

# How to get started

## How to enter a competition

Choose a show from the schedule in the Competition section of this website or *British Dressage* magazine. Each schedule gives you all the information you need, such as the date and venue of the competition, along with the tests used in each class, entry fee, closing date for entries and when to phone for your test times.

You can download an Entry form and for test sheets click [Online shop](#) or call the BD office (tel: 024 76 698830). Send your entry form to the organiser of the show you are attending, not BD, enclosing a cheque for the entry fee and a stamped addressed envelope. This allows the organiser to let you know if the class is full.

If you can't compete early or late, or are travelling with another competitor, write this on the entry form as most organisers try to help when allocating start times. This is usually done a couple of days before the show.

Remember to ring for the start time of your test during the time slot stated in the schedule or you could lose your place.

## What to wear

Some riders think they need to spend a fortune on expensive clothes and leather boots to compete in affiliated dressage. This is not the case.

You need to wear:

- A suitable hat, BSI standard is recommended. If wearing a crash hat, use a dark blue or black cover
- A navy or black jacket with shirt and tie or stock is usually worn. A hacking jacket is also fine
- Beige, cream or white breeches or jodhpurs
- Leather or rubber long black or brown boots with breeches or jodhpurs or short boots with jodhpurs. You can wear plain gaiters with short boots as long as they match the colour of the boots.
- Spurs are allowed at all levels and are compulsory from advanced level upwards
- Whips are generally allowed, except in championships and in all FEI pony, junior and young rider tests. The maximum length rule was abolished in 2005, instead whips may not be used in a way or of a length that disturbs other riders
- Gloves

Your horse:

- A plain-coloured saddle, leather or synthetic
- Plain black or brown bridle, leather or synthetic
- A snaffle must be used in preliminary and novice tests. From elementary level, double bridles as well as snaffle bits are allowed. Check the current *British Dressage Rules* for permitted bits
- Boots, including overreach boots, and bandages may be used for warming up, but must be removed before entering the arena
- Martingales and bit guards are not allowed. A breastplate is permitted
- It is optional to use a numnah or saddlecloth

See the current *British Dressage Rules* for full details.

## **At the show**

Arrive in plenty of time to declare your horse at the secretary's office. Make a note of your competitor number, which you will need to display using a bridle or saddlecloth number. You can buy these from many saddlers, our [Online shop](#) or BD.

Check where your class is being held, whether you should ride inside or outside the arena just before you start your test and where you can work in. Follow the code of practice for warming up (full details in the current *British Dressage Rules*) and remember your gloves and number.

Keep an eye on your watch, as it is up to you to be at the arena at the right time, and remember to remove any boots and bandages before the test.

You are welcome to ask a friend to video your performance and you can also have someone read out your test, sometimes referred to as a commander, who shouldn't stand too close to the judge.

You are allowed to ride around the outside/inside of the arena for a short while before you begin your test. The judge will sound a horn or ring a bell to tell you to start and you have up to 45secs to make your way around to A.

If you go wrong, the judge will sound the horn. Don't panic, as you will only lose marks for that one movement. Stop as soon as possible. If you know where you have gone wrong, raise your hand and return to the start of that movement. If you are not sure, ride towards the judge, who will tell you where you went wrong and where to restart. If you have a problem with the horse and would like to retire, let the judge know.

Once you have put your horse away, check your marks on the scoreboard. Your test sheets can be collected about ½hr after the end of the class and it is wise to check the adding up of the scores. If they are wrong, you must point it out to the organiser within 1hr of the class finishing. If you can't wait to collect your sheets, you can leave a stamped addressed envelope to have them sent on. Judges are often around the scoreboard after the class has finished. Do feel you can ask them questions to help you learn.

Although dressage is an extremely exacting sport, remember to enjoy the day and that everyone, even top riders, make mistakes. If you feel you would like more help, click [Find a trainer](#) to locate a registered BD coach near you. Our trainers want to help you improve, whatever level you ride at.