feet) circle should go from one side of the arena to the other; a 10-meter (32.8 feet) circle should go only half way across.

Rhythm

Rhythm is even spacing between footfalls. A sound dressage horse has only three correct rhythms – a four-beat walk, a two-beat trot and a three-beat canter. So you can compare the

canter rhythm to that of a waltz--it always has three beats.

Tempo

Tempo is the speed of repetition of strides. A change in tempo is the difference between a fast waltz and a slow one. The rider controls the horse to a tempo which should be so obvious you could sing a song to it.

Naughtiness

Naughtiness in horses can be exhibited by bucking, rearing, tossing of the head, or even jumping out of the dressage ring. Of course, this will have a negative impact on the score!

Tension

During a test the horse needs to remain calm, attentive and supple. If the horse is tense, he becomes rigid through his neck and back, which can exhibit itself in stiff movement, pinned-back ears and a tail that swishes constantly instead of hanging arched and quietly swinging.

Rider Seat and Position

The rider should sit upright, quietly and not depend on his whip, spurs or voice. Riders who use their voice have points deducted from their test score.

Whipped-Cream Lips

When a horse is relaxed in his jaw and poll (the area just behind his ears), he releases saliva. You might see white foam around his lips and mouth which means he is chewing on his bit and comfortable in his work.

How to Be a Good Spectator

Horses and Flight

Horses have two main mechanisms for protection from danger: they run and they kick. Allow plenty of room for the horses and never approach any horse without first alerting the rider that you're doing so.

Scary Stuff

Horses have strange aversions: plastic grocery bags can remind them of Satan's minions and an opened umbrella can cause bolting to three states over. Use caution at horse shows and think before you toss away noisy garbage, open an umbrella or put on rain ponchos or blankets in the stands.

SSSSHHHH!

Focus is important in dressage so be courteous. Stay about 45 feet back from the competition ring and remain as quiet as possible during rides.



Dressage at Devon: A Brief History

www.dressageatdevon.org

In 1965, a group of riding enthusiasts got together and formed a club in response to the question “How come the kids get to have all the fun”? The Delaware Valley Combined Training Association (DVCTA) was born and the adult pony club idea began.

The basic mission of the club is to provide instruction and training for the members of the club and to inform and demonstrate our sport to the public. This was accomplished through their many clinics and large events such Dressage at Devon.

For several years in the early 70s, the club put on a dressage show at the Willcox’s Tory Hill Farm in Glen Mills, PA. The show then moved to The Radnor Hunt Club in Malvern, PA while still searching for a permanent home.

We credit the late Pat Franco with the idea of moving the show to the Devon Horse Show Grounds in 1975. It caught on and Dressage at Devon or “DAD” was born.

Local riding instructor, Sidley Payne, had a son who had leukemia. She and the DVCTA’s first president, Sally McCawley, approached long-time equestrian enthusiast Dr. Audrey E. Evans, Director of the Division of Oncology at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), to explore the idea of presenting Dressage at Devon as a fundraiser for the Cancer Research Center, and as a result, a wonderful 10-year relationship was begun.

More than 250 hospital volunteers, most of whom were parents and families of the children being treated at CHOP, sold programs, served as ushers, operated and staffed the Souvenir Shoppe, the food booths and the Deli, the Wine and Cheese Café, the Beer Garden, the ticket gates and the parking areas. It was inspiring to see oncology doctors volunteering and working alongside the families and patients they were treating.

In the early years, there were more horses than spectators, but the high level of enthusiasm among the competitors convinced the volunteer DAD committee that this was a show with great potential.

Early on, most of the horse show volunteers came from the ranks of the DVCTA membership. Today, more than 700 volunteers come from all over the country with a few coming from as far as New Zealand!

The show continued to grow, added two days for the breeding show, and scheduled more exhibitions and even larger classes.

Starting with the 2006 show, Dressage at Devon became a PA non-profit corporation. While still maintaining a strong working relationship, DAD and DVCTA now operate as separate entities. The majority of the DAD committee members are members of DVCTA and DVCTA still supplies a strong volunteer corps to the show.

Like any organization, DAD has had its major and minor upheavals since 1975 yet volunteers, committee members, and show workers agree that DAD is worth the effort. Today, Dressage at Devon has evolved into the most prestigious dressage competition in the hemisphere. It is an internationally rated show, drawing exhibitors from around the world, as well as the largest open breed show in the world. The food vendors are rated as the best on the horse show circuit and the Festival area and overall venue are unique in the horse show world.

Thanks to the support of our sponsors, volunteers and spectators, Dressage at Devon continues to grow and prosper. If you have not been a part of this remarkable event, please join us and experience Dressage at Devon for yourself.



Dressage at Devon The Largest Horse Breed Show in North America

Dressage at Devon opens on Tuesday, September 25th with the three-day breed division, the largest horse-breed show in North America, attracting thousands of spectators. Some are new to the equine world, others have been in the industry for decades but all enjoy watching as hundreds of foals and young horses from throughout the United States and Canada are evaluated for their dressage potential.

The Breed Show includes three categories of classes. Horses are lead by experienced handlers in two categories: the Young Horse/Sport Horse Classes that include horses up to and including the age of three years, and the Mature Horse/Breeding Horse Classes for horses four years and older. There are also classes for horses three years and older where the horses are ridden.

For those not steeped in horse knowledge, it may seem a bit of a mystery as to how a particular fuzzy foal with non-stop legs is pinned with a blue ribbon in a breed class and another goes home with no decoration. After all, they're all adorable. While it takes years of experience to develop the ability to size up young horses, those in the know can tell whether a filly or colt has the potential to shine in the dressage ring. It's almost like being able to look at a toddler and predict that with the right training she can become a highly-tuned gymnast or ballerina, able to perform movements of strength and balance, yet remain supple and relaxed.

Movement and conformation are two elements judges consider to predict whether a horse will be likely, once trained, to perform high-level dressage movements and remain sound through the rigors of training and showing. Conformation includes a horse's bone structure, muscles and body proportions. For example, a judge evaluates the strength of a horse's hindquarters, the engine that provides the spring and power for advanced dressage moves.

The judge also needs to gauge the horse's movement. To demonstrate this horses are either lead or ridden at a walk and trot. At the walk judges look at the horse or foal's ability to "track up"; this lingo describes how the horse's hind foot steps ahead of the footprint of the forefoot on the same side. The walk should also be a steady,

rhythmic 1-2-3-4 pace. A judge watching the trot wants to see the horse put more weight on his hindquarters than his forehand. Ideally his steps are so elastic, natural, and rhythmic that he almost appears to float.

At the Breed Show visitors can experience more than 30 horse breeds shown in a series of Individual Breed classes. These are organized in cooperation with breed associations in the United States and abroad. Breeds range from Trakehners and Oldenburgs, commonly seen in the dressage ring, to others that are not seen as frequently such as Gypsy Vanners, Friesians, Georgian Grandes, Cleveland Bays, Morgans and Arabians.

Each breed has its own standards – and, of course, its own particular attraction. The Friesian, for example, is most often recognized by its [black](#) coat color, though color alone is not their only distinguishing characteristic. Friesian horses also have a long, thick mane and tail, often wavy, and "feathers"--long, silky hair on the lower legs, deliberately left untrimmed.

Join us and pick your favorite in each class!