

The Power of the Half –Point

Libby Anderson. S Dressage Judge

This is a very interesting and complicated topic. The first question that comes to mind is “what is a half-point? The half-point is not in the FEI or USEF rules books. In fact the half-point is jargon used by dressage riders, trainers and judges to describe the overall quality of any particular movement performed by horse and rider. The half-point is a useful tool for dressage judges to use to evaluate a movement. Over the duration of a typical dressage test there is a possibility of more than 24 half-points! This leads to another good question? Is the half-point cumulative? You bet it is!

Judge: Is trained and skilled in accessing the dressage tests presented before them. To aid in this instant and gut feeling response to a movement they often use a mental half-point. Perhaps the trot was nicely forward on the circle but the circle line was more like an egg, leading to lack of bend throughout. Mentally and instantly the judge appraises the movement, the gait is good (an 8), the horse is moving in a pleasing manner through the back and from the hind legs. Now the judge is leaning towards an 8 1/2 or even a 9. Problem is that the circle was not centered and the line was poor. The 8 1/2 is gone and due to both problems in the circle the marks sinks mentally to a 7 or maybe a 6 1/5. Bend is a very important issue and the rider failed to show the correct bend on the circle line. Now the 6 or the 6 1/2 marks loom large. The judge makes a decision as to which mental mark to give. If it is a 6 then the mark represents the value of the movement. If in fact, the judge sits with the 6 1/2 mental image. The next circle could be nearly the same, maybe just a little more circular and the trot remains pleasant. The judge could well climb to a 7 because of the previous circle at 6 1/2. If in fact the second circle was not quite as good as the first the judge may give a 6 but mentally award a 5 1/2. Thus the half-point mental system can be cumulative and can help the judge to reach the final marks in a fair and just way. Remember the judge is always on the rider’s side.

Rider: The rider is attempting to show the judge the best possible ride that they are capable of executing. The rider must focus and visualize on each and every movement. In addition the rider must appear happy (as well as the horse of course) and in control of the test both mentally and physically. If the horse is a little “sticky” in a transition the rider can just gloss it over and continue. Or the rider can make a point to the horse that could result in a marked loss of balance and resistance in the transition. The judge could be thinking 6 or even a 6 1/2 in the first case. In the second the judge will drop down to 5 but will be thinking either 4 1/2 or 5 1/2, depending on the roughness of the transition. If the horse spooks at the pot plants then if the rider is relaxed, or even pets the horse’s neck to comfort him, the judge will be thinking. Well done! The half-point is positive. If the rider shows loss of confidence and is testy to the horse then the judge will be thinking a negative half-point.

Trainer: The trainer needs to coach the rider not only in the regular riding skills but also in the mental approach. This training can influence the rider for years to come. The trainer is thinking to make the half-points all positive