

# 50 Ways to Get Eliminated

(Or what not to do at a dressage show)

BY MARGARET FREEMAN



ARE YOU READY? *Most causes of elimination are preventable*

**D**ressage-show officials don't want to play a game of "rules gotcha," but they have a responsibility to consider the welfare of the horses, the safety of those at the show, and to keep the competition fair for everyone. Competing in US Equestrian Federation-licensed/USDF-recognized dressage shows is expensive, and if you're eliminated because you don't have a firm working knowledge of the rules it's a silly waste of money, at the least.

Some elimination rules are black and white, like when a horse jumps out of the arena. Some may require an official's judgment, such as determining whether a horse is markedly lame. Others may have an element of discretion, such as a violation of a dress rule: You might get off with a warning, especially if it's not a championship show.

### Preventing Elimination

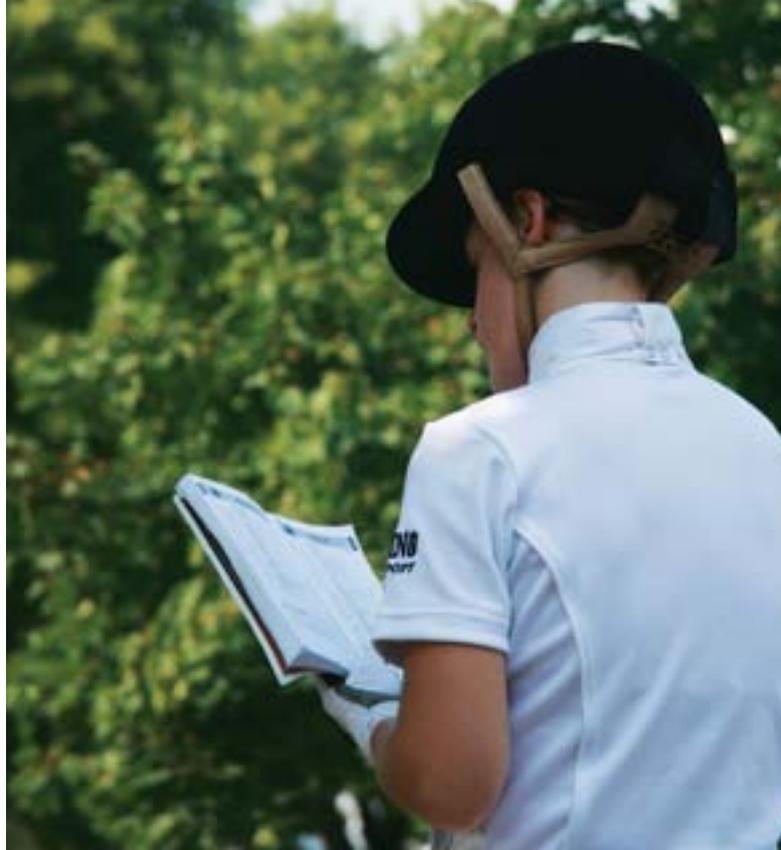
The USEF, not the USDF, writes the rules for national-level dressage competitions in this country. (However, authority for most rules that affect elimination for freestyles from First through Fourth Levels has been turned over to the USDF. Confused yet?)

While the USEF Rule Book is heavy going, it's easily accessible online at [www.usef.org](http://www.usef.org), has a user-friendly search function, and has printable pages. The rules you'll need to check most often are DR 120 to DR 124 (DR stands for Dressage Rule). There are also rules concerning elimination in the General Rules (GR) section at the front of the Rule Book, particularly Chapter 8. Print several copies of the pertinent pages and stash them in your truck and in your show bag for quick reference, or save a PDF to your smartphone, tablet, or other mobile device. Reread the rules often—at the very least, before the start of every show season.

Article DR124 in the USEF Rule Book helpfully summarizes the most likely causes of elimination, so read that section first. Under certain circumstances, you can be eliminated from the entire competition, the current test, or the next class, depending on which is closest to the time the incident occurs.

The number-one cause of elimination from a dressage test is committing three errors, such as riding off course—often the result of show nerves and not actual forgetfulness. Errors are most likely to occur right at the start (track right or left at C?), during the walk section (which letter to which letter?), and at the end (where to turn onto the center line; and is the halt at X, I, or G?). A quick review of just those points before you go in the ring can prevent many goofs.

If using a reader will increase your confidence, then do so; but know that riders who use readers go off course as



**KNOW YOUR TEST:** *Riding off course is the number-one reason competitors get eliminated*



**OFF WITH THE WRAPS:** *Enlist a helper to remove them if you're likely to forget*

## The Fatal 5

**H**ere they are—the five most common causes of elimination at a USEF/USDF dressage competition.

1. Three errors during a test.
2. Sustained resistance of longer than 20 seconds during a test.
3. All four of the horse's feet go outside the arena fence during a test, with or without the rider.
4. Bandages or boots left on the horse's legs during a test.
5. Marked lameness. There is no appeal against this decision by the judge.

much as those who don't—a sure sign they're having trouble focusing on their performance. The more relaxed you are, the more likely you are to remember your test.

If you're at all likely to forget to remove your horse's leg wraps (they're not permitted in the competition arena), use a color other than white (which blends in with horses' leg markings) and assign someone to remind you about them between the warm-up and the in-gate. Do the same thing when carrying a whip at a championship during warm-up and for other matters of dress and equipment.

## Who Can Eliminate You?

Most riders think it's either the judge or the technical delegate (TD). That's not quite right. The judge may eliminate you for a rule violation during a test only after you've entered the arena (except for the late-entry rule: see "50 and Counting," item 12, on the next page).

Outside the competition ring, authority for rules enforcement rests with the show committee, which can also eliminate a rider for use of illegal equipment during a test if it's discovered after the competitor has left the arena. The TD informs the show committee of any rules violations and advises competitors who are unsure of rules situations. Among other things, the TD's role is to clarify the application of USEF rules to judges, exhibitors, and management alike and to investigate any situation in which the rules aren't upheld.

At unrecognized dressage shows (schooling shows), show management makes the rules. Many schooling-show prize lists state that the show will be run according to USEF rules, with specified exceptions (such as a relaxed dress code). Schooling shows don't have TDs, and schooling-show management can override the decision of the judge concerning rules if it wishes.

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## 50 and Counting

We've listed 50 potential elimination situations here, but there certainly are more. Unless specified, the same rules apply in warm-up as in the competition ring. The first five to consider are perhaps the most likely to cause elimination, so we've included them in a sidebar, "The Fatal 5," on page 36.

Picking up from there, in no particular order:

**6.** The reader (test caller) adds instructions or reads movements more than once. This is considered unauthorized assistance.

**7.** Leaving the show ring in a manner not prescribed in the test.

**8.** Long-lining on the show grounds.

**9.** The horse's tongue is tied down.

**10.** Equipment breakage during a test such that the rider can't continue or is now unsafe. "Time-outs" aren't allowed in dressage.

**11.** Riding with a whip longer than 47.2 inches (120 cm), including lash.

**12.** Late entry into the show ring: After the judge's bell sounds, the rider has 45 seconds to enter the ring. It takes most horses about a minute to trot around the outside of the ring; so depending on where you are when the bell rings, turn around (or pick up a canter) accordingly.

**13.** Failure to participate in a mandatory prize-giving ceremony, if specified in the prize list.

**14.** In a freestyle, failure to enter at A within 20 seconds after the music starts.

**15.** Carrying two whips.

**16.** Making a misrepresentation on an entry form.

**17.** Riding with plastic spurs.

**18.** Striking a horse on the head, except in an emergency situation.

**19.** In an FEI freestyle, performing movements that are not allowed.

**20.** Horse causes concern for the safety of the rider, other exhibitors, or their horses.

**21.** Failure to wear one's competitor number when outside the stall or away from the trailer.

**22.** Using a snaffle with a port.

**23.** Any intervention by a third party using voice or signals during a test.

**24.** Riding at any time with an adjustable-length whip.

**25.** Riding with side reins. Lungeing a horse (with or without a rider) with single direct side reins or double sliding side reins (triangle reins) is permitted, however.

**26.** Evidence of blood on a horse, with the exception of environmental causes, such as insect bites. (Don't feed your



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**HORSE ID:** *Horses must wear their competitor numbers at all times when out of the stall*



**LOSE THE NECKWEAR:** *When jackets are waived in hot weather, remove your stock tie*

horse treats containing red food coloring, which can tint his saliva red and be mistaken for blood.)

- 27. Riding with a seat cover on the saddle.
- 28. Excessive whipping.
- 29. Competing in a test with a brightly colored saddle pad.
- 30. Riding without spurs in a test above Fourth Level. ("Dummy" spurs are allowed.)
- 31. Leaving a stock tie on when riding a test without a jacket, if coats are waived in extreme heat.
- 32. Riding with half-chaps in tests above First Level. At First Level and below, solid black or brown half-chaps are allowed if they match the color of the boots and are smooth leather or leather-like material.
- 33. Riding in sneakers. For safety, all riding shoes and boots must have a distinguishable heel.
- 34. Changing a marking on the horse's hide and hair

(except for mane, tail, and hooves).

- 35. Showing a horse that has been officially retired.
- 36. Riding without gloves in a test above Fourth Level.
- 37. Using a roller bit. (The USEF Rule Book contains illustrations of legal and illegal bits.)
- 38. Fall of horse or rider if the rider cannot continue in a timely manner, if the judge determines that it is unsafe for the competitor to continue, or if the judge suspects rider injury.
- 39. Riding in a test with a fly hood without getting permission before the class starts.
- 40. Competing in more than three dressage tests in one day at Fourth Level and below (two tests per day above Fourth Level). There are exceptions to this rule in some breed-specific shows.
- 41. Entering more than two consecutive levels, freestyle included.
- 42. Riding in a test with a tail bandage.

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## The "Helmet Rule"

**A**s we reported in last month's issue, the US Equestrian Federation recently changed its dressage rules regarding the wearing of protective headgear.

Effective March 1, all riders while mounted on horses competing at Fourth Level and below, and all riders under the age of eighteen regardless of level, must wear ASTM/SEI-approved protective equestrian headgear while mounted at USEF-licensed/USDF-recognized competitions.

The only exceptions are competitors aged eighteen and over while riding horses that are competing only in FEI levels and tests at the Prix St. Georges level and above (including FEI Young Rider Tests, the USEF Developing Prix St. Georges Test, and the USEF Brentina Cup Test).

Read the changes to the USEF dressage-attire rule (DR120) here: [usef.org/documents/rules/ruleChanges/2011/2011AnnualMeeting.pdf](http://usef.org/documents/rules/ruleChanges/2011/2011AnnualMeeting.pdf).

**43.** Riding *hors de concours* (as an exhibitor only, not for awards, scores, and placings) in one class and then in a later class for placings and awards at the same show, except for situations of emergency substitutions of judges.

**44.** Carrying a whip in a championship class.

**45.** Using a noseband so tight that it severely irritates the skin.

**46.** Having a test called in a foreign language without prior consent from show management and the judge.

**47.** At a championship show, allowing a person to school the horse other than the rider entered in the championship class.

**48.** Ear plugs on a horse.

**49.** Riding in front of a judge who has taught the rider within the past 30 days.

**50.** Using a flash noseband with a double bridle.

## An Ounce of Prevention

There are many ways to get eliminated, but as you can see, most are easily preventable. You invest considerable time, money, and energy getting to a show. Don't let all your efforts go to waste over a needless elimination. Study the USEF Rule Book carefully before you compete, especially if you're new to showing or you've been out of circulation for a while. If you have any questions, speak to the TD before you take your horse away from the trailer or stall. ▲

*Margaret Freeman, of Mt. Kisco NY, is a USEF "S" dressage judge.*