

GUIDELINES FOR GRAND PRIX FREESTYLE BY GHISLAIN FOUARGE, FEI DRESSAGE JUDGE GENERAL (24 April 2012)

REFERRING TO THE DIRECTIVES FOR ASSESSING THE DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY IN A
FREESTYLE TEST 2009

General Remarks:

There is a close connection between the Degree of Difficulty and the technical execution . The rider should at least show all the compulsory movements and these movements should be based on the basic requirements of the FEI Grand Prix and their respective degrees of difficulty.

In general the judging of the technical execution of the compulsory movements is fairly straight forward and leads to very few problems.

Under the current system, judges are now allowed to award half Marks and this leads to even greater accuracy in assessing the technical movements. For example if a piaffe is awarded a 6 and a 7, the final mark or average must clearly be a 6.5. However, if a 6.5 and a 7 are given, then the Judge would still have to decide on the average final mark.

TECHNICAL VERSUS ARTISTIC

There should be a clear connection between the technical and artistic parts of the test. The first two marks on the artistic side relate very much to the technical execution of the test.

1) Rhythm, energy and elasticity. This is a combination of the first two collective marks of a standard test but the main emphasis should be on the rhythm (about 2 – 1).

2) Harmony between horse and rider. This is a combination of the third and fourth collective marks in a standard test . The main emphasis should be on harmony and the way of going and less on the seat of the rider (2 – 1).

The repeated correction of technically mistaken movements will affect the mark in a negative way; technically and also in harmony and in the Degree of Difficulty.

GREY AREAS ON THE TECHNICAL SIDE

It is not always clear where the Judge should take mistakes into account.

Example – The extended canter is followed by a wrongly executed flying change of leg. A mark is only given for the extended canter, but the Judge must take the failed flying change into account when scoring the extended canter. In the execution of the extended trot and canter, the transitions form an important part of the movement and should be taken into account. If wrongly executed, the mark for harmony must also be affected.



Example – If in a canter zigzag the flying change between the half-passes fails, the mark for the initiating half-pass will be negatively affected. In other words – half-pass left, failed flying change, half-pass right, correct change – the mark for the left half-pass would have to be suitably lowered.

When there are many mistakes as described above, the mark for Harmony and Degree of Difficulty must also be affected. In all these cases the Judge should give an explanatory comment to the rider.

SPECIAL MOVEMENTS ONLY SEEN IN THE GRAND PRIX FREESTYLE

There are numerous movements allowed in the Grand Prix Freestyle, which are not required in the standard Grand Prix and Grand Prix Special. Some are combinations of movements, like piaffe pirouette and others are a development of the basic movements like half-pass in passage and double pirouettes in canter.

PIAFFE PIROUETTE

For a top score both elements – the piaffe and the pirouette – should be executed in the correct way, as stated in the Handbook and Guidelines. When done so, the mark for Choreography would also be influenced in a positive way. The specific mark is awarded for the piaffe on the technical side of the score sheet. The front legs and the outside hind leg should turn around the inside hind leg with the horse slightly bent and flexed, not stepping out, keeping balance, rhythm, not too much forward (see the Guidelines for piaffe: a piaffe more than 1 meter forward cannot be considered as a sufficient piaffe and the mark can never be higher than a 5), and taking weight on the hindquarters and off the ground. The emphasis is on the piaffe in the shape of a pirouette. Exercises like the piaffe pirouette can also mask some problems. For some horses the turning helps to keep the horse soft and round and indeed the hindquarters often escape to the outside. Where the horse evades taking weight and turns around the middle with the hindquarters falling out or even worse – turns around the forehand – the criteria have not been met, so the mark for the piaffe will be negatively affected.

For the highest score, the piaffe pirouette must be executed on both hands and with some straight strides either before, before and after, or after, : 3 – 4 strides.

A clear description of the piaffe pirouette will be added to the Handbook.

HALF-PASSES IN PASSAGE

Where half-passes in passage are shown, the technical mark is only given for the passage.

The hoofs should be placed on the ground keeping the angle of where the legs were pointing at in the beginning of the stride.

In this movement it is very difficult for the horse to bend and cross to the same extent as in a normal trot half-pass. It should be executed in the right technical way, in other words with the right footfall angle. The angle may not be as steep as in a normal trot half-pass. If a horse is able to show these elements in a good way, the marks for Choreography and Harmony will be positively affected.



The emphasis should be on the quality of the passage and all the basic criteria should be sustained during the execution of the half-pass. In other words – rhythm, balance, cadence, elevation, self- carriage, clear lengthening of the moment of suspension and the flexing and bending of the neck and body. The half-pass in passage should be shown for at least 5 meters side wards from the starting point and to both sides. In order to obtain a high technical score, the passage must be shown at least once on one track (a minimum of 20 meters). If passage is only shown as a half-pass, it will be scored as technically insufficient. If passage in half-pass is shown in addition to a passage on one track, it will be scored technically as usual.

Additional piaffe pirouettes and passage half-passes are not considered as a higher Degree of Difficulty, although they are to be rated positively in the Choreography. (See Directives for assessing the Degree of Difficulty in a Grand Prix Freestyle test 2009).

COMBINATION OF EXERCISES

If a half-pass in passage is immediately followed by a piaffe or piaffe pirouette and is fluently followed by another half-pass in passage, the transitions between the elements would be given a mark on each occasion (even if they are not straight) on the technical side of the score sheet. However the rider must show straight transitions in and out at least once to meet the technical criteria in the compulsory movements.

In order to obtain a high technical score, the piaffe must be shown on a straight line with a minimum of 10 steps straight. If piaffe is only shown as a pirouette, it will be scored as technically insufficient. If the piaffe pirouette is shown in addition to a piaffe with a minimum of 10 steps straight, it will be scored technically as usual.

Any combined exercise shown by the rider must be executed to the standard of all elements as laid down in the Handbook.

Combining exercises should be logical, aesthetically sensible and never conflicting with the nature of the horse or degenerate into a circus act, like cantering backwards, airs above the ground, pirouette in counter canter and piaffe backwards, etc.

MULTIPLE CANTER PIROUETTES

A double pirouette or a part of it may be shown for a maximum of two times on both reins. If shown more, the mark for Choreography must be lower.

Everything between one and a double pirouette is allowed, like one and a quarter, one and a half or one and three quarter pirouette. The double pirouette has the highest degree of difficulty.

The Degree of Difficulty in a multiple pirouette is only high, if the whole pirouette has the same size , as each part of the pirouette of the multiple.

A multiple pirouette should be judged as one movement and not as two single pirouettes or parts, divided by two to make the mark.

More than a double pirouette in canter is not allowed and the final mark for the not correctly executed double pirouette must be a 0, regardless of any other correctly executed pirouette on the same rein.



The scores for Choreography as well as the Degree of Difficulty cannot be higher than a 5.

Canter pirouettes performed from and into walk, or from and into piaffe, will only be regarded in the Harmony and Choreography. (directives 2009)

In order to obtain a high technical score, canter pirouettes must be shown from a straight line to a straight line, in canter. Pirouettes may be shown from half-pass to half-pass as a part of the Choreography.

The criteria for the pirouette should be strictly adhered to and should be shown on both reins.

PIROUETTE LEFT FOLLOWED BY PIROUETTE RIGHT (v.v.)

In order for the Judge to mark the pirouettes separately the rider should show at least 3 or 4 strides of canter straight in between. If these straight strides are not shown, the Judge should consider the movement only in the Choreography and Degree of Difficulty.

EXTENDED CANTER FOLLOWED BY A CANTER PIROUETTE

This can only be considered in the Degree of Difficulty if the transition back is executed in a maximum of 5 strides. It should also be prompt, smooth and completely straight, followed immediately by a pirouette on the same straight line . If not shown this way, it is actually easier because the extended canter leads to greater impulsion and engagement.

EXTENDED CANTER FOLLOWED BY PIAFFE OR PIAFFE PIROUETTE

From the extended canter the horse needs to go into a straight collected canter first and then make the transition into piaffe. Judges should be careful not to encourage this combination of movements to become like a circus trick and against the horse. The rider can only show this transition with a maximum of two times. If shown more, the mark for Choreography must be lower.

DIFFICULT TRANSITIONS

For transitions from immobility to passage or piaffe the same principle applies. A short transition phase can be accepted so these difficult transitions affect the mark for Degree of Difficulty.

There are more of these difficult transitions like half-pass in trot to half-pass in passage or the other way around, or e.g. a transition from collected canter into passage .

RIDING WITH THE REINS IN ONE HAND

Riding with one hand is no longer limited , the Handbook is not the current view , (like decided at seminar in Las -Vegas) , it can be shown with either left or right hand .

For the correct influence on the Degree of Difficulty, the rider should show movements with one hand to both sides. For example – half-pass left and half-pass right. Riding with one hand should never disturb the harmony and contact, and any flexion or bending required technically should be shown correctly as if ridden with both hands.



If movements with one hand are well executed, the marks for Harmony and Degree of Difficulty will be raised.

If riding with one hand is not shown in the correct way, it will influence the technical mark for the movement being executed as well as the marks for Harmony and Degree of Difficulty.

The free hand should calmly hang down the rider's body and can under no circumstances be used to stimulate the horse or influence the audience. This will be punished by minus 0.5 in the mark for Harmony.

The rider may also take the reins in one hand during a movement, but the quality and correctness must be adhered to. This applies also to flying changes and all compulsory movements.

According to the rules, a rider is not allowed to take off the hat or safety helmet during the test and show movements with the hat or safety helmet in one hand. This will be regarded as retiring from competition before the end of the test.

EXECUTION OF MOVEMENTS

For high marks, the movements should be clearly visible to all the judges.

Collected and extended walk may be shown on curved lines. Both should be shown at least for 20 m consecutively however it is allowed to interrupt a collected walk by walk pirouettes.

If the walk is not shown on one track, but is only performed clearly as a lateral movement, it is considered as 0 (directives 2009).

Extended trot should be shown on a straight line and not in a circle. If it is only shown on a 20m circle, it will be considered as a poor extended trot, the mark for extended trot must be insufficient (4) or lower. If the rider does both, a kind of extended trot on a circle and an extended trot on a straight line, the one on the circle should be considered as a medium trot and as part of the choreography, but should not become a technical mark. Extended canter may be shown on a curved line, but must be shown technically correct for instance regarding the straightness.

Flying changes may be shown on a curved or straight line, as well as on a circle. However if the quality is lowered on the curve – for example regarding the straightness – , the technical mark will be lowered and also the mark for Degree of Difficulty.

If a compulsory movement is only executed below the requirement, for example too few changes in a series, or too few piaffe steps, the movement should be marked as technically insufficient providing that no other form of that particular exercise has been executed correctly, according to the required Grand Prix level. The Degree of Difficulty mark would also be adversely affected.

GUIDELINES FOR SCORING

If one compulsory movement is omitted the mark cannot be higher than a 5, also if the movements are difficult to identify and one pace or same movements are excessively used.

If a horse-rider combination only meets the very basic requirements in a correct way, the score for Degree of Difficulty cannot be higher than a 6, as written down in the FEI Freestyle form.

Where there is some exercises that create a higher Degree of Difficulty, according to the level of the respective standard test, the mark can be a minimum of 7.

Greater difficulty and well calculated risks will clearly receive the higher marks and often for the Harmony as well as the Degree of Difficulty. (8 or 9 or even higher)
In all ranges half marks can be used.

If the basic requirements of FEI Grand Prix level cannot be presented as stated in the rules, it is absolutely necessary to react by reducing the technical marks and the Degree of Difficulty.

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY

Difficult exercises will score high when well performed, but will lower the score when the horse does not perform them well. Then they will lose marks in more than one section.

There should be a precise calculation of risk fitting the required levels and a logical order of combinations and movements / transitions. This should all be performed in an easy and fluent way, not abrupt and without obvious tension.

The rider has to find a balance between risk and capabilities. If it is not and it seems the test is too difficult for the horse and the rider is asking too much, the technical mark, the Degree of Difficulty mark, and the Harmony mark will be lower.

The technical mark will be low because they did not perform the movement well, the Degree of Difficulty mark will be lower because they lost the principles and so will the Harmony mark be lower, as the horse and rider did not work together successfully.
Not everything which seems possible to the rider, can be expected of the horse.

The overall rewards will be higher for a well-performed easy test, than a poorly performed difficult test. Never the less even a difficult test :

must look easy.

**THE GOAL SHOULD ALWAYS BE : THE HARMONY AND WILLINGNESS TO PERFORM
NOT FORCED HORSES SHOWING TRICKS.**