

THE COLLECTIVE MARKS

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IDJC Newsletter July 2003

When judging novice horses the important thing to consider is whether the paces are as nature intended. Whether the training so far has been established and to a certain extent enhanced the paces that nature gave to the horse. In order to give high marks for the paces we would expect to see absolute regularity in all three.

The Walk

For a Novice the walk must be;

- in clear four beat.
- the medium walk marching well forwards.
- the Free walk showing exactly the same rhythm with relaxation and more ground cover than in the medium. We need to be careful with the young horses that show a huge over track, from the point of view of absolute regularity of the four beats and the future development of collection. The important point is that the horse can show clear difference without any signs of losing the clarity of the four beat and that he moves through whole body not just the legs.

The ideal walk of an Advanced horse is:

- when the collected is in a true four beat with the horse printing in which means the hinds step into hoof print of forefeet. I am anxious if the hind feet step behind the hoof prints of the forefeet and usually describe this as short rather than collected.
- in extended there should be the same four beat but with a foot of overtrack. The ability to show this collected and extended walk is rarely seen, but needs to be rewarded with the highest marks.

The Trot

The trot of the Novice horse should be perfectly regular two beat rhythm and a moment of suspension in between the diagonal pairs. The strides should be free from restriction and show a natural looseness and elasticity. Elasticity is freedom from stiffness with the horse springing easily forwards from one diagonal to the other. When considering "freedom" the Novice horse should show an ability to produce some lengthening without altering the speed of rhythm (tempo).

The Canter

The canter should be true in its three beat rhythm and established enough in the balance to show free unconstrained strides with a clear moment of suspension and lightness of footfall to each canter stride. The ability to lengthen these strides and return again to a balanced working canter without altering the speed of the rhythm of (tempo) is important.

For a Novice horse with paces described above the mark range is 7 to 10 depending on the degree of the quality.

To Give a Poor Mark

Unfortunately, even at Novice level, incorrect training leads to detrimental results on the horse's natural paces. This normally results in stiffness and restriction within the paces. Sometimes it goes as far as disturbing the true rhythm. Often the walk is the first pace to suffer from this, losing the clarity of the four beat, even to the point of moving in pure lateral pairs.

The trot often suffers from a lack of correct training by becoming dull and earthbound, and losing the ability to cover the ground cover in the way nature intended. Often a horse with that sort of trot when asked to lengthen only runs or hurries forwards rather than springing off the ground and making bigger strides. If this lack of correct training continues the result of restriction and lack of suppleness often leads to irregularity.

The result of poor training in the canter often leads to a loss of clear three time beat, causing the diagonal pair of legs to separate so the horse ends up appearing to move in an earthbound, laboured canter, showing virtually a four beat rhythm with a very short moment of suspension.

If any of the three paces show the tendencies described it would be difficult to give higher than a six. Depending on the severity of the described symptoms the marks could end up in the insufficient range.

The Advanced Horse

Through the systematic development of collection the advanced horse will show enhanced quality to the natural paces. Through the increased engagement of hind legs and lightness of the shoulders the paces will appear lighter and freer. Through the development of impulsion they will show more cadence and expression. It is only through true development of collection that breathtaking extensions can be produced correctly

The important thing to consider about an advanced horse's paces, is not only the absolute regularity but to have the feeling that the horse is moving in an uphill direction with light and mobile shoulders.

This is what one is looking for to give 8s 9s and 10s for the Paces mark.

Fairly Good Paces

An Advanced horse that achieves a 7 for its paces will be absolutely regular and show clear differences within the paces but will not have the same lightness and elasticity of the quality described above.

Satisfactory Paces

6 applies to a horse that is somewhat limited within its correct paces or perhaps has an extremely good trot and canter but a lack of clarity of the four beat in the walk. Bear in mind if the loss of regularity is only momentary it could be considered more of a submission problem.

Poor Marks

5s and below apply to horses that though their training demonstrate stiff earthbound paces that lack freedom and expression. Usually because of those problems the horse ends up losing the clear four beat walk and three beat canter.

IMPULSION AND SUBMISSION

The Link

The impulsion and submission are linked unequivocally because the more impulsion you ask for the more submission needed.

Impulsion can only be developed 'through' a supple and straight horse that is in a true balance and self carriage. Only then can the energy produced from the hind legs come through the back of the horse to the elastic and accepting contact with the hand. Then the half halt can transfer that energy from the hind legs into carrying power. And this in turn brings the lightness and mobility of the shoulders that allows the horse to move with true expression.

IMPULSION

Impulsion is about a desire to go forward, - the energy and carrying power that is produced from behind that goes to the bridle through a supple and swinging back. Impulsion allows the horse to move in a powerful and athletic way to show elastic and expressive movement.

The opposite of elastic steps are stiff staccato steps when the joints of the horse are not really supple and flexible. Elastic steps can only be seen when joints are flexible and where the muscles are well developed and supple.

It is interesting to note that there is a difference between true engagement as opposed to pure forward energy. Some horses go with huge amount of energy but the hind legs are pushing rather than carrying themselves forward with the hind legs. The horse is energetic but is lacking true engagement and carrying ability of the hind legs. You see this in overproduced young horses. They power along out of balance and at expense of engagement and self carriage.

The remarks

Judges have to be careful what they say about impulsion. Every horse could be described as needing to be more engaged and to have more impulsion, but they must be careful that they do not encourage the riders to force more energy and engagement into a horse that is stiff or out of balance. If the riders take us at our word they could make their situation worse rather than better. That is why it is so important to think carefully about what we are saying particularly in the summing up comments.

It is vitally important that the riders and judges recognise the difference between speed and impulsion. Creating speed will only cause the horse to go out of balance, become stiffer and make true impulsion impossible to develop. There is no point in saying to a rider whose horse is resisting against the hand and is tight in neck and back that it needs more impulsion because if the rider tries to develop more impulsion it will only create more resistance.

The Marks

If the horse goes through the test without mistakes and resistance but gives the impression of being rather flat and not showing clear differences as set down by the level of the test, then the impulsion is probably only sufficient or satisfactory.

If we see a horse that is loose, energetic and carried itself in a really good balance, reacts well to the rider's aids, shows clearly defined transitions within the paces, gives the impression of stepping under behind and coming up through the shoulders in all the movements, then we must think in the high range of marks - 8s 9s and 10s.

SUBMISSION

The first thought that comes into my head when thinking about submission is willingness, that the horse understands what is being asked of it, and is confident enough in the rider to react to the aids without fear or question. Its straightness, 'uphillness' and balance enable the horse to react in front of the rider's leg and draw forward into an accepting and self carrying contact with the bit. Basically the rider is able to direct the horse through the test with the impression that the horse is in front of the rider's aids and accepts to stay in a true balance (not on the forehand) and self carriage. This is what really produces the rare picture of harmony and lightness.

Two elements are not named in the directives for the submission collective mark but have an important influence on it. These are straightness and collection.

Straightness

Straightness is thought about when giving the mark for submission i.e. that the hind feet follow in the tracks of forefeet on straight and curved lines, and that the horse shows equal and submissive lateral bend in both directions. Often in more advanced tests irregularities can be seen in some of the lateral movements, particularly the half passes. Provided there are no irregularities in other parts this is deducted in the submission mark rather than the one for the paces. This is because that irregularity is a direct result of lack of submission to the bend and the ability of the horse to remain in a true balance.

Collection

The degree of collection required in the tests at each level is that which enables the horse to perform the movements with ease and fluency. Therefore insufficient collection results in a loss of submission because the horse is not doing the movement/s with ease and fluency.

The Marks

A horse that you are only able to give the lower marks for submission is the one that is outright disobedient or uneducated. It does not carry out the wishes of the rider with confidence and lacks an understanding of the movements required.

The horse that gets the high marks is the one that gives the impression of carrying out the movements of his own accord.

These pieces by Stephen Clarke appeared in the British Dressage Magazine.