

WESTERN DRESSAGE ASSOCIATION®

OF AMERICA

GUIDELINES FOR GAITED HORSES

There are a significant number of gaited horse breeds (about 30 in North America), all with gaits specific to their breed. In Western Dressage competition, the gaited horse will perform a saddle gait in place of the jog. The saddle gait selected should be the gait in which the horse is balanced and athletically comfortable performing. The saddle gait is a 4 beat lateral or diagonal gait, timely and evenly performed. The tempo, rhythm and foot falls of the gait they choose to show must not change throughout the test. The true four beat gait the horse performs, should be able to be ridden in a working, lengthened, free and collected manner as the Western Dressage test calls for.

The rules are taken from USEF's Western Dressage Rulebook: <https://files.usef.org/assets/YMOH1DjPYWw/30-wd.pdf>

WD106 Saddle Gait

The saddle gait has a noticeable increase in cadence from the working walk. Excessive speed or slowness will be penalized.

1. In lieu of a jog, gaited horses perform gaits of various rhythms and footfalls. The gaited horse will perform a saddle gait in place of the jog.
2. The saddle gait may be either a lateral or diagonal gait, timely and consistently performed. The tempo, rhythm and foot falls of the gait the rider chooses to perform must not change throughout the test. The gait the horse performs, should be able to be ridden in a working, lengthened, free and collected manner as the Western Dressage test specifies.
3. The quality of the saddle gait is judged by general impression, i.e. the regularity and rhythm of the steps, the cadence and impulsion. This quality originates from the horse having a supple back and well engaged hind quarters, and the ability to maintain the same rhythm and natural balance in all variations of the saddle gait.
 - a. Collected Saddle Gait. The horse, remaining "on the bit", moves forward with the neck raised and arched and showing clear self-carriage. The head approaches the vertical position and a light contact is maintained with the mouth. The hocks are well-engaged and must maintain an energetic gliding impulsion, enabling the shoulders to move more freely. Although the horse's steps are shorter than in the other saddle gaits, elasticity and cadence are not lessened.
 - b. Working Saddle Gait. With an energetic, regular consistent rhythm; the horse must go forward with consistent and elastic steps. The back must be relaxed and the shoulders free, while there is an obvious push from the hindquarters. The hind legs actively glide under the horse. The horse must show proper balance and maintain light contact with the bit. The horse's nose must be on or slightly in front of the vertical.
 - c. Lengthening of Stride. This is a variation of the Working saddle gait; the horse covers more ground while maintaining the same tempo, consistent rhythm as in the Working saddle gait. Speeding up is a fault.



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- d. Free Saddle Gait. The Free saddle gait will show moderate lengthening of stride and frame compared to the Working saddle gait. Without hurrying, the horse goes forward with clearly lengthened steps, with impulsion from the hindquarters and uphill balance. The rider allows the horse to carry the head a little more in front of the vertical than at the Collected and the Working saddle gait. The horse's neck is "out", down and forward, with the nose slightly in front of the vertical, with a loose rein and the poll at approximately the same height as the wither (the neck is level). The steps should be consistent, the whole movement balanced and unconstrained, while maintaining a consistent rhythm.



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