

Straight Shot

Can you give me advice on how to make a good dressage entrance?

By Sharon Biggs

Q. I have a hard time making a good first impression in my dressage tests. I can't turn down the centerline properly—I either overshoot or undershoot. If I do hit it, I usually weave my way down. Can you give me some advice on how to make a better entrance?

A. There are two reasons why you might be making these mistakes. The first one could be pure and simple—rider error. You might be timing your turn incorrectly. There's a knack to hitting the centerline and it pays to practice because, as you implied, making a good first impression is important when performing in front of a judge. The centerline is the first and last impression you have, so give yourself a fighting chance. If you are entering the arena from outside and you can make a straight line in, simply line the letter C up between your horse's ears. Keep your eyes on C the entire way; looking down will throw your weight off, which will cause your horse to weave. Keeping your eyes up and focused on a point also shows the judge that you are a confident rider. Making a turn to enter the arena can be trickier. In this case, it is better to undershoot your turn and drift onto the centerline. Again, keep your eyes on C the entire time.

The second reason you might be having a problem on the centerline is because your horse may not be listening to or understanding your turning aids, which include the all-important inside leg to outside rein. Inside leg to outside rein is a fundamental aid that is important for many things such as turning, re-balancing and keeping a horse straight. It doesn't really matter which comes first, the leg aid or the rein aid, but one is always followed immediately behind the other: a light squeeze of the inside leg and then a slight squeeze on the outside rein (or vice versa). The aid lasts momentarily and is repeated, if needed.

This is part of your horse's basic training, and if the fault lies with him, you must go back to the drawing board and work on things like turns and leg yields. If you don't have this aid mastered, it may be the reason why he is weaving on the centerline.

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