

## The Complex of Maneuvers of the FEI Dressage Horse

Dressage has ancient roots and is became an important equestrian event in the West during the Renaissance in Europe. It was at this time that the great European riding masters of the world created a sequential training system, which is known today as Classical dressage. This training system is still the basis of modern dressage training today.

Often referred to as “horse ballet,” dressage tests the athletic ability of the horse as well as its disposition and willingness. Due to the dressage being a French term, the maneuvers completed in the various dressage tests are also French. However, before you can completely understand the maneuvers, you must first have a good understanding of the arena that dressage takes place in.

A dressage arena has letters assigned at specific positions. Each dressage test dictates which gait or maneuver is to be performed and at which letter. There are two sizes of dressage arenas, but the arena used at the FEI World Equestrian Games will utilize the standard arena. The standard arena is 66 feet by 197 feet, creating a long rectangle. Around the outside edge of the arena, moving clockwise, you will see the letters A-K-V-E-S-H-C-M-R-B-P-F. Down the middle of the arena, you will not see any letters marked, but the riders know that the letters G-I-X-L-D correspond to the letters marking the outside edge with the letter “X” marking the center of the arena.

A dressage test always begins at marker A and the judge is always sitting at marker C on the far end of the arena from the rider. At a world level competition, such as the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, four other judges will be placed at the markers E, B, M and H. This ensures the horse can be judged from all angles.

The tests performed at the FEI World Equestrian Games are of the highest level, which is Grand Prix. The gaits and maneuvers performed at this level include":

- Collected and extended walk, trot and canter
- Trot and Canter Half-pass – This is when the horse travels diagonally across the arena with its body parallel to the arena railing.
- Passage – This is a slow, suspended trot.
- Piaffe – This is a slow, extremely collected trot and should appear as though the horse is trotting in place.
- One, two and three tempi changes – These are flying lead changes at the canter that take place at specific beats in the gait depending on the required tempi change.
- Canter pirouettes – This maneuver is a 360 degree circle that appears to take place on the spot.

For the freestyle dressage test, the horse and rider are able to perform these maneuvers and more to show the ability of their horses. Many riders will include more complicated movements such as pirouettes in a piaffe, a half pass in passage or a double canter pirouette.

If you want to see some of the most talented horses from around the world perform at the highest level of dressage, then you won't want to miss the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games.