



# SO.... you want to be ready to SHOW??

Even if you are the most confident, well-prepared of riders, your first dressage show can reduce you to nothing but a bundle of nerves. There is so much to remember, and we're not talking about just the test! Well, relax, we've got everything covered. By the end of this article, you'll be on your way to realizing your dressage goals in a relaxed, enjoyable manner.

## **A month before the show:**

- Be mentally and physically prepared. Sounds obvious, but too often riders enter their first dressage show without asking themselves the following questions: Do I understand the objectives—rhythm, relaxation, and suppleness—of dressage? Can we ride the required movements in a controlled, accurate manner, and do we consistently do so at home? Does the horse have the ability to stay on task, and is he well-behaved?
- Don't focus on your nerves. If you wait to compete until you aren't nervous about it, you'll never compete. Even top-level dressage riders get nervous. Instead, realize that a healthy case of nerves can keep you focused on the task at hand.
- Read the USEF rule book. Read it twice! Many riders are eliminated because they haven't taken the time to read the rule book and inadvertently break a rule. You've worked way too hard to let that happen!
- Begin to memorize the test. Know it front and back, inside and out. Walk the test on your own two feet, ride the test on your horse often, draw a diagram and trace it with your finger, and think about it in your head when you are driving and falling asleep. Know it in your sleep, because if you get in the ring and are nervous, it will be the first thing you forget.
- Arrange for someone to read for you. If you suffer from the type of nerves that empties your brain of everything you've learned since birth including, unfortunately, the dressage test you've memorized, then find a friend or family member who will read it to you.
- Get a good coach. Practice doesn't make perfect, perfect practice makes perfect. Ride with your instructor as often as you can afford to. Your coach will be able to gauge your position and your ability to use your aids correctly, which will have a direct and very important impact on your horse's progress.

## **A week before the test:**

- Start paying attention to details. Make sure your equipment is clean and in good working order, and refer to the USEF rule book to make sure it's all legal. Be sure your clothes fit. Make a check list of everything you need to bring with you.

## **The day before the test:**

- Give your horse a good once-over. Now is a good time to bathe, clip, and perform other grooming odds and ends. Give your tack trunk and trailer a fairly detailed inspection to determine you've packed everything you'll need.
- Give yourself a good once-over. And don't forget to eat well and get good night's sleep.
- Visualize the test. The night before your test, banish your nerves by visualizing it in your head. Banish any bad thoughts, and instead concentrate on riding the perfect test in your brain. The next day your brain will feel "experienced," and that will help!

## **The day of the test:**

- Find a partner-in-crime to attend to the details. This person can check you in, get your number, do last-minute grooming, and make sure that your time is freed up to concentrate on the test at hand.
- Check out the arena. Rules will prohibit you from riding in it, but you may be able to walk it. If this is possible, take advantage and walk the test on foot.
- Give yourself plenty of time to warm up. You want to be on long enough to warm up, but not on so long that you and your horse are tired before the test even begins! Do the same warm-up as you do at home, so something feels familiar!
- Arrive early. Get to the arena well before the whistle blows, and give yourself and your horse a once-over to determine that everything is in order. If you have a friend or family member there, ask them to look you over as well.
- Focus on your horse. And not on your nerves. If you focus on your horse and not yourself, everything will fall into place.
- Bring your sense of humor to the ring. Everything will not be perfect. Be competitive and give your personal best, but keep everything in perspective.