

Freestyle Dressage

So, you want to try Freestyle Dressage? It's a fun way to show off you and your horse's capabilities. There are no set patterns to follow, but each level has a list of required movements, some of which have a coefficient. Refer to the EA Dressage Rules section 8.0 for details.

The fun comes in putting them together!

Your Test

Firstly, make a list of the required movements (consult the EA website for Novice Freestyle and above and the SADA website for the Walk/Trot, Prep and Prelim templates). Tick them off as you design the sequence so that none are missed. There is a time limit specified for each level – this is the hardest thing to achieve – so try not to go halfway around the arena between movements. However, note that some movements such as free walk have a minimum distance (e.g., 20 m). You can make the pattern as simple or complex as you like, just make sure that each movement is clearly shown. You can use short diagonals or circles away from the usual end and middle to add interest. A good way to visualise it is to draw the sequence on a series of arena templates.

Once you have the sequence, you need to sort out the timing. Ride it several times to determine if you need to shorten or lengthen the time any movement takes. For a SADA test, you should aim to be no more than a minute over the maximum time.

Music

Music adds another dimension to the performance. You can use one tune with repeats or several stitched together to achieve the time required. Changing the rhythm to match the pace is very effective. In Freestyle half the marks are gained for artistic presentation, so this is important. Try out different styles of music to determine what suits your horse's paces best. Having someone video you at walk, trot and canter is a great start. Free software is available to allow you to speed up/slow down the music and to fade it in and out.

Putting It Together

Have someone video the whole test, including your entrance. Decide where you will start from (outside the area) and where your starting salute will be. Note that the rules allow only 20 seconds of entry music. Play around with the music to match the changes of pace, keeping an eye on the total time. There will be several edits, but nothing beats riding to music (in your head from the headphones) and singing along at the top of your voice!

If all this is too challenging, you can purchase online ready-made freestyle tests with music to match.

Judging

There are two parts to be judged: the required movements are scored up to 10 with half point increments as normal, and coefficients as noted in the template. In the artistic presentation section, there are five subsections, each with a separate coefficient, which represent half the total available marks. They are also marked out of 10 with increments of 0.1 available.

The subsections are:

- Rhythm, energy and elasticity
- Harmony between rider and horse
- Choreography
- Degree of Difficulty
- Music and interpretation of the music.

Costume

You can opt to ride your Freestyle test in the SADA uniform, but it's more in the spirit of the day to dress up according to the theme chosen. Practice riding in the outfit in case your horse objects!

Finally

Write your sequence of movements in a list (just the movements e.g., entry and halt, trot right, trot circle right, etc); send to the Secretary beforehand. This makes judging so much easier.

Download your music onto a USB and make sure it plays. If possible, also send this to the Secretary beforehand.

Write a short paragraph explaining why you chose the theme and music and any story behind it. This will be read out prior to your ride.

Above all, have fun doing it!