


Freestyles
By
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I hope that everyone has been working hard on their freestyles! By now you have decided your level and picked out your music. Put together a rough draft of the freestyle and are ready to make a working tape.

Working Tape 

The best way to see how it is all going to work out is to first make a working tape. You can do this on your own CD player or on a tape. Once you have your music then you can cut out the parts that you wish to use. Remember to divide it up according to the requirements and strengths of the horse. Try to get the cuts as close as you can, that will make it easier to get a feel for the timing. Spend some time just listening to it and see if you can visualize what the horse is doing. Take it to the barn and let the kids play with it. They often can come up with great ideas for the ride. They should have as big a part as they can in the whole process.

Remember that when you are putting your ride together that it should be an interpretation of the music. So try to put movements that match the music. For instance. A big bold part in the music may be a good place to put in a lengthening. A soft quiet part may work for a stretch circle. You want to judge and audience to see that the music inspires you to have the ride go a certain way, not just riding to the music. It should not be background music. That is not always easy with a Training level test. There is not much they can do that is very dramatic. So in that case make it simple. Simple to judge, simple to watch. A judge will appreciate a test that is correct and well thought out. Just riding around doing circles and figures that the judge can not make out will not improve your score. Make it clean and correct. Each movement has a beginning and an end. Make sure you look at the requirements of the test again at this point. You need to make sure you have all the requirements covered.

Also very important is the size of the ring. Freestyles are done in the large ring. Make sure that is the case for your rally. The ring size changes from what you have practiced, it will throw the whole ride off and your child will have to deal with it. Freestyles at champs are always in the large ring. Make sure you are working in the right size ring at home as well.

Once you have an idea of how the ride will go, start to write it down on paper. You will not be able to remember the details of the practices from time to time. Make notes. Have the test ridden and the music played several times.

It will probably not work out the same every time. That is ok. It is a freestyle. The kids have to be prepared that they may have to improvise in cases like:

- Music not starting on time or ending on time.
- Unexpected acts of the horse.
- Forgetting part of the test.

You try hard not to have that happen but it does sometimes. They should know what they are supposed to have in their test and if it gets messed up make sure they do all the required moves. It seems hard but they really can do that.

Once you are clear with your ride. Get it down on the computer and make copies. Have them in the barn and make sure they go to the show. Now the kids can practice the ride when ever they want. Remember you are using your working tape still. The test may still change slightly, but not usually a lot.

Entrance Music

You can have music playing when you are entering to arena. This is a nice way to let the judge and audiences know you are about to begin your ride. It can also set the tone for the freestyle. You do not have to do this but I think it adds a nice touch. A few rules you need to know, the rider must enter the ring or signal the sound engineer with in 45 seconds of the bell or whistles, and the rider must enter the arena within 20 seconds of the start of the music, or will be eliminated. So make sure you have worked out at home were on the out side of the ring you will start and start at the same place in the competition. Signal the sound engineer by raising your hand that you are ready for the music to start. Remember it is ok if the halt is not exactly is the same place each time. It is more important to halt with the music then it is to halt in the same place.

Editing

The next phase is editing. This is where the cost may come in. I recommend you find a person to edit your music. The cost maybe well worth the time and headache it may cause for you to do it on your own. Most will charge about \$25 per hour. They will be able to do a better job with better equipment. There are a few places you can find this person. I use a DJ. He has a great ear for the music and can hear just where the cuts fit in naturally. He is able to do fades and even change the tempo of the music slightly. He can make quite music seem louder as well. It is a big help. He has the equipment to do a professional job. There are also programs that you can get for you computer. If you are good with that you may find that you can do it your self. I have done several with my CD player. They were ok but I would not recommend it if you are using your freestyle for competition or going to Champs. There are a few people that make freestyles for a living. They will be more expensive but you will be happy with your freestyle. Remember you can reuse these. It is nice to change occasionally and as you move up the level you may have to but they can be tweaked so you can move up.

Preparing for the competition

Make sure that you have several copies made of your freestyle. You should have both CD's and tapes. Most competitions use a CD player these days, we do at Championships. There is of course the exception, so have a tape with you in your show box. Make sure everything is labeled with your name, your club name and your phone number if you want. Store them in a water proof container so they will not get damaged.

At the show

Make sure you hand in your music on time! They need the numbers mentioned above and your competitor number. Be sure you know if they need CD's or tapes. Find out when the sound checks are going to be and be there. Another important reminder, if you have entrance music make sure the person in charge of starting the music knows the signal that you will give to start your music. It is usually a raise of the hand. You can write that on you CD case. Once you have taken care of these few details you are ready to go. Remember you have work really hard to get to this point so have fun. If you enjoy your freestyle it will show and the judge and audience will enjoy right along with you. After the class pick up your music.

Conclusion

I hope that making a freestyle with your kids was as fun for you as it has always been for me. It is a great way to get them involved in dressage. If you have any questions that were not covered, please feel free to contact me. My contact info is on the USPC Dressage Website. Good Luck at your competitions and I look forward to seeing some of you at Championships.