

*There are changes in Intro and in the Freestyle requirements too. Any thoughts?*

Rest assured if you are a neophyte dressage rider that the changing of the tests, while it may seem to turn your world upside down, will be of lesser consequence than was the introduction of New Coke. The new tests will last longer.

If you're the sort of person who can only find the bathroom at 2 am by counting your footsteps down the hall, I understand why making a circle in a different place could be traumatic! But think of it as an opportunity for personal growth. Seriously, there are only so many things that can happen in a walk-trot test, and once you've done the new ones a handful of times, the old patterns won't linger in your memory any more than the guy who took you to junior prom. Unless, well . . . never mind!

Of note is the Entrance in Intro A—there's no halt. You just sashay down the center line with that stricken look on your face, track right, and proceed towards your fate. The eventers have been doing this for years. Horse trial organizers discovered that they could squeeze a couple more 300 dollar a pop entries into the day's schedule if they didn't take up those valuable few seconds finding out if riders had brakes. We presume the reasoning in Intro is otherwise—like once you get stopped, you might never get going again, and the eventual traffic jam would clog up the arena for later riders. Otherwise, Intro A and B, if you know how to paint by numbers, hold no mysteries.

Not so with Intro C. The bad news is you have to canter. The good news is that it's not for very long. That's likely to be bad news too. In the first part of a 20 meter circle at A, you make a depart. Before the circle is done, you're already back in trot. I anticipate judging a lot of rides with a blurry, running, undefined depart and an equally blurry, running, undefined downward transition with very few real canter strides in between. I figure, if you're going to risk your life, it should be for a more noble cause than that! Or at least a *longer* one where if the first part isn't very good, you have time to rescue it and show some improvement before you have to trot. The question might arise: if you can only canter that briefly, maybe you shouldn't be cantering in a test at all. But let's wait and see how it all plays out. Will this new requirement foster bravery by inviting beginners to set their sights high? Or allow them to set their sights not quite high enough? Or maybe it's a diabolical plot to make them skip Intro C altogether and plunge right into Training Level where they have a chance to actually *show* the canter!

As for the freestyles, there aren't many differences in the riding requirements, but the new tests give the judges an opportunity to give more accurate feedback. First of all, we now have a block in which to score the entrance and finish halts. Also the technical side includes three blocks to score the Collectives: Gaits, Impulsion, and Submission. On the old 2007 tests the Gaits and Impulsion scores were combined into the first block on the Artistic side (Rhythm, Energy, and Elasticity), and the Submission and Rider scores were combined into the second block (Harmony between Horse and Rider). The new way is better.

On the Artistic side there are still five blocks. "Harmony between Horse and Rider" remains but the nuance will shade away from the technical aspects of Submission (like bending for instance) towards more ethereal "feel good" elements. Your bonus is a new split in the analysis of the music—one score to evaluate the "suitability, seamlessness, and cohesiveness" and a whole separate score for its

interpretation: how the music expresses the gaits, use of phrasing, and dynamics. These changes won't affect your scores very much in that judges always found a way to reward those good qualities under the old system, but it may point riders in better directions when they set out to create their own musical rides.

So that's the new deal. Gentlepersons, start your (one horsepower) engines!