

## **Andrew Gardner – Convenor of the A & B Judges' Seminar following Sydney CDI3\* Sunday 10 May 2009**

*Andrew Gardner is an FEI International Judge, and has been Director of British Dressage, Deputy Chair and Chairman of British Judges, and previously Chair of International Selection. He regularly takes seminars for and examines British Judges to Grand Prix level.*

### **Our role**

We must be ambassadors for our sport, set a good example, be united in how we deal with things, fly the flag well under the microscope of criticism, protect the integrity of our job.

We must treat others with respect, put the horse first, recognise that we make mistakes, act with integrity, and have the courage to make a stand. We must be transparent, objective and accountable for our actions. We should be willing to discuss things with riders.

### **Finding the right mark**

A good way to start each movement is to ask yourself what you liked most, it is so easy to focus on the negatives. Fault finding is the easy part of judging.

Judging is about shades of grey, it is rarely black and white, so we have to decide which shade of grey it is.

- If we 'police' it, we can find reasons to mark it down.
- If we appreciate it, we can find reasons to mark it up.

We must be careful not to pose a higher requirement than is appropriate for the level of the test. We mustn't be too greedy, and have unreasonable expectations. There should be a degree of latitude when a new movement is introduced at a level - eg in piaffe at Inter II, we allow the horse to progress forward rather than complete the movement 'in place'.

At each level there will be a slightly greater requirement for the hind legs to provide more of the support for the horse.

### **Collection**

The tests are the challenge to collection. When is collection sufficient? When you see all the work in the test performed well, then the collection is sufficient. Ask, 'Can the horse cope with the requirements of the level? Collection is relative – each level requires the rider to reorganise the horse's balance to cope with the requirements of that test. If the horse can do the work in that test, he has enough collection for that level.

### **Giving low marks**

“If I had to give a rider a 5 I’d be horrified, it’s a very nasty mark, unless the rider is intentionally abusive, rather than not very well-balanced”.

We must not crucify the bottom end. Think of the greater good of the sport. Find a way to ‘soften the blow’ if giving bad news – use the word: ‘Today...’

Don’t be patronising, be respectful, not insulting. It is easy to mostly sit on a 6 or 7 for a Rider Mark – is this being mean with our Rider Marks? Should we give better riders 8’s?

### **When there is a mistake in a movement**

Where there is a mistake (eg a brief loss of balance in the lengthened or medium trot):

“I was brought up in the Eric Lette era, and Eric would ask: ‘What in your mind would the mark have been if there were no mistakes?’ Then you have to reflect that in the mark you give”

The point here is - a small mistake should not hijack the mark for the whole movement.

### **Double punishment**

Take care not to mete out double punishment – ie in both the Test Marks and in the Collective Marks. We should not punish the horse twice for one small mistake – eg we may take a mark off in the movement mark or in the transition mark, but it is not fair to do so in both.

In a higher test, we expect more submission – the Submission Mark could be lower in a high level test for something you wouldn’t punish a baby for. If there is one problem in a lower test then the rest of the test is fine, eg a horse bucks in a 20 metre circle in a Preliminary test, he will get a 3 or 4 for the movement. In this case, don’t pull the Submission Mark down as well.

### **Comments**

Comments are highly recommended for a 5 or lower, but riders don’t always really need to know why you gave a 3 or 4, if the horse has just given 2 fingers to the spur, they know why it was a 4!

Riders often do need to know why you gave a 7 or 8, tell them why was it not a 9 or 10?

### **Freestyle**

We must not impose our taste in music on the marks. We need to ask, does the music match each pace’s footfall? Does it suit the horse? Do the phrasing and transitions match the transitions in the choreography?

Are the movements mirrored, does the test look balanced, is it easy to follow?

Think about the way the movements are related to one another. Is there a theme to the freestyle?

### **Half pass**

If the horse is in one of those huge reaching ('medium trot') half passes, often the quarters will appear to be trailing. To decide if they really are trailing, look at the crossing of the hindlegs. If the horse is in fact parallel, his *inside* shoulder and hip will appear almost parallel. If the quarters are trailing, the hind legs will barely cross, or will not cross.

### **Discrepancies**

If there is a real 'hiccup' in the marks, the explanation is likely to be one of the following -

1. Where the judge sits – eg a tight gullet &/or a tongue drawn up is much easier to see through most movements in the test when sitting at E or B than it is sitting at C, H or M. Judges have different jobs depending on where they are sitting.
2. Mistakes/disobediences – some judges are tougher on disturbances, resistances
3. One strict, one lenient eg one judge can give mostly big 6's thru the test, the other can give mostly small 7's through the test – the result could be a 10% difference in marks.

Often the correct mark is midway between the 2 judges' totals.