

2023 Equitation Tests Explained

Courtesy of Judging Hunters & Equitation WTF? (Want The Facts?)

- 1. Work collectively or individually at a walk, rising/posting trot, and/or sitting trot, and/or canter.**

This is a straightforward and basic test to evaluate riders on the flat. This test is often used if there's a wide gap in scores from the original round, and the judge doesn't want to lose the winner. It's also sometimes used in a Pony Medal work-off to forego having to change jump heights if ponies aren't in the same height section.

- 2. Downward Transition Test:**

a) Walk (4-5 steps)

b) Halt (4-6 seconds)

c) Halt and Back for (3-5 steps). When riders working collectively are asked to halt and then back, they should walk forward a few steps and halt again after backing and then proceed with any further instructions from the judge.

This test allows the judge to evaluate the rider's ability to control their mount and properly ask for downward transitions. The Halt should be 4 to 6 seconds and with the horse in front of leg, square and on contact. Major penalty points are incurred when the horse takes backwards steps and/or comes behind the bit. If a rider is asked to Halt and Back, the judge may specify how many steps they would like to see. Backing should be straight, with the horse maintaining a light forehand. If asked to Halt and Back, 4 to 6 seconds should transpire between the halt and the back.

- 3. Question(s) regarding basic horsemanship, tack, or equipment and/or conformation. The judge may ask question(s) that are appropriate for the level of expected skill of any given class or specifications.**

If this test is used, all contestants must be asked the same question. Judges are encouraged to ask questions with a clear answer. Some examples include:

- Name two pieces of tack and equipment you have on your horse and explain their purposes.
- Name the four seats we use in Hunters and Equitation.
- If the course chart states the distance between a line of fences is 72', how many strides should you take on a horse with an average stride?

- 4. Working either collectively, or individually, riders may demonstrate the lengthening or collection of strides on the flat at the walk, sitting or posting/rising trot and/or canter.**

This test allows the judge to evaluate the rider's ability to adjust the horse's stride. Major penalty points are given for breaking gait. Riders are rewarded for showing smooth and seamless transitions with a substantial difference between the collected, working, and lengthened gaits.

- 5. Figure Eight at the trot, demonstrating change of diagonals. In any Figure Eight movement, the rider should start at a center point at the halt. To finish the movement the rider is to return to the halt at same position as the point of commencement.**

A figure of eight is described as two uniform circles connected by a straight line. It is not an infinity sign. The pattern begins and ends in the center of the straight line, known as X. It's best if the rider begins facing the judge and starts tracking left. A consistent plan when beginning this test makes it easier to keep track of completed figures of eight should more than one be requested. Change of diagonal should occur as the rider crosses X, and the halt should also occur at X.

- 6. Figure Eight at the canter on the correct lead. In this movement, the rider will begin at the halt and demonstrate a simple change of lead. This is a change whereby the horse is brought back into the walk or trot (either is acceptable unless the judge specifies) and then restarted into a canter on the opposite lead in the center of the figure, then will proceed to the second circle on the opposite lead. The rider will halt in the center at the same point of commencement to finish the figure.**

The same directions as above in No. 5, except at a canter with the simple change occurring at X. Riders should note that a simple change through the walk is more difficult than through the collected sitting trot, and some judges may note that on their card. A simple change of lead is defined as three to five steps of the downward gait.

- 7. Jump a shortened course. The riders must jump all obstacles in the same direction of the original course unless the judge clearly states that a jump be attempted in the opposite direction of the original course. If the judge requests that a jump be used in the opposite direction, it must be a vertical and the ground lines must be correct. (See EQ 102.11)**

Judges who use this test are encouraged to prepare their work-offs before the class starts. Therefore, if needed, they can ask the course designer to set a vertical that can be jumped in both directions.

- 8. Jump low obstacles at a trot. The maximum height of a trot jump is determined as 6" lower than class requirements and is not to exceed 3' for horses and 2' for ponies. Oxers may be used as a trot jump in classes listed at 3'6" or higher with maximum width 3'.**

The horse/pony should trot all the way to the base of the jump, and the rider should sit in a light seat just before take-off. If the judge believes the rider cantered the trot fence or failed even to attempt the trot, a score in the range of 50 may be given.

- 9. Demonstrate a half-turn or a half-turn in the reverse. In all cases where a figure is requested between 2 jumps that requires a change of direction, the rider will not be charged for crossing their path nor will this count as a refusal between the obstacles.**

This figure is similar to a tear drop. The half turn should be performed with a 10-meter half circle, with the horse bent properly. The test can be performed at the walk, trot or canter, and the rider should change diagonals, if applicable, or leads upon returning to the wall. A simple or flying change of lead may be done unless the judge specifies.

- 10. Change leads on a line demonstrating simple or flying changes. The simple change is whereby the horse is brought back into the walk or trot (either is acceptable unless the judges specify) and then restarted into a canter on the opposite lead.**

If not specified, either a simple or flying change is fine. However, the degree of difficulty is as follows: flying, simple change through the walk, simple change through the collected trot sitting (in that order from most difficult to least difficult). Straightness, promptness, and smoothness in execution is key.

- 11. Figure Eight at the canter demonstrating flying changes of leads. Like all Figure Eight movements, the rider is to first halt at a center point. The flying change is performed in one stride with the front and hindlegs changing at the same moment.**

The same directions as in No. 6, except the flying change of lead should occur at X, with the horse's body relatively straight and without increase of pace or loss of balance.

- 12. Collection of strides between 2 fences. It is recommended that a line chosen for this test be not less than 70'. For safety purposes, judges may only ask for additional strides to be added and must not ask a rider to leave out a stride.**

This is a test of a rider's knowledge of their horse's stride length and their ability to collect their horse's stride. The objective is for the rider to keep an even rhythm through the line, with both the first and second jumps being taken out of the same stride and distance.

- 13. Work collectively or individually at the walk, posting/rising trot, sitting trot and/or canter without irons. In any case where riders are asked to perform**

without irons they must be allowed to walk or halt and be afforded the opportunity to cross their irons if they wish.

If this test is used in a work-off and the riders are coming from the in-gate or told beforehand, the judge may also give them the option to remove their stirrups altogether.

- 14. Execute a serpentine at a trot and/or canter on the correct leads. If trotting, the rider is to demonstrate the changes of diagonals at the center points of the figure. If cantering, the rider should demonstrate the simple or flying changes of lead in the center of the figure. This is a change whereby the horse is brought back into the walk or trot (either is acceptable unless the judge specifies) and then restarted into a canter on the opposite lead.**

When requesting this test, the judge must specify the number of loops they want performed. The rider begins at one end of the arena, dividing the area equally into the number of loops requested and proceeds to ride even, half-turns then continues straight across the centerline (where the new diagonal or lead occurs) before beginning the next loop. The serpentine ends on the opposite end of the ring where it commenced, perpendicular to the centerline.

- 15. Canter on the counter lead on the flat. For the purposes of Hunt Seat Equitation on the flat, a counter canter is defined as a balanced canter on the outside lead. If working collectively, no more than 12 riders may counter canter at one time. Riders must complete one full revolution around the arena in each direction.**

The horse should be bent very slightly in the direction of the lead (toward the outside of the arena). Breaking gait or doing a flying change to the correct lead is a major penalty.

- 16. A canter on the counter lead may be used on the approach to a jump. When utilizing this test, a rider may be asked to:**

1. Approach a single jump on a counter lead. This test requires riders make at least ONE turn or bend of not less than 90 degrees and not more than 120 degrees on the counter lead.

2. Demonstrate a counter canter between 2 jumps on the course. For this test, the rider upon landing off the first jump can choose from the following acceptable options:

a) If the rider lands on the inside lead, he/she may demonstrate a simple or flying change of lead before cantering through the first 90-degree to 120-degree turn and continue to hold the counter lead to the next jump. Either the simple or flying change is acceptable.

b) If the rider lands on the outside lead, he/she may continue to hold the outside lead to the next required obstacle.

c) A judge cannot require a rider to land on the counter lead.

It sounds complicated, but the point of this test is for the rider to perform a counter canter around a turn and not begin the counter canter on a straight line to the fence. The rider must show a balanced counter canter through a turn to receive full credit for completing this test.

17. Demonstrate a turn on the forehand done through the halt.

This test is an extension of the leg yield. It's a basic test when performed at the halt. The forehand remains immobile as the horse's hindquarters move around the forehand toward the center of the ring. Typically, this movement is asked for as a half-turn. Done correctly, the hind legs cross over one another. It's a penalty if the horse takes any backwards steps.

18. Demonstrate a turn on the haunches done from the walk.

This is an advanced exercise properly performed without losing forward momentum. Typically, a half-circle with the horse bend in the direction of the turn (which should be toward the middle of the arena), making a wider track with the front legs and continuously making small steps with the hind legs. Loss of forward motion or backing up is considered a major error.

19. Demonstrate Shoulder-in, Shoulder-out, Haunches-in, Haunches-out, Half pass or Leg Yield in both directions at either the walk or the sitting trot.

These basic dressage movements allow a judge to observe the rider's knowledge and ability to move their horse laterally. Riders should study the proper bends and tracks for each movement.

20. Hand Gallop. A hand gallop may be used either when riders are working collectively or individually on the flat, and it may also be used on the approach to a jump. The rider must be in a half-seat when executing the hand gallop. A hand gallop may not be requested into or out of a related-distance line.

This pace is faster than a normal canter, with a consistent rhythm created in the turn and maintained to the take-off of the jump. The rider is always off the horse's back in a half-seat position whether on the flat or on the approach to a fence.

21. Ride without stirrups over fences.

As noted above in No 13, if this test is used in a work-off and the riders are coming from the in-gate or told beforehand, the judge may give them the option to cross their irons or remove their stirrups altogether.

22. Demonstration ride of approximately one minute. Riders must advise the judge(s) beforehand what ride he/she plans to demonstrate.

This test is typically used in an equitation championship or medal finals. It gives riders the opportunity to showcase their talents and should be judged on technical difficulty as well as execution.

23. Change horses. (Note: this is the equivalent of two tests.) Riders will only change horses for Championship classes. Riders will not be asked to ride a different horse unless he/she has ridden the course on his/her own horse first.

a) When a swap of horses is requested, the rider must be given a minimum of 90 seconds to do a brief flat and jump no more than two (2) schooling jumps.

b) Riders may be requested to jump a previous course or a portion of the previous course. Tests 1 – 22 shall not be included even if included in the former course.

This test is now used exclusively in championship classes and tests the rider's ability to perform on an unfamiliar horse. Due to the challenges of changing horses, no other tests are permitted to be used and must be removed from the course.

*Rules may be changed annually, and as a responsible exhibitor, trainer or judge you need to check the USEF Rulebook regularly (new rules are printed in red.).