

What is Dressage?

From a technical stand point, the word dressage comes from the French term meaning “training”. But there is a dual aspect of dressage, first as a method of training and second as a competitive equestrian sport.

Dressage is called “classical training” because it uses a series of gymnastic exercises to develop the horse, all of which have evolved over centuries. These exercises are made up of movements and figures and they are used in a training progression. This progression is basically what is found in the competitive levels of dressage. Training level is the lowest level recognized by the USA Equestrian. The subsequent levels build on classical training principles to gymnasticize and develop the horse physically.

There are also a set of Walk-Trot tests developed by the US Dressage Federation. These test were intended to allow young riders and/or young horses to compete that may not be ready to show their canter work.

The other component of dressage that is only implied by these tests and progression of training is the relationship aspect of working with a horse. It is this relationship or partnership that enables a horse to demonstrate harmony, lightness, and relaxation even when executing the most difficult upper level movements.

If you are interested in investigating further, the USAE tests are available on the USAE web site: <http://www.equestrian.org/aboutus/inter/dressage/2003-test-movements.asp> and can be viewed and printed in Adobe Acrobat.

Future articles will delve into the training progression and specific movements.