

Judge Protocol Sessions for Dressage Riders

What is a Judge Protocol Session?

Judge Protocol training for dressage refers to the rider riding a test of choice, the judge judges it and gives feedback to the rider on how to improve the riding of the test with the view to gaining more marks. After discussion, the judge may ask the rider to ride some movements again or ride the whole test again.

The judge is there to give feedback to the rider but does not coach the rider. These days are not riding clinics as such. It is not essentially different from a rider discussing the test with the judge after a competition except that there is an opportunity to repeat movements. Videoing the process can also add value or sometimes the rider may ride the test wearing a headset so that the judge's marks and comments are audible as they ride.

For example the judge might point out that for a higher mark the rider needs to ensure the steps don't get shorter or slower, or that there needs to be more angle in a shoulder-in. Or they may assist with confirming what is the correct frame to ride in. It is not a competition.

The process is a very good educational tool and generates cooperation between judges, riders and coaches. It will benefit riders at all levels. The rider could ride a test at a level they have not yet competed, to get a sense of whether they are ready to step up, without the public pressure of competition. It can also be a very valuable tool in both judge and coach education as well.

How and who to organise?

The sessions/days may be organised by clubs or state dressage entities and be opened to members of that club, members of other clubs or riders as a group i.e. a state squad.

From the perspective of an Organising Committee, these days can be run very simply by allocating approximately 30 minutes per rider. Using a video person and/or headsets can also be helpful and value-add to the day.

Improving the communication on technical matters between riders, coaches and judges is vital in the further development of our sport and creating these opportunities for communication is really simply an extension of the feedback that riders already receive through competition.

Is this a conflict of interest for judges?

The Judge Protocol process is neither coaching nor training, but an extension of the feedback process judges give during normal judging and also at judges clinics to show judges how a test could be improved, and what they need to see to give higher marks.

National judges are governed by Rule 1.7.2 Conflict of Interest of the Australian Dressage Rules. It is recommended however that the judge who provides the judge protocol session should not judge that rider within two weeks after the session but if so, the competition in which that rider competes must have at least 2 judges.

Of course, if a judge is a regular coach of a rider this is a conflict of interest, and that judge can't judge that rider for 12 months after the coaching ceases. For those judges who are FEI accredited, the Judges Codex applies.