

Swan River Dressage Tests

Why have we created some additional tests for dressage events?

Swan River Dressage is keen to foster development of our wonderful sport.

Skill development

We know that skill development continues throughout every athlete's life (F. Pyke, *Advanced Coach's Manual*, p. 93). There are three phases of learning. Most riders who compete in national tests are at the second (Associative Phase) where skill acquisition is steady & gradual. In this phase, riders are fairly successful in 'closed skill' tasks (eg executing individual test movements), but are less proficient in 'open skill' situations where the brain has to juggle many balls simultaneously (eg riding a test where one movement closely follows another, and the brain has to navigate the test at the same time as plan and execute a complex series of movements).

After about 10,000 hours of practice, athletes in all sports reach the third (Autonomous Phase or elite phase) of learning skills. Most part time riders with one horse ride between 250-300 hours per year. It will take them a lifetime to achieve the elite level of skill mastery.

Closed situations

Recognising that most riders are not 'elite riders', British Dressage at Elementary Level allows the option of rising trot (ie a more 'closed' situation). This assists riders to concentrate on other skills in a test such as keeping the lateral work active and round. British Dressage understands that these same riders are training their sitting trot skill at home until they feel they can keep their horse active and round, not just on a 20 m circle (closed situation), but in a series of more demanding trot movements (open situation).

Medium and Open Medium

Countries like UK, New Zealand and South Africa include a level between Australia's Elementary and Medium Levels. In these countries it is called Medium, but there are no flying changes in the tests. Flying changes are introduced at the next level - Open Medium. This allows riders to master flying changes at home before attempting to do them under the pressure of competition. We have created Medium Bridging Tests which have no flying changes in them.

Brainspace

We know that at times, there is 'not enough brainspace' (quote from Olympian George Sanna) for riders to navigate complex tests while applying the right degree of each of their aids at precisely the right time.

To allow riders more brainspace for the quality of the work they produce, where possible, we have placed less emphasis on precision and accuracy, and more emphasis on the actual work.

To allow riders more brainspace for actually influencing their horse in positive ways, our tests are as far as possible mirrored.