

USPEA Para Dressage 101

How to Get Started in Para Dressage; An Overview

(Updated Feb 2017)

What is Para Dressage?

Para Dressage is Dressage for Riders/Athletes with an Eligible Permanent physical impairment (a deficiency in or loss of body function or structure) as defined by the FEI Para Equestrian Dressage Classification Manual.

In Para Dressage the Athlete's mobility, strength and coordination are assessed in order to establish their Classification Profile. Athletes with similar functional ability Profiles are grouped into competition Grades. The Grades range from Grade I for the most severely impaired, to Grade V for the least impaired. The competition within each Grade is then judged on the skill of the individual competitor on their horse, without regard to the competitor's impairment.

Para Dressage is parallel to Dressage using the same basics in training, gaits, movements and figures but unlike Dressage Athletes compete according to their Classification Grade.

Parallel to Dressage Athletes not beginning at the highest level, Grand Prix level, Para Dressage Athletes also have to train and build their riding skill level & knowledge before reaching the highest level of their Grade.

What are the first steps to getting started in Para Dressage?

- **Learn to ride independently** & ride 2 or more times per week
- **Obtain a National Classification:** Request a Classification through the USEF Para Equestrian Director, Laureen Johnson at lkjohnson@usef.org who will contact the USEF Classification Coordinator that will follow up with the Athlete regarding required paperwork for classification and to determine that **the criteria for an Eligible Permanent physical impairment has been met**. If met, a classification will be scheduled. When completed a National Grade and profile will be determine for a USEF Dispensation Certificate. (The Classifier works with an IBSA Classifier for Athletes with a Visual Impairment)
- **Find a barn** where you can learn the basics of Dressage gaits, rhythm, relaxation, connection, basic horse care. This could be a USEF/USPEA Center of Excellence (COE), a Dressage barn, or a Path Int'l Center that has Riding Instructors and horses that are appropriate for your ability and needs. (United States Dressage Federation (USDF.org) has a wealth of information on their website and some great educational materials/training information opportunities. If available & appropriate riders should be encouraged to join a local Pony Club.)
- **Continue learning the basics of the Dressage/Para Dressage tests** learning test movements and gaits, training to ride a test. At some point you might have to look into

changing barns/centers and buying or leasing a horse if your current training place isn't geared to Dressage and/or competition or once your riding skills have outgrown the horses and Dressage knowledge of that center. It is not recommended to lease or buy more horse than you need! Look for a sound horse with correct basic gaits and a good mind, safety first. A nice four beat walk is important no matter your Grade. The quality of your horse will be more important as the quality and level of your riding skills improve.

- **Learn the Basics of Competition:** learn about what is required (memberships horse & rider, USEF dispensation certificate, horse medical documents or passport, etc) to participate at local USEF/USDF licensed shows riding either USDF or USEF tests or FEI Para Dressage tests. Attend a Para Dressage clinic/camp/symposium that will give you additional information and resources.
- **Build a “Team”** of individuals who will help you at clinics and shows. It is the rider’s responsibility to cover their needs, care for their horse, equipment, transport, mounting, etc.
- **Begin showing** at your skill level, which may or may not be at your Grade level. FEI offers Para Dressage Novice tests in each Grade. In addition to FEI Para Dressage tests if you are a Grade II – III, or higher Grades who are not yet ready to canter, USDF offers Intro tests that are walk trot only and ridden in a small or large arena that only require a beginner riding skill level. Grades III, IV & V and some Grade II's, those able to canter, could start riding USEF Training Level test and advance to, First, Second Level or above as their riding skill level and impairment allow. (*When riding a USDF or USEF test the rider must follow USEF dressage rules.*) Continue training until you reach the skill level to ride at your National classification Grade. This level offers the opportunity for you to start working to meet the requirements and: apply to USEF for the Development Program, work toward earning USDF Para Dressage awards, and achieve the qualifications to participate in the USEF Para Dressage National Championships!

What are the first steps to becoming a High Performance Para Dressage Athlete?

Obtain an International FEI classification IF your goal is to compete in Para Dressage at the International Level. (Note: International Para Dressage competitions are offered in the US as well as abroad.) International FEI Para Dressage competitions have additional requirements for both rider and horse. Contact the USEF Para Equestrian Director, Laureen Johnson at lkjohnson@usef.org to request an International Classification. Usually International Classification is available at CPEDI3* (International FEI Para Dressage) competitions. **All required forms and medical documentation must be sent to USEF PE Director at least 6 weeks before desired classification date.** Attending a CPEDI3* competition as a spectator is extremely beneficial to learn/observe how these competition are conducted, meet High Performance (HP) Para Dressage Athletes, obtain your FEI International Classification and/or review/update your compensating aids. This level of competition requires regular training and riding 4 - 6x/week and a horse that has an FEI passport, is sound and has good quality FEI level gaits for the gaits & movements your Grade FEI tests require. It also requires the ability for the horse & Athlete to travel across the country for competitions and abroad if working toward making a Team. This level

offers you the opportunity to work toward meeting the requirements and: apply to USEF for the Development or Elite Program, earn USDF Para Dressage awards, work toward qualifying for USEF Para Dressage National Championship, qualifying to compete in CPEDI competitions, and work toward qualifying for USA Para Dressage Teams including CPEDI3*, North American Junior Young Rider Championship (NAJYRC), World Equestrian Games (WEG) and the Paralympics! (Athlete must meet all requirements as set forth in the USEF Selection Criteria)

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It is the Rider/Athlete's responsibility to know the rules and requirements of their sport!

"If you want to be successful, it's just this simply. Know what you are doing. Love what you are doing. And believe in what you are doing." – Will Rogers

Below are some useful websites to explore & become familiar with in order to learn about the sport of Para Dressage (& Dressage) and for information regarding competitions, symposiums/training sessions and Classification. Rules are constantly being reviewed and updated and symposiums/training sessions and competition opportunities are always being added so it is recommended that you check the sights frequently.

United States Equestrian Federation – usef.org (Governs US Para Dressage & National competition)

- Para Dressage Programs & Forms: ***Check frequently***
- <https://www.usef.org/compete/resources-forms/disciplines/para-equestrian/para-dressage-programs-forms>

Check here for Para Dressage information including upcoming symposiums/training sessions, CPEDI competitions, Centers of Excellence (COE), Dispensation Certificate and other important information

- New (2017) Para-Dressage Program Structure and Pathways requirements and application are at:
<https://www.usef.org/compete/resources-forms/disciplines/para-equestrian/para-dressage-programs-forms/para-equestrian-dressage-program-structure-pathways>

- USEF Para Dressage & Dressage rules (Para dressage rules are found in and part of the dressage rules.)
- <https://files.usef.org/assets/Q1HPh8up0hc/08-dr.pdf>
- USEF General Rules (Complete Rule Book)
- <https://www.usef.org/compete/resources-forms/rules-regulations/rulebook>

United States Dressage Federation - usdf.org (USEF affiliate for US Dressage)

- USDF Competition & Results: <https://www.usdf.org/calendar/competitions.asp>

USDF/USEF licensed shows calendar list shows by region (look for shows that have a PE next to the show name which shows they offer FEI Para Dressage test of choice classes)

- Adequan®/USDF Para Dressage rider of the year awards program:
<http://www.usdf.org/awards/performance/year-end.asp> (pgs 22 & 30 in USDF Member Guide)

- Good basic Dressage information to read & know
About Dressage: <http://www.usdf.org/about/about-dressage/>
New to Dressage: <http://www.usdf.org/about/about-dressage/newtodressage.asp>
Tack & Equipment: <http://www.usdf.org/about/about-dressage/competition/tack-equipment.asp>

Federation Internationale Equestrian – FEI.org (Governs International Para Dressage & International competitions)

- FEI Para Dressage Tests: <http://inside.fei.org/fei/your-role/organisers/p-e-dressage/tests>

- FEI Para Dressage Rules 2017:
http://inside.fei.org/sites/default/files/PED%202017_rules_Nov_2016_Final%20Clean.pdf

- Classification manual 2015 4th edition: (updated Jan 2017)
- http://inside.fei.org/sites/default/files/FEI%20Para%20Equestrian%20Classification%20Manual_January%202017%20Markup_0.pdf

United States Para Equestrian Association – USPEA.org (USEF affiliate for Para Equestrian)

USPEA serves to advise, advance & promote US Paralympic Equestrian & Para Equestrian sport

- Sign up for USPEA's **Email Newsletter** and keep up to date with what's going on in US Para Equestrian disciplines.
- Browse the website for news on upcoming, present, and past events in Para Equestrian sport
- Para Dressage Mentor Program – become a mentor for new Para Dressage riders

For additional information contact Hope Hand, USPEA President at wheeler966@aol.com

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