

**DRESSAGE**  
**By**  
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# Definition of Dressage

**Big Paul's Definition:** Dressage is doing something unnatural with horses!  
My wife agrees, but.....

**My Definition:** Dressage is doing something smart to draw on the horse's "natural" combination of power and beauty.

**Dictionary Definition:** Dressage is the art of riding and training a horse in a manner that develops obedience, flexibility and balance.

But Dressage is much misunderstood. It is a sport, or an art, or both - as typified by the Lipzana horses of Austria. And finding a simple explanation is illusive. Dressage does make its life difficult with cliquey and odd vocabulary.

# Three Viewpoints

Avoiding such unnecessary terminology where I can, I shall try and explain the sport I loved for 15 years, despite never achieving any notable standard. So I offer a Novice's opinion from three viewpoints:

- The Horse
- The Arena (or Menage)
- The Rider

# Viewpoint of the Horse (1)

The horse:

- Unlike dogs, cats and humans, is classed as 'prey' not 'predator'.
- Is naturally defensive and on its guard.
- In a field with others, one will always be on watch.
- To ride effectively, therefore, you have to relax and think 'horse', watchful of anything that might cause him concern and put him off his stride. Else, he will be off, with you on him, at pace, back to the stables.
- When you do "bond", you release a power and beauty that only a horse can deliver - in my view.
- Ultimately, you train, exercise and maintain a fit and willing horse - that's the power of dressage. When you next see a horse, look at its 'top line', the gentle curve from the neck to the hind quarters. If a gentle curve and not a big dip, you know that the horse is fit, regularly and correctly ridden, and well looked after.

# Viewpoint of the Horse (2)

Whether at work, in war or play, the rider's task is to relax the horse and to encourage him to release his full potential, usually to your benefit. A horse confident in your ability - and they do know - will serve you well.

Let me introduce you to a term called *Dressage Scales*, which are measured and assessed in dressage:

- Scale 0 - Rider Seat and Position, display an awareness and empathy for the horse
- Scale 1 - Rhythm, empathising with the natural swinging tempo of the horse
- Scale 2 - Relaxation/Suppleness, exhibiting no tension and ready for any eventuality
- Scale 3 - Contact/Connection, the two of you working as one unit (Firm, but gentle)
- Scale 4 - Straightness, posture balance, evenly distributed weight
- Scale 5 - Impulsion, carrying, lifting, driving power from the horses quarters
- Scale 6 - Collection, demonstrating balanced economy off effort with perfect gaits

# Viewpoint of the Horse (3)

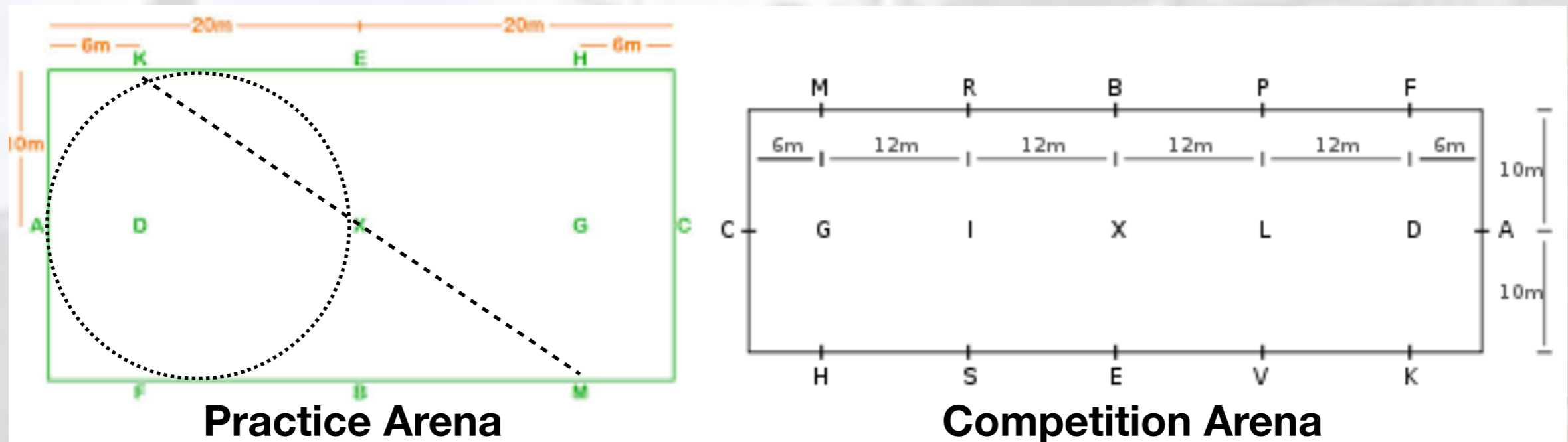
To make your horse accept your leadership - to him, a leap of faith - the training scales are introduced in four loosely structured (rider dependent) phases:

- Days of training - Scale 0, learning to sit quietly and to instil confidence
- Weeks of training - Scales 1, 2 and 3, familiarisation and bonding to achieve rhythm, relaxation and contact.
- Months of training - Scales 4 and 5, developing skills of precision and drive to achieve straightness and impulsion
- Years of training - Scale 6, collecting beauty and power as one.

# Viewpoint from the Arena (1)

The Arena:

- A Practice Arena, which I used weekly for years, is 40 metres x 20 metres
- A Competition Arena is 60 metres x 20 metres

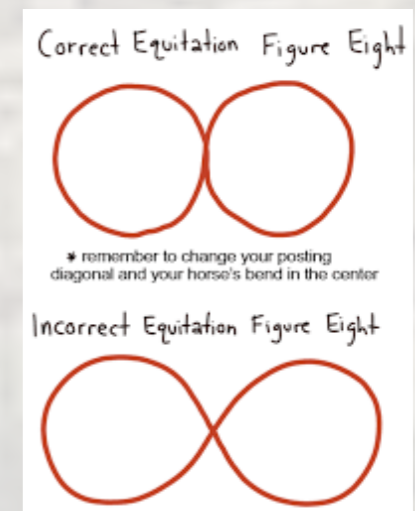
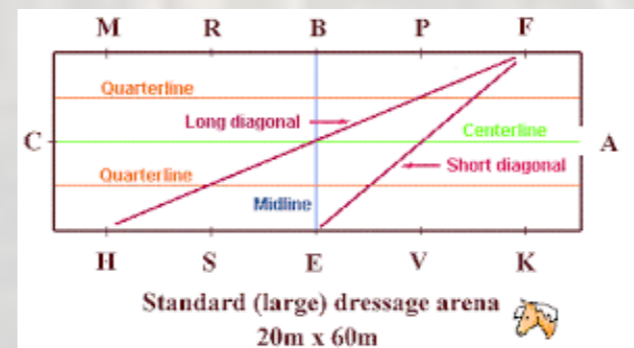
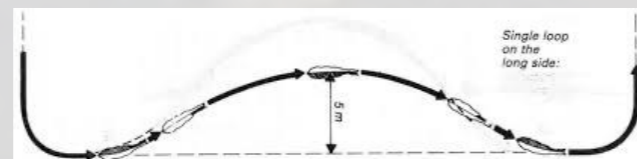
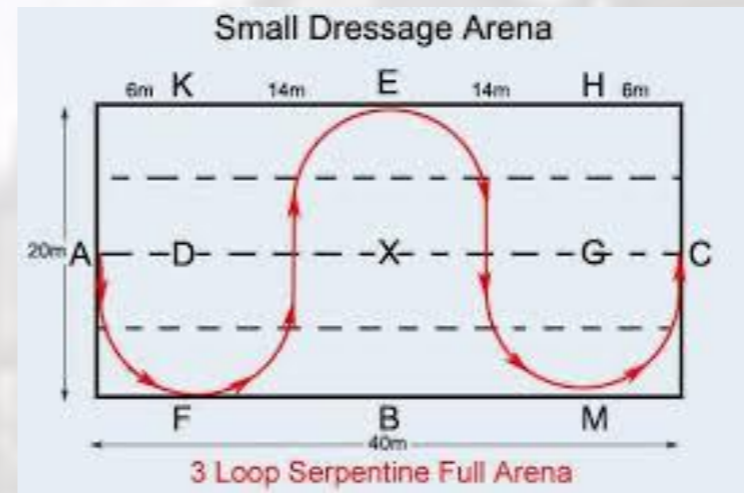
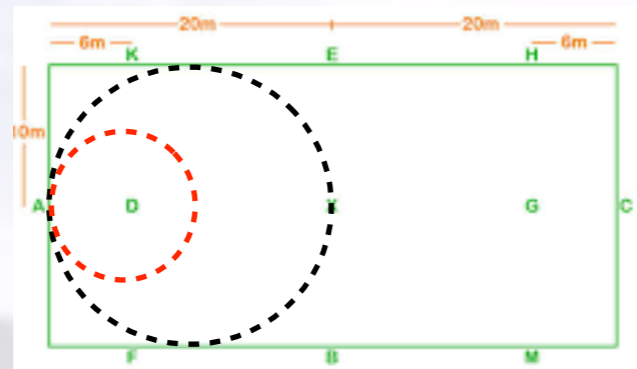


- The arenas have lettered markers that defy logic or sequence, allegedly derived from German cavalry, but are used for instruction and test sequences. For example, you may receive an instruction to start a 20 metre circle at 'A', changing rein through 'K' to 'M'. 'Changing rein' is a clue that you should be in 'trot', whilst 'changing lead' implies that you are in 'canter'.

# Viewpoint from the Arena (2)

Practice Arena moves include:

- 20 m circle
- 10 m circle
- Serpentine
- Figure of 8
- 5 m Loop
- Short and Long Diagonals



All aim to work the horse (and rider) through the six training scales - often more difficult for the rider than the horse, as the rider must remain relaxed, firm and gentle.



# Viewpoint from the Arena (3)

Advanced moves include:

- Leg Yield - your leg behind the girth, indirect rein against a supporting leg.
- Haunches In )  
)
- Haunches Out ) Leg and hand combinations  
)
- Figure of 8. )
- Turn on the Forehand, moving the quarters of the horse around the rein
- Half pass
- Pirouette

All depend on consistent leg, seat and hand aids from the rider. You steer with your bum not your hands.

# Rider Viewpoint (1)

## Practical Tips:

- Approaching - from the front, at an angle as the horse's eyes are on the side of its head. Let him smell your hand, both nostrils, stroke and repeat.
- Mounting - quietly lowering yourself into the saddle.
- Sitting - Align perfectly along the horse's top line. Posture.
- Starting Up - Hand? Leg? No. Sit deep and gently squeeze with your feet.
- 'Walk' - a '1, 2, 3, 4' cadence. Right rear, right fore, left rear, left foreleg order
- 'Trot' - a '1, 2' cadence. Right rear+Left fore, mid-air, Left rear+right foreleg
- 'Canter' - a '1, 2, 3' cadence. Right and Left rear legs drive, depending on lead
- 'Gallop' - All out chaos,

# Rider Viewpoint (2)

Judges look for:

- Rider suppleness - in each gate, the rider must move with the motion of the horse, looking in perfect connection, empathy and rhythm with the horse.
- Driving into the bit - subtle seat and leg aids, keeping hands still to control the pace. Don't tug with the hands, just provide a resistance.
- Leg aids support not drive - the impetus comes from your seat, with the legs supporting the momentum. If jumping, for example, the leg resists a horse that might be veering to one side - sometimes supplemented with a tap from the crop reinforce the leg aid if the horse is ignoring it. Don't flap or kick with the legs. Squeeze and relax.
- Changing rein/lead - The drive comes from the seat, with a supporting leg aid ('Leg On'). Hands regulate pace without tugging.
- Steering - You steer predominantly, directly with your seat and indirectly with hands and leg. To turn left, the left hip moves forward, the right leg slightly behind the girth, and the left hand opens the rein. Vice versa