Dressage: The Great Equestrian Art

A historical overview of the discipline from ancient Greece ‘til modern day

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"Equestrian Art may be likened to the construction of great edifices, which began centuries before, are still far from being finished. Built to endure in marble rather than in brick." – Nuno Oliveira, Portuguese Dressage Master.

If you spend enough time in the equestrian world, whether you consider yourself to be a western rider or an English one, chances are that you're going to hear the word *dressage* mentioned. Many riders, both experienced and inexperienced, have no idea what dressage is or have a faulty understanding of it. The mental image often associated with the word is what we see today in the Olympics: top hats, fancy riding coats, and big warmblood horses. Dressage, however, is so much more than what you can spot in the modern show ring. At its core, it is an art form on par with the finest music, the most spectacular painting, or the most moving theatrical performance (Oliveira, 21). It has existed since ancient times and possesses a rich history that has been woven throughout the tapestry of time, and its influence on horsemanship is felt all across the world.

Asking the question, "What is dressage?", is a bit like asking, "What is music?" There are so many different angles you could take when answering, but all would still fall short in one way or another because how do you describe something so immense, powerful, and beautiful in a simple explanation? Yet, this is one of the purposes of this essay, so I will endeavor to provide as clear and thorough a description as I can.

The term dressage (dr*uh*-sahzh) originates from the French word, *dresser,* that simply means "to train" ("Dressage"). It wasn't until around the late 1800s that it came to be recognized as an official equestrian discipline ("Disciplines and Dressage"). Now, you could dressage a dog or even a parrot, so we still find ourselves in need of a more comprehensive description. The best I've heard yet comes from the renowned horseman Eitan Beth-Halachmy. "Dressage," he says,

"is about balance … educating the horse on how to balance himself with a rider on his back." This is truly the foundation upon which Dressage principles are built, despite how it's been adapted to different styles around the globe.

I think most humans, equestrians or not, can concede that the horse is a magnificent creature, one with great power and remarkable beauty. Mankind has, in fact, been enthralled with this animal for thousands of years. From cave drawings to statues, tapestries, and elaborate paintings, art over the centuries vibrantly depicts the alluring creature we call the horse. Originally, the horse was used for food and its milk, and later on as a beast of burden, for driving, and for racing. Archaeological evidence indicates that the first tribe of people to ride horses was likely the Botai, who lived in what is modern-day Kazakhstan, around 3500 B.C. (Outram). As horsemanship progressed through the centuries, it seems to have been predominately used for military purposes, but from this we see the gradual birth of the Dressage discipline ("History of the Art of Riding").

The oldest complete surviving book on horsemanship dates back to the 4th century, written by Xenophon, a Greek Military commander ("History of the Art of Riding"). In his book *The Art of Horsemanship*, Xenophon often refers to his predecessor Simon of Athens, who also had written on equestrian art, though only small fragments of Simon's works are still in existence today. Both Simon and Xenophon avidly recommended a gentle and kind, but firm, approach to horse training. Their methods are simple and easy to understand, and their advice applies even to our modern horses and situations. Xenophon provided his readers with many exercises to supple the horse, build up his strength, and earn his trust. He strongly opposed the idea of forcing a horse into a maneuver against the creature's will, "For what the horse does under compulsion … is done without understanding; and there is no beauty in it either, any more than if

one should whip and spur a dancer … he should show off all his finest and most brilliant performances willing and at a mere sign" (Xenophon, 62). Any student of Dressage knows that this is the ultimate goal of riding: to execute maneuvers in such a graceful way that your audience cannot detect your cues. In this way, your performance becomes a dance. "The apex of perfection in equestrian art is … the conversation of the horse's enjoyment, suppleness and finesse during the performance …" (Oliveira, 21). From the training of the Greek cavalry horse we can see the foundation laid for what would one day evolve into elegant Dressage riding.

Unfortunately, there was a great span of time (nearly 2,000 years) between Xenophon and the next notable achievement in the art of horsemanship (Hillsdon, 3). In the early 16th century, Italian nobleman Federico Grisone studied Xenophon's works and attempted to merge medieval mounted combat techniques with the classical Greek principles. He established the first official riding academy in Naples in 1532 and then wrote his own book, *Gli Ordini di Cavalcare*, designed to pick up where Xenophon had left off. He has come to be known as the 'father of the art of equitation' (Reilly). However, many object to this title and his methods, as the kindness Xenophon so highly praised was lost in Grisone's horsemanship. He was, and still is to this day, criticized for his harsh and sometimes cruel training practices. For example, as a punishment he recommended tying a cat to a long pole that was to be placed under a horse's belly ("Early Dressage Literature to 1800"). Nevertheless, his efforts greatly furthered the progress of horsemanship, and he remains a notable figure in equestrian history.

Over the next century, students from all across Europe traveled to study under great Italian horsemen like Grisone ("Early Dressage Literature to 1800"). Frenchman Antoine de Pluvinel studied under the Italian horse master Giovanni Battista Pignatelli, a contemporary of Grisone, who is credited with the invention of the double bridle (which has a snaffle bit, a curb

bit, and four reins for the rider to manage) (Reilly). Pluvinel then revolutionized horsemanship in France with his desire to reintroduce humanity into the training methods of the day ("The Classical Riding Masters"). Much like Xenophon, Pluvinel believed that the horse should be allowed to think for himself and used praise over punishment in his techniques. He understood the partnership between a horse and rider and strove to further the art form of riding. He is credited with the invention of the single pillar used for teaching the horse to keep his haunches in or out on a small circle, and the double pillar used for teaching the horse to stand on his haunches and perform school jumps ("Antoine de Pluvinel"). He also is said to be the first horseman to use cavaletti in his training and has come to be known as the 'father of French equitation' (Reilly).

William Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle, was the first horseman to introduce 'haute ecole,' or classical dressage, to England, in the 17th century ("The History of William Cavendish, the Father of Dressage"). Influenced by the gentler methods of the Ottomans, Cavendish advocated for a kinder approach in horse training. He successfully trained 54 horses in his lifetime, the most famous being Le Superbe, a Spanish horse who often performed with Cavendish in front of large audiences. Cavendish was regarded as one of the finest horseman of his time, and gentlemen from all across Europe traveled to see these performances. He founded a riding academy in Antwerp and wrote several books on horsemanship that have been quoted numerous times throughout history by other Dressage Masters. After his death, he came to be referred to as the 'father of Dressage.'

Both Pluvinel and Cavendish's written works had great influence on François Robichon de La Guérinière, a horseman still held in high esteem by many today (Reilly). Guérinière not only opened a riding academy in Versailles, but also so greatly influenced the Spanish School of Riding in Vienna, Austria, that to this day, it exclusively uses his training methods ("History of

the Art of Riding"). Guérinière wrote several books on horsemanship, his most well-known being *Ecole de Cavalerie* ("Early Dressage Literature to 1800"). He took equestrian art a step further with his extensive knowledge of how horses naturally move at liberty, and he is credited with the invention of the shoulder-in, designed to supple the horse, as well as the half-halt, the counter canter, and the flying change of lead. Guérinière and his disciples took leaps and bounds towards the growth of the art of the discipline, seeking in their horses a more relaxed and confident partner ("François Robichon de La Guérinière").

In 1565, a document was issued mentioning the building of the "Thumblplatz" – a wooden riding arena built near the Imperial Palace of Vienna, the predecessor to the most famous riding academy in equestrian history ("Spanish Riding School in 450th Anniversary Fever"). The school was officially given its iconic name, the Spanish School of Riding, in 1572 ("The History of the Spanish School of Riding of Vienna"). It was named for its Spanish horses that sired the Lipizzaner breed that they exclusively use at the school. Between 1729 and 1735, the wooden arena was replaced with an elaborate white riding hall, commissioned to be built by Emperor Charles VI, and it still stands to this day. Interestingly enough, though its primary focus has always been the training of the school's renowned horses, the Winter Riding School (the official name of the baroque riding hall) was often used for jousting contests, masquerade balls, townhall meetings, and Maria Theresia's famous ladies' carousels. Throughout the centuries, the school's training practices have remained virtually the same, as they religiously follow Guérinière's writings. To many in the Dressage world, they are the epitome of the classical art of riding. Today, their Lipizzaner stallions can be viewed almost every morning in their training sessions and once a week for a performance in the Winter Riding Hall. In 2015, the school celebrated its 450th anniversary ("Spanish Riding School in 450th Anniversary Fever").

Dom Pedro José de Alcântara de Menezes, often referred to as "the Guérinière of the Iberian Peninsula," was a talented classical rider of Portugal in the 1700s who was known for being the head of Real Picaria, the equestrian academy of the royal court ("Portuguese School of Equestrian Art"). Though Real Picaria was closed during the 19th century due to the political circumstances in Portugal, the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art was opened in 1979 as a recreation of the old academy. The school may not be well known, but it certainly puts forth skilled Dressage riders. The students of the school religiously follow *Luz da Liberal e Nobre Arte da Cavallaria*, a detailed book on horsemanship written by Manuel Carlos de Andrade, a disciple of Menezes. Those who have heard of the school will know it by its Lusitano horses, uniquely Portuguese tack, and maroon velvet costumes.

In 1815, the French Calvary established a riding school in an effort to reform their mounted troops and to regiment how horses were used in war ("The History"). It wasn't until 1825 that the school was officially named the Cadre Noir, or the School of Calvary. The group of officers at the riding school became especially well known for their dashing riding across the country and for their talent in classical riding.

They studied the works of great classical horsemen, such as Pluvinel and Guérinière, but predominantly those of their own riding masters: Antoine Henri Philippe Léon Cartier d'Aure and, later on, François Baucher ("The History"). D'Aure's technique was far more humane than any seen yet and encouraged gentleness and lightness. Most of his teaching was done by example, rather than by written principles. Baucher, on the other hand, despised the traditional training practices and sought to create his own scientific system, in which he viewed the horse being in complete submission to the rider of utmost importance ("Baucher, Francois"). Though Baucher's methods were highly controversial, he became famous for flying lead changes at every

stride (tempi changes), canter pirouettes, and executing the passage backward. General Alexis L'Hotte was the third riding master at the school and is known for his combining of the principles of Baucher and D'Aure to create the Saumur doctrine ("The History"). Though he was said to be the superior classical rider of the three masters, he did not strictly teach classical methods and preferred to remain true to his military background.

As the use of the Calvary in war dwindled and became replaced by airplanes and tanks, the focus of the school changed from instructing military officers to civilians. Though their techniques were still very militaristic, they shifted their training focus towards the emerging discipline of Dressage. Unlike the Spanish School of Riding or the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art, the Cadre Noir trained horses of several different breeds: warmbloods, thoroughbreds, and Selle Français horses. The school is still in existence today after 400 years, and they are known for preparing excellent horse and rider pairs for Dressage competitions, predominately the Olympics.

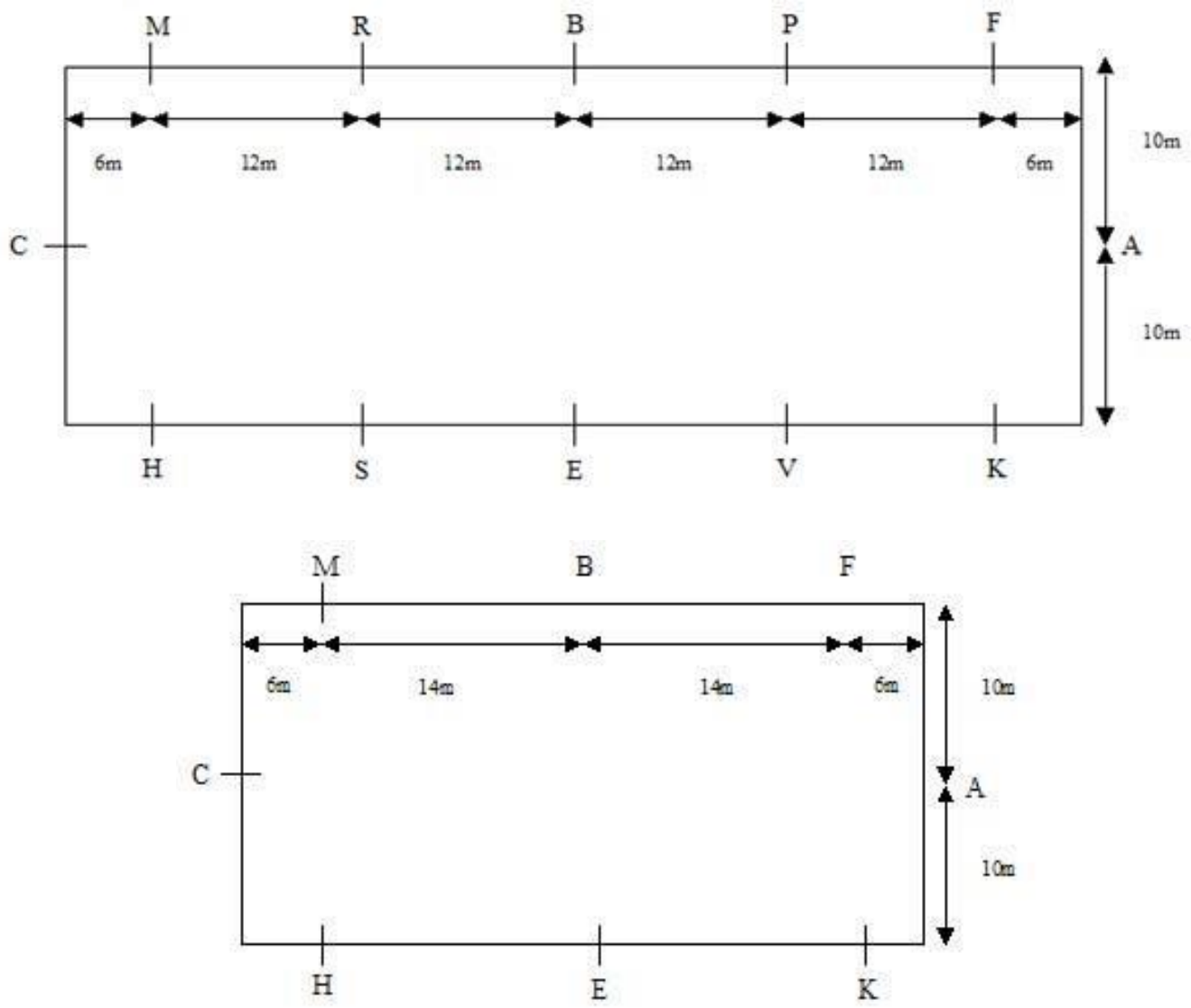
The discipline of Dressage has a unique court used for training and on which its tests are performed ("Tests'). The traditional court, which is always used in higher-level competitions, measures 20 meters by 60 meters and is marked with 17 letters as reference points for the rider (Fig. 1). Around the perimeter, you will find (clockwise) A-K-V-E-S-H-C-M-R-B-P-F. "A" marks the entrance and exit to the Dressage arena, and "C" at the opposite end is where the judge sits. Down the centerline, there are five invisible letters that go unmarked but are still expected of a rider to know. These letters are D-L-X-I-G. There is also a small dressage court measuring 20 meters by 40 meters used in lower level competitions and for training purposes. There are only 11 letters marking the smaller court: A-K-E-H-C-M-B-F around the perimeter and D-X-G down the center line.

One of the most frequently asked questions is where this court originated. There is much speculation and confusion on the matter, but the most agreed upon idea is that it was adapted from the markings found on the walls of the Imperial German Court in Berlin, the Royal Manstall ("Tests"). It is said that these markings told where each horse was to be positioned by his groom as he waited for his rider. The stable yard was designed for riders to gather and perform morning exercises and measured 20 meters by 60 meters. There were eleven markings on the walls: *Ausgang* – Exit, *Kaiser* – Emperor, *Vassal* - Servant/Squire/Equerry, *Edeling/Ehrengast* - Chieftain or Honored Guest, *Schzkanzler* - Chancellor of the Exchequer, *Hofsmarshall* - Lord Chancellor, *Meier* – Steward, *Ritter* – Knight, *Bannertrager* – Standard Bearer, *Pferknecht* - Ostler or Groom, and *Fürst* – Prince.

These, of course, match our modern perimeter Dressage letters, with the exception of C. It is difficult to say where the invisible letters that mark the centerline originate. Likely they were simply added later to give markers for completing maneuvers, though we do not know why those specific letters were chosen.

Fig. 1 – The Dressage Courts

("The Dressage Arena")



It is now that we come to the divide in the modern Dressage discipline. Many riders and trainers choose to follow the classical schooling techniques that have been developed over time since the Renaissance era (Knipp). This type of training strives to develop the horse both mentally and physically, his longevity being of the utmost importance. Known as Classical Dressage, it requires knowledge, patience, and a deep love of the horse.

More commonly seen and heard of in the equestrian world, however, is what is known as either Neo-Classical, Modern, or Competitive Dressage (Berg). This is what we see in the modern show ring, from local shows to the Olympics. Generally speaking, those who participate in this aspect of Dressage use training techniques that have descended to us from the cavalry horses. While the maneuvers taught to the horse in Neo-Classical training are the same as those taught to a horse in Classical training, the style in which the Neo-Classical Dressage horse is trained is distinctly militaristic. It is no easy feat to create a horse who can perform Grand Prix level maneuvers, and it takes a skilled rider to properly showcase such a horse. Unfortunately, much of the art and beauty of true Dressage cannot be seen in the competitive show world.

The classical school of thought is a revered one, and there have been numerous masters throughout the ages who have studied the principles and furthered the art. Anja Beran, a modern-day Classical Dressage instructor, describes classical schooling techniques as

> … the ability, by means of good exercises, logically structured and based on the natural laws of balance and harmony, to train the horse so that it subordinates itself to the rider's will contentedly and with self-confidence, without any detriment whatsoever to its own natural sequence of movement (Beran, 13).

Nuno Oliveira, a Portuguese Classical Dressage trainer often referred to as one of the last great international riding masters, described classical riding eloquently: "… equestrian art is to

establish a conversation on a higher level with the horse; a dialogue of courtesy and finesse" (Oliveira, 18).

Some say that true classical horsemanship will soon disappear from the modern world, that the last of the great masters have already passed in legend, and the tradition will soon be lost. It can seem that way when you look at the diverse and sometimes convoluted training methods that are swirling around nowadays; everyone wants to reinvent the wheel. As Baruch Spinoza, a Dutch philosopher, once remarked, "Everything sublime is as difficult as it is rare" (qtd. in Beran, 5). Classical Dressage is incredibly difficult to master, and it is rare to find a talented trainer who really follows the classical methods. Most are too much in a hurry to make money or earn fame. However, there are still dedicated men and women out there who possess a deep love of the horse, a desire to continue the classical tradition, and a God-given talent in equestrian art. When you do see someone, who rides in real harmony, rhythm, and partnership with their horse, with a finesse so refined that it can hardly be understood, it is a stunningly beautiful thing to behold. Real Classical Dressage is the ultimate dance between horse and rider. As long as God continues placing such people on this earth, no matter how rare a find they may be, the classical tradition will never die.

The idea of Competitive Dressage developed in Europe over the 20th century (Weldon). It was in the 1912 Summer Olympics held in Stockholm, Sweden, that the first 'military test' appeared, later to expand into the separate disciplines of Dressage, Eventing, and Stadium Jumping. Originally, they were designed to be obedience tests to challenge the combative rider and his mount. The horsemen were expected to perform not only advanced riding maneuvers but also complete 5 different obstacles, including jumping a barrel that was

rolled at the horse and rider (Bortzellis, 4). Horses were required to compete in a double bridle, and extra points were awarded for riding one-handed.

In 1917, the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) was founded to regulate equestrian events at a national level ("Our History"). The USEF created the five levels of national Dressage tests: Training Level, First Level, Second Level, Third Level, and Fourth Level. In 1921, the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) was formed in Lausanne, Switzerland ("The History of the FEI"). The founding countries were France, the U.S., Sweden, Japan, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, and Italy. It was designed to regulate international competitive equestrian events in Jumping, Eventing, and Dressage. Later, Para-Equestrian Dressage, Driving, Vaulting, Endurance, and Reining were added to the list. The FEI has an extensive rule book that is followed strictly worldwide by Competitive Dressage riders, and they also create all international level Dressage tests.

In 1936, at the Olympics in Berlin, the standards rose: Tests were now to include most of the modern movements (such as piaffe and passage), and the use of obstacles was no longer in style (Weldon). When the U.S. cavalry disbanded in 1948, there was a new wave of interest in the sport. Nineteen fifty-two marked the first year that civilians and women were allowed to compete; up until then only Calvary officers (men) had been allowed. That year, Liz Hartel, a female Dressage rider from Denmark, made history as the first woman to earn a medal in the discipline (Black, 143).

In 1973, the United States Dressage Federation (USDF) was founded by one Lowell Boomer from Nebraska ("USDF History"). The USDF, as stated on their website, is dedicated to "education, recognition of achievement, and promotion of Dressage." The USDF and the USEF

work closely together in the U.S. for the tests and rulebooks that govern American Competitive Dressage.

English-style riders, however, are not the only ones who practice Dressage. The training practices and maneuvers found in classical riding have also greatly influenced the western riding world. In Spain and Portugal, the discipline of *Doma Vaquera*, which translates to "western dressage," has become a renowned competitive sport (Lust). Classical riding methods had long been popular in the countries of the Iberian Peninsula. On the ranches of Spain, vaqueros -- Spanish cowboys, if you will -- adapted Dressage methods to suit their needs in training a ranch horse ("Doma Vaquera Introduction"). The vaqueros had to work herds of cattle and needed a highly trained mount who was obedient and responsive even while being ridden for long days. The vaquero would ride his horse one-handed in order to leave the other hand free to use his *garrocha*, a long pole useful for fending off aggressive cattle.

The Spaniards are very partial to their Iberian horses, in particular, the Andalusian, because of the breed's tendency to be compact and short-coupled, as well as to operate more from their hindquarters, than other breeds ("Doma Vaquera Introduction"). The well-trained *Doma Vaquera* horse, usually an Andalusian stallion, is ridden in a short, collected frame and expected to be able to perform intricate maneuvers at high speeds while being ridden one-handed, though no *garrocha* pole is carried. It is much like a combination of Dressage and Reining (on steroids). Though some consider this riding style harsh because of the constant collection, there are severe point deductions for riders who are heavy-handed or who cause pain to their horses with spurs (Lust). The tradition has spread to the U.S., France, and Holland and is open to other breeds, though the Andalusian remains the standard by which all are judged ("Doma Vaquera Introduction").

The tradition of the Spanish vaqueros and their "western dressage" has greatly influenced the rest of the western world. The old California style, or the California Vaquero, is one such influenced discipline. A major contributor to this style of riding was Jean-Claude Dysli, a Swiss civil engineer who became an American cowboy ("Herzversagen: Jean-Claude Dysli ist tot"). Dysli came to America in 1961, planning to write his doctoral thesis, but instead found himself enamored with the western riding world. He studied under Tom Dorrance and Ray Hunt, the founders of the Natural Horsemanship movement, and then worked as a ranch hand for several years. Dysli had a great appreciation for Dressage and the classical methods but enjoyed the freedom he could give his horses in the western style. He often rode with a long rein in a bosal or bridle-less, though his horses were also trained to carry a curb bit in the California Vaquero tradition.

In 1981, he moved back to Switzerland, importing his American Quarter Horses with him and introducing western riding into Europe, where he was met with great resistance ("Herzversagen: Jean-Claude Dysli ist tot"). However, after a performance at the Equitana in 1973 in Basel, Switzerland, where he rode in the California Vaquero style with a curb bit and performed Dressage maneuvers, rode European M-Dressage in a bosal, and then performed a showcase of a working cow horse bridle-less (all on the same horse, mind you), he was taken seriously. For 40 years of his life, Dysli fought not only for the western tradition in Europe but also for humanity in horsemanship. He believed the horse could be collected while ridden on a long rein, and he valued relaxation in the horse. Though a cowboy, his views echoed the kindness in horse training Xenophon encouraged so many centuries before.

In recent decades, two new styles of Dressage have been introduced to the equestrian world, starting in the U.S. and spreading rapidly across the globe. They are known as Western

Dressage and Cowboy Dressage. Often times they are referred to interchangeably, but they are, in fact, two very separate disciplines. However, they do both accredit their inspiration to master horseman Eitan Beth-Halachmy, an Israeli who had an impossible dream to become an American cowboy (Black, xxix). He and his equine partners have become famous for their stunning performances of Dressage while in full western tack and apparel.

Eitan's methods of training give credit to both classical schooling techniques and those of the traditional American cowboy (Black, 9). He emphasizes kindness, partnership, harmony, and most notably, Soft Feel (Beth-Halachmy). As a young man, he spent time at the Spanish School of Riding mucking stalls but, more importantly, watching and listening to the Classical trainers as they worked with their Lipizzaner stallions (Black, xxi). In 1968, he emigrated to the U.S. with a student visa to attend vet school in California. Though he soon discovered veterinary work was not the vocation for him, he stayed enrolled in college, trying out different majors until 1986, when President Reagan granted amnesty to all illegal immigrants, allowing Eitan to receive a green card and explore other career options. He settled into horse training, his ultimate passion, and realized his lifelong dream to become a cowboy (Black, xxii). He discovered the Morgan horse, and the breed quickly became his favorite. It was in the Morgan show world that he met his would-be wife, Debbie.

Eitan and his Morgan stallion, Holiday Compadre, performed all over the world, winning the hearts of audiences everywhere they went (Black, xxv). Much like Dysli, he was a novelty, a cowboy riding high-level Dressage maneuvers on a long rein with a relaxed and happy horse. In 1994, Eitan and Debbie trademarked the term Cowboy Dressage, and Eitan began teaching his unique style of riding wherever he performed ("Home").

When Compadre was retired in 2002, Eitan trained his next partner, another Morgan stallion by the name of Santa Fe Renegade (Black, xxvii). Again, Eitan stole the show wherever he went, all the way up to his last performance at the 2010 World Equestrian Games in Lexington, Kentucky. There he went into cardiac arrest during the grand finale and slipped off his horse, waking up in the ICU with nine broken ribs, a fractured sternum, and a punctured lung. He was told that it was a miracle that he even survived. Unsurprisingly, however, his first question was if he would be able to ride again (Black, xxviii). The accident was a turning point for him. The 20,000 emails Eitan received from fans during this time caused him to realize just how big an impact he was making on the equestrian world.

As the interest in this western version of Dressage grew, people began to want an outlet in which to perform and show. So, in 2010, a mixed group of U.S. Dressage and western riders founded the Western Dressage Association of America (WDAA) (Black, 7). Like Competitive Dressage, they chose to be in affiliation with the USEF, adopting their rules and policies. ("Alternative, Western, and Gaited-Horse Dressage FAQs"). The discipline was designed to combine the principles of Dressage with the western stock horse heritage and give eager riders the opportunity to compete ("About Western Dressage"). It quickly became popular and is still growing rapidly, not only throughout the U.S. but also Europe and Australia. Riders are required to show in full western attire, and many enjoy decking their horses and themselves out in bling and silver, though it's not a requirement (Swanson). The Morgan horse is a popular favorite of Western Dressage riders, but the rules allow for all breeds to compete in the discipline, even gaited horses.

The WDAA has created six different levels of tests in which their riders compete, very similar to traditional Competitive Dressage: Intro Level, Basic Level, Level 1, Level 2, Level 3,

and, as of April 2018, Level 4 (“WDAA Tests”). The Intro and Basic Level tests can be ridden on the 20 m x 40 m or the 20 m x 60 m Dressage court, but Level 1 and up must be ridden on the 20 m x 60 m court. They chose to design the tests in a way that resembles a combination of what you would find in a Dressage test and a Reining pattern (Swanson). Horses are graded on the freedom and regularity of their gaits and their impulsion, while riders are judged on the use of their aids in cueing the horse and are encouraged to be effective, precise, and in harmony with their mounts.

Eitan had influence in Western Dressage but chose to focus predominately on education over the show world at that time with his Cowboy Dressage (Beth Halachmy). Though he appreciated where Western Dressage went, he felt it was lacking in some of the essence of the cowboy, the lifestyle, and the laid-back approach found out on the working ranch. Western Dressage brought the cowboy into Dressage, but Cowboy Dressage brought Dressage to the cowboy. As he later put it, “The Dressage is my discipline; the Cowboy is my freedom.” As time went on and Western Dressage grew, gaining a large following, Cowboy Dressage also flourished and gained an enormous community of enthusiasts in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and, of course, the U.S.

Much like what happened with Western Dressage, Cowboy Dressage lovers wanted a show ring where they could compete and a community with which they could interact. Out of this desire, a group of dedicated people helped Eitan and Debbie create Cowboy Dressage World, the community and showing aspect of this unique style of riding (Beth-Halachmy). However, this show world looked completely different from any other Dressage competitions yet. They chose not to affiliate with USEF, allowing the discipline the freedom to create its own rulebook and regulations specifically tailored to the western horse.

Eitan had already created his own Cowboy Dressage court completely different from the traditional court used in Classical, Competitive, and Western Dressage ("Cowboy Dressage - The Courts"). For Cowboy Dressage World, two courts were put into place, the challenge court (Eitan's original idea) and the open court. The open court is a variation of the traditional small Dressage court, so it measures 20 m x 40 m. He chose the smaller version of the court since the western horse is naturally built smaller than the breeds we see in traditional Dressage, and consequently doesn't need as large of a space in which to work (Beth-Halachmy). He also knew that the average western rider is not rich and would be more likely to own their own court if it were the smaller size. He wanted Cowboy Dressage riders to be able to practice at home and use the court as a training device. "You do not train your horse for the test, the test trains you . . . and your horse!" he said.

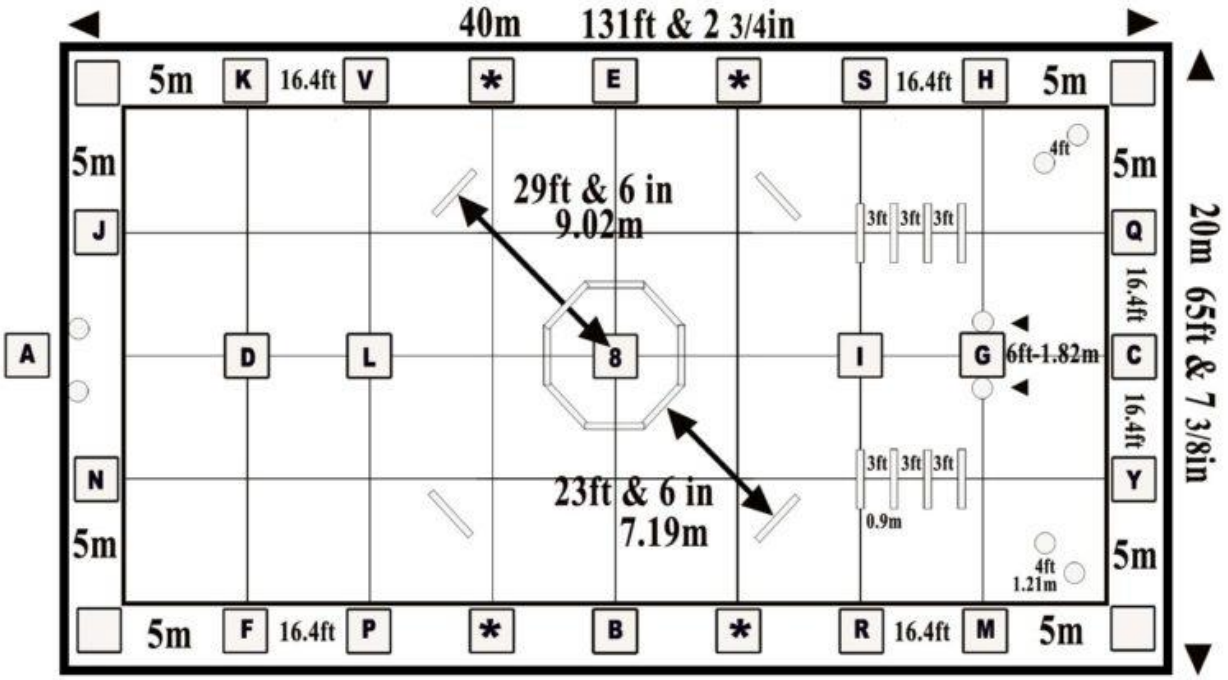
Eitan decided to adapt the letters on the court to a more logical format by adding letters and placing them at five-meter intervals instead of the six and fourteen-meter intervals found in the traditional small Dressage court ("Cowboy Dressage - The Courts"). On a Cowboy Dressage court, you will find (clockwise) around the perimeter: A, J, K, V, a blank marker, B, a blank marker, S, H, Q, C, Y, M, R, a blank marker, E, a blank marker, P, F, and N (Fig. 2). The blank markers allow for a marker every five meters without completely confusing a rider from traditional Dressage. Down the center are the invisible letters D, L, 8, I, and G. He considered changing all the letters over to numbers to make things more logical but decided against it, knowing Dressage riders would find the change far too radical (Beth-Halachmy).

The Cowboy Dressage challenge court is a really unique and innovative part of this discipline. Inside the court are placed a series of four ground poles on each quarter line, four ground poles set just to the inside of the 20-meter circle found in the center, an octagon around

"8," two cones on either side of the letter "G," and two sets of cones in the "C" end corners. Though it is called a challenge court, these additions are by no means obstacles but are additional reference points for the horse and rider. The ground poles also encourage the western horse to pick his feet up since many have a tendency to drag along lazily. The poles are set based on a six-foot canter stride, a good working frame for the western horse.

Fig. 2 - The Cowboy Dressage Court

("Cowboy Dressage - The Courts")



The tests in Cowboy Dressage exemplify the western horse and heritage, looking for horses that are balanced and light, comfortable to ride, and responsive to their rider ("Cowboy Dressage Rules and Guidelines"). Horses must execute true western gaits (walk, jog, and lope; in both free and working frames), and tests include a variety of maneuvers from circles to backing, turns on the forehand and haunches, shoulders in, lead changes, and patterns such as figure eights, diamonds, broken arrows, and bow ties ("Cowboy Dressage Handbook"). The tests start with the partnership on the ground and the newly added liberty division, then move into the riding tests which range from the partnership under saddle walk/walk, to the challenge walk/jog/lope 2, with many open and challenge court tests in between. There is also the Freestyle division with solo and drill team options and the Vaquero division. Many who ride Cowboy Dressage enjoy incorporating *La Garrocha* into their freestyle performances. New tests are frequently being developed, and the discipline is constantly evolving as new ideas are brought forth and more people take an interest.

All Cowboy Dressage judges are required to complete an extensive checklist of requirements, including mentoring sessions under one of the founding partners -- Eitan, Lyn Ringrose-Moe, or Garn Walker. This ensures that they are well prepared and understand the philosophy of the discipline ("Recommended Judges"). The judges don't just look at the execution of a maneuver but also how the horse was ridden through the maneuver ("Cowboy Dressage Rules and Guidelines"). Were the horse's gaits free and regular? Did the rider have Soft Feel? Were the horse and rider pair in harmony and partnership? Did the rider help their horse perform to the best of his abilities? With judging like this, it really opens the discipline to all horses and riders who simply have the desire to learn and better themselves no matter the breed,

age, or physical limitations. So, from the very old traditions of Classical Dressage and the American cowboy comes Cowboy Dressage, a new tradition.

No matter what tack you use, what country you come from, or what breed of horse you ride, there is some form of Dressage for you. To those in the equestrian world who ride Show Jumping, Cross-country, Reining, Barrel Racing, or any other discipline, a little Dressage can benefit you, too. After all, who doesn't want their horse better educated on how to balance himself? Who doesn't want a horse who works in a light, confident partnership with their rider? Dressage creates better riders and better horses so that no matter their job, they can do it to the best of their abilities. It may seem boring to some, but it is truly the epitome of equestrian art, the foundation on which all riding can be built.

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