

THE SCALES OF TRAINING

Those of you who compete in dressage frequently may have noticed that the 'Collective Marks' section at the bottom of a dressage test has changed and also when you collect your score sheet, there are now printed comments (*Directives*) listed alongside the numbered movements explaining what the judge is looking for from the horse in each movement.

The aim of these comments is to draw attention to the essence of the movements – what the key factors are that the rider and their trainers should be working towards and what a judge should be looking for when making their assessment of a movement and awarding a mark.

Since 2006, with the introduction of Prelim 1, all new BD dressage tests will have *Directives* next to each movement and appropriate *Directives* will be added to existing tests in use as they are reprinted

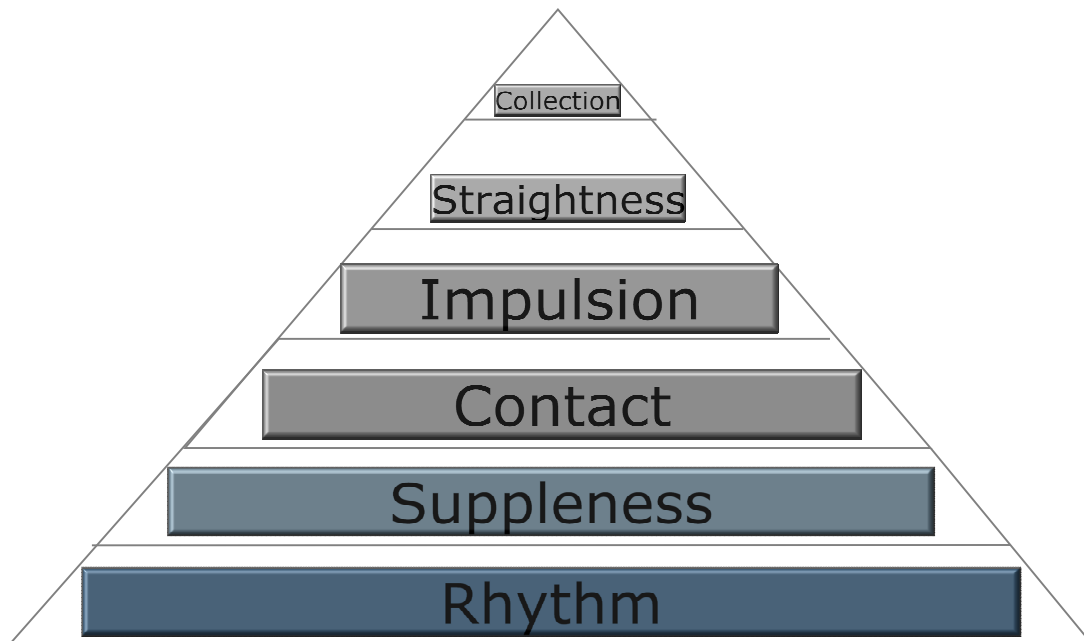
These new comments relate to '*The Scales of Training*'

The Scales of Training are most heard used in the world of dressage, however the principals can be applied to any horse or pony and any discipline. They work equally as well when applied to the schooling of a show jumper as they do to a dressage horse or pony.

Originating in Germany, the Scales of Training are broken down into 6 elements or levels – *Rhythm*, *Suppleness*, *Contact*, *Impulsion*, *Straightness* and *Collection*. The levels are all connected however each stage should be properly established before moving on to the next, meaning a fully rounded rider needs a good grasp of each level on the scale to be able to perform to the highest levels. Until a horse works with *Rhythm* it will be difficult to achieve *Suppleness* and without being supple *Contact* will be spasmodic, and until a regular and true contact is achieved *Impulsion* will be illusive.

If you think of a pyramid, each level in the training scale builds on the previous one, giving a horse and rider team a logical way to work up the levels and improve their performance.

The Six Levels or Elements of 'The Scales of Training'



The pyramid starts with the basic skills at the bottom, *Rhythm*, *Suppleness* and *Contact*, and once these basic qualities are attained by you and your horse you should be getting pretty good marks on a regular basis at Prelim and Novice Level.

At the top of the pyramid is *Collection* which is the more advanced quality a judge would be looking for from a horse working at Grand Prix level.

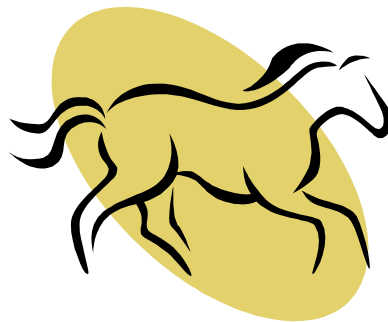
The levels are all connected, meaning a fully rounded rider needs a good grasp of each level on the scale to be able to perform to the highest levels. For example, a crooked horse is unable to develop impulsion, and a horse that is not relaxed will be less likely to travel with a rhythmic gait.

Despite its appearance, the training scale is not meant to be a rigid framework. Instead, each level is built on as the horse progresses in its training: For example, a rider competing at Grand Prix level would work with their horse on the refinement of the bottom levels of the pyramid, rather than just focusing on only the highest level of “collection.”

At any level, if things start to go wrong, the rider can always take a step down to the previous level and work on it a little more until the horse settles. For example, if the lengthen strides in trot in a Novice test become irregular, tense or hurried, the rider can leave them out for a while when schooling at home to work on re-establishing the horse’s rhythm and suppleness. Once this has

been achieved, the lengthen strides can be tried again and will hopefully be improved.

In summary, *The Scales of Training* can be used as helpful checks on the way of going for the rider when performing a movement and for the judge when marking a movement. When there is *Rhythm, Suppleness, Contact, Impulsion, Straightness* and in the more advanced tests *Collection* the 'way of going' can be said to be good. The aim is for the horse to do the movements of a dressage test in a willing and gymnastic way that is just as important as achieving the technical requirements such as halting four square. More and more emphasis is being placed on the way of going in and the quality of the work in a dressage test and a rider should always be aiming to do more than just simply ride the prescribed movements of the test



The following is an explanation of the six levels or elements of the Scales of training as found in the British Dressage Rule Book 2009 and are the standards that dressage judges score against in a competition.

RHYTHM

Rhythm should be both:

1. **Regular**, that is correct for each pace.

In the **walk** there should be four hoof beats – in a marching time

In the **trot** two hoof beats – the legs move in diagonal pairs plus a moment of suspension when all legs are off the ground.

In the **canter** three hoof beats – only one diagonal pair move together and there is a moment of suspension

2. The same tempo (speed of the rhythm) and this should have a pronounced beat to it. The horse should not speed up or slow down whether going around a corner or on a straight line, lengthening his strides or shortening them.

SUPPLENESS

The aim is that the horse's muscles have tone and are free from resistance and joints are loose and do not tighten against the riders aids. The muscles that are really important are those over the top line from the hind legs over the quarters, loins, in front of the wither and up to the poll.

The test of whether a horse is supple and working 'through' the back and neck is that when the rein contact is eased as in a free walk) the horse wants to stretch forward and down and not try to hollow and lift his head

CONTACT

The ideal contact is a light, even elastic feel in both reins and this is achieved by aids from the legs and the seat, not the hands. The legs are applied as a driving aid, the horse steps under more and works 'through' those muscles along the horse's top line – over the back, neck, through the poll - and the rider feels the energy thus created in the reins. When the contact is established in this way, the horse's outline and steps will be 'round' not hollow, and in the trot and canter springy and not flat. The horse's hindquarters and forehand are connected by that band of muscles over the top line and the rider can feel this in their hands as there will be a lively forward tendency in the reins. The horse is then said to be 'connected'

IMPULSION

This is the contained power of the horse. It is created in the hindquarters by getting the horse to take more energetic steps, to place the hind legs further under the body, and is contained by the rein contact that stops the horse from using up this extra energy to simply go faster. Any resistance, tightening of the muscles, ligaments and joints will block this energy getting through so the horse must be supple and connected to be able to build up real impulsion.

Riders aim to create enough impulsion to develop the horse's ability and to show off its athleticism but not so much it cannot be controlled. The skill of the rider is to create as much energy as can be contained without the horse starting to pull and speed up.

STRAIGHTNESS

Horses, like humans, are born one sided and will tend to move forward with their bodies slightly curved. This crookedness can get worse if the rider sits to one side and/or keeps a stronger contact in one rein than the other.

When a horse is crooked it will be more difficult for it to stay balanced and develop impulsion.

The aim is for the hind legs to step into the tracks of the forelegs both on a straight line and on a circle, and that the rider has an even feel in the reins.

COLLECTION

Dressage makes the horse a better ride, more manoeuvrable, more powerful and easier to control. To achieve this, the horse's balance has to be changed as it adjusts to carry the weight of the rider in the most efficient way. When a horse is first ridden in the early stages of its training, it will carry most of the rider's weight on the forehand. This is cumbersome, a horse will tend to run faster when asked to lengthen the stride and will find it difficult to stop quickly and will often lean in the rider's hands to keep its balance.

Through training, the necessary muscles are built up and the horse is taught to how to carry more and more weight on the hindquarters. This lightens the forehand, gives more freedom to move the shoulders which allows the horse to become an easier and more athletic ride.

Over time the horse is asked for more and more collection so that the hind legs step further forward under the horse's body and as this is done the weight will be transferred backwards developing the carrying power of the hindquarters.

At Grand Prix level collection is developed to such a high level that the horse will be able to trot on the spot in piaffe or turn around practically on the spot in the canter pirouette. In Preliminary and Novice tests no collection is asked for but there are movements that start to develop collection. These include when the horse comes into a halt or changes from lengthened strides to a working trot or canter. As the horse stops or shortens the steps it should step more under the body with the hind legs and transfer a little more of its weight onto the hindquarters, this is the beginning of collection.