



BEYOND THE BELL

The NSW Judges Journal



WELCOME!

Welcome to the first 2026 edition of the NSW Judges' Journal, Beyond the Bell! What a start to the year - with a great new rules & The Good The Bad and The Ugly workshop, the Super Seminar and Willinga all done! Next Stop, Sydney CDI and a great master class with Christof Umbach.

In this newsletter you get to meet the 2026 JSC who are here to promote your role as judges, facilitate your training and progression, keep you up to date on what's happening around the State, Nationally and from the international judges' platform.

We have a new segment this year, Around the Grounds, including some interesting information about a local club and candid pics of your fellow judges at those events.

This newsletter is here for you, and we would love to hear from you about topics you might like covered and also stories you'd like to share. We're trying to mix a bit of serious (technical topics and updates) with a little bit of fun.

I'm looking after the newsletter again this year so if you have any feedback, topics you'd like addressed or stories to share, please contact me via email at mjdoyle034@gmail.com or on 0414 991599. Always happy to have a chat about your thoughts on the newsletter.

Happy Judging! *Mel*

OVER THE PAGE

In this edition, we'll:

- meet the 2026 JSC;
- find out a little bit about our CDI seminar presenter, Christof Umbach 5* FEI Judge;
- join Robyn Targa and have a close look at Leg Yields;
- report on upcoming potential sit-in and shadow opportunities;
- cast a spotlight on the amazing range of CDI seminars;
- hear about the Trans-Tasman exchange;
- read about what's happening elsewhere in the world of dressage; and
- take a look at the new "meet the clubs" section and hear about Goulburn Dressage Club.

The 2026 NSW Judges Sub-Committee

What do they do?

The NSW Judges Sub-Committee (JSC) is specifically focused on managing NSW Judges' training, education and accreditation, promoting consistent judging across NSW.

Who are they and what are they responsible for?



Ann Maree Lourey – Chairperson, A/B Level judges, Young Horse and Fast track judges

Ann Maree is the 2026 JSC Chairperson and also looks after our A/B level judges, Young Horse and Fast Tracking Judges. Ann Maree is a B level judge and mentor and lives in the Hunter Valley.



Beth Turner – Upgrade Mentor

Beth is here for all your questions about upgrading and to give you that little pep talk when the road to the next level is feeling bit long or you need some help finding opportunities to complete the upgrade process. Beth is an A level judge and Mentor. Beth is located in the Hawkesbury.



Jodie Dunstan – G level and new judges

Jodie looks after our newest recruits, G level judges, and those just beginning their judging journey. Jodie is an A level judge and mentor based at Table Top in the far south of NSW.



Nell Marshman – Regional Judges

Nell is our JE Advisor and looks after our regional judges and like all our JSC, is working to ensure those furthest away have a local voice. Nell is an A level, YH, and PE Judge as well as being a Judge educator and mentor. Nell lives in the Taree region.



Maryann Schiller F to C Level judge support

Maryann looks after all of our mid-level judges from F to C level. Maryann is a C level judge and is based at Young.



Sue Birch – LMS, Judge records & mentoring support

Sue is looking after our most valued records so when we come to reaccreditation and upgrading, we can find what we need. This year, Sue has also taken on managing the LMS system to give us all great learning opportunities at our fingertips. Sue is a C level and PE judge as well as a mentor. Sue lives in the Hawkesbury area.



Melanie Doyle – General Admin support

Mel provides general admin support and manages the production of Beyond the Bell, The NSW Judges Journal. Mel is an F level judge and is based near the Southern Highlands.

Contact details for all members of the JSC are available on the Dressage NSW website or look us up on the NSW Judges list.

With the 2026 New Rules workshop, the Good, The Bad and the Ugly workshop on warning cards, and also the Super Seminar done and dusted, the JSC is committed to a great year of judge education and upgrades! Read about the seminars being offered at the Sydney CDI and make sure you get your enrolments in!



CHRISTOF UMBACH at SYDNEY CDI

Sunday 3 May 2026, Sydney International Equestrian Centre, 9am to 3pm

Please join us for a wonderful educational opportunity with Luxembourg's 5* FEI judge Christof Umbach, who will be staying an extra day after judging for us at Sydney CDI.

Christof Umbach is an athlete, a judge, a trainer and an owner who has officiated at major dressage events across the world. He has been described as 'one of the most respected judges in the world' by the United States Dressage Federation. Some have described him as 'a unicorn in the dressage world', even 'dressage royalty', since he has produced and ridden to Grand Prix with big scores, has numerous Grand Prix riders competing on different continents, has a big yard at home and brings with him more than 30 years' judging experience.

Formerly a banker, German-born Christof was just four years old when he was introduced to horses.

"My father went showjumping and hunting and when I was 14, I had my first horse, a Hanoverian, which I competed in eventing and jumping. Later I had one trained by Dr. Reiner Klimke, which was when I developed a passion for dressage."

Christof worked in the banking business for 12 years. " But I'm not a banker anymore - I'm a professional trainer."

For more than 20 years, Christof's home has been in Luxembourg where he heads the Grand Ducal Dressage Centre situated close to the city.

"In the early days there was only one Grand Prix rider, now there are many more and the country is making its mark on the international dressage scene."

Christof is definitely one of us. Asked if he has any hobbies, his reply? 'Horses are my life: my passion and my business, so there's not much more time for other hobbies!'

Please arrive by 8.45 am to ensure you are signed in and receive your headphones for the workshop. Free of charge for EA Judges - see you there! But don't forget to register on TryBooking, or there will be no headset reserved for you! Here is the link:

<https://www.trybooking.com/DKNVP>



SYDNEY CDI

*Workshop with Christof Umbach (Luxembourg)
FEI 5*/Level 4 Dressage Judge*

Development of the Young Horse to Grand Prix' - from a trainers' and judges' view



Sunday, 3 May 2026

Sydney International Equestrian Centre, Horsley Park



LEG YIELD from a Judge's perspective

By Robyn Targa

The leg yield is one of the first lateral movements introduced in dressage, yet it reveals a great deal about a horse's training. From a judge's point of view, it clearly shows suppleness, connection, acceptance of the aids, and straightness.

What Is Leg Yield?

Leg yield is a lateral movement in which the horse moves forward and sideways at the same time, with a slight flexion at the poll away from the direction of travel. The horse should remain relatively straight through the body (not bent like in shoulder-in), with the shoulders slightly in advance of the hindquarters. The inside legs pass and cross in front of the outside legs

It may be ridden:

- From the centreline to the track
- From the track to the centre line
- On a diagonal line.

A Correct Leg Yield

From the front, a correct leg yield shows:

- Even, clear crossing of the legs
- The inside fore stepping smoothly in front of the outside fore
- The inside hind stepping clearly under the body and cross in front of the outside hind
- The horse remains straight through the body
- The poll remains the highest point with slight flexion away from the direction of travel
- A soft, elastic contact

The rhythm, balance, forward tendency and fluency should be maintained throughout the entire movement.



A special thanks goes to Rodney's Photography for sponsoring local photos in this article!

Rodney's Photography

The Basic Requirements (What Judges Expect)

From the rulebook standpoint, we are looking for:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rhythm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, regular walk or trot. • No loss of tempo. • No shortening or quickening caused by tension.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Suppleness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horse appears relaxed and elastic. • No stiffness in the neck or body. • Smooth crossing steps.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contact & Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steady, elastic contact. • Horse seeking the bit. • No tilting of the head or opening of the mouth.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Straightness (Through the Body)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slight flexion at the poll. • No over-bending in the neck. • Shoulders and hips aligned. • Inside hind stepping clearly.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Balance & Forward Intention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement goes clearly forward and sideways. • Not just sideways. • Not falling through the shoulder.

What We See from the Front (Judge at C)

When judging from C (head-on view), we are primarily evaluating:

1. Crossing

- Do the forelegs clearly cross?
- Does the inside hind step under and across?
- Is the crossing even and rhythmic?

2. Straightness

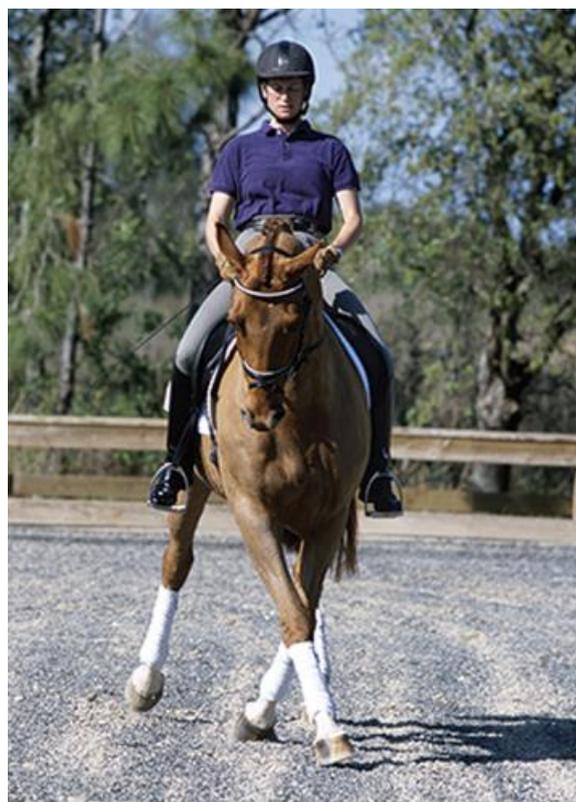
- Is the horse aligned from poll to tail?
- Are the shoulders leading slightly?
- Or are the quarters trailing?

3. Neck Position

- Is there only slight flexion?
- Or is the horse overbent?
- Is the neck twisted instead of flexed?

4. Balance

- Is the horse leaning?
- Falling through the outside shoulder?
- Drifting instead of moving deliberately?



The Common Faults (Front View)

Here's what lowers the mark:

1. Too much neck bend - the rider pulls the inside rein, and the horse over-flexes. The neck bends, but the body doesn't follow.
2. Leading with the haunches - the quarters drift ahead of the shoulders. This often happens when the rider loses control of the outside rein.
3. Leading excessively with the shoulders - the shoulders run away while the hindquarters trail behind.
4. Lack of crossing - steps become parallel instead of crossing — often due to tension or lack of impulsion.
5. Loss of rhythm - irregular steps, especially in trot, immediately affect the score.
6. Resistance - open mouth, head tilt, bracing against the contact.



From the front, imbalance and crookedness are very easy to see.

What We See from the Side

When viewed from E or B, the judge can assess forward energy, frame, and overall balance.

From the side, we want to see:

- Clear forward intention
- A steady tempo
- The inside hind stepping actively under
- A level, swinging back
- Consistent frame and outline
- The horse staying in self-carriage



The movement should travel diagonally across the arena line, not drift shallowly or stall sideways. The balance should remain slightly uphill (appropriate to the level), not falling onto the forehand.

The Common Faults (Side View)

1. Loss of forward - the horse slows down and just “slides” sideways.
2. Running sideways too steeply - too much angle, losing forward flow.
3. Trailing hind legs - the inside hind fails to step under — often due to insufficient impulsion.
4. Hollow back - tension shows through a dropped back and raised head.
5. Inconsistent frame – the horse shortens the neck or drops behind the contact.
6. Resistance in transitions in or out of the movement - the entry and exit matter just as much as the leg yield itself.

The Invisible Marks: Rider Influence

Although we judge the horse, the rider’s effectiveness is reflected in the movement. From the box we can tell:

- If the rider is pulling on the inside rein instead of using the leg
- If the outside rein is supporting
- If the aids are subtle and harmonious
- If the rider is balanced and independent

What Separates a 6 from an 8

A score of 6 - Correct idea, some crossing, but lacks fluency, balance, or impulsion.

A score of 7 - Clear crossing, good rhythm, fairly balanced, minor tension or slight crookedness.

A score of 8 or higher - Effortless, supple, forward, elastic, well-aligned, harmonious — looks easy and gymnastic and ridden accurately on the line and precisely from marker to marker.

The difference is often in quality, not just correctness of the position of the leg yield.

Final Thoughts from the Judge’s Box

Leg yield is not just a sideways movement — it is a window into the horse’s training. It shows:

- Suppleness
- Obedience to the aids
- Connection from hind leg to hand
- Straightness
- Balance

When executed well, it’s fluid and almost invisible in effort, when executed poorly, it exposes gaps in training that need to be addressed for the horse to be able to further its education and progress to higher levels.



Upcoming events and potential sit-in/shadow opportunities

As we head into some cooler months in NSW which we'll all be grateful for, the Regional Championships get under way. These can be a great opportunity for those looking to upgrade as these events often have mentor judges where you can sit-in or shadow judge. Upcoming regional championships include:

- Bowral 18 – 19 April
- Young 10-12 April

The Sydney CDI has a stunning line up of education options this year. Not only do we have the Christof Umbach seminar on Sunday 3rd May but we also have two seminars from our very own Sue Cunningham. There will be a Young Horse Seminar on Thursday 30 April (with JE Kristin Closson assisting) and also a Freestyle Seminar on Saturday 2 May, both with workshops via zoom in the week leading up to the CDI.

Young Horse Seminar Thursday April 30, 2026 (theory Zoom Monday 7pm 27 April)

The current schedule plan for the practical sessions looks a bit like this:

- 8.30 Registration and make your way directly to **Arena 4** for a 9.00am start. The YH competitions will be in action as we arrive, so please be particularly careful on arrival at the arenas so as not to disturb the horses.
- 9.00 - 11.00 Seminar and practical judging of 4yo horses in Arena 4
- 11.00 - 11.30 Break and move to Arena 7 to the allocated space
- 11.30 - 1.00 Seminar and practical judging of the 6 yo horses in Arena 7
- 1.00 - 1.30 Break and move to Arena 4 to the allocated space
- 1.30 - 3.00 Seminar and practical judging of 5 yo horses in Arena 4
- 3.00 - 3.30 Finish and discussion

Please bring copies of the 4, 5 and 6 yo tests plus several copies of the front report sheet listing Trot, walk, Canter, Submission and Perspective. (A work sheet for recording the information will be emailed to you on enrolment).

You can book in for your FREE YH seminar here:

YOUNG HORSE SEMINAR
WITH
SUE CUNNINGHAM
assisted by
KRISTEN CLOSSON

ZOOM THEORY SESSION 7PM
MONDAY 27 APRIL
PRACTICAL SEMINAR THURSDAY 30
APRIL AT SIEC

SYDNEY CDI
Australia's Premier Dressage Event

DRESSAGE
NEW SOUTH WALES

<https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1556047>

Freestyle Practical Demonstration, Saturday May 2, 2026 (theory zoom 7pm Tuesday 28 April)

9.00 Registration and make your way to Arena 7 for a 10.00 start
10.00 - 12.00 Freestyle seminar and practical work

We will watch the CDIJ, CDIY, CDlu25

Please bring copies of these Freestyle tests found on the FEI website. (A Work sheet will be emailed to you on application)

PLEASE NOTE, **ALL TIMES ARE A GUIDE ONLY** AND MAY BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE BASED ON THE FINAL DRAW so please keep an eye on communications closer to the date.

You can book your Freestyle seminar here:

<https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1556047>



SCRIBING AT SYDNEY CDI

Did you know that our NSW judges have first dibs on scribing at the CDI? This means that you could gain insight into the international judges' thoughts, get up close and personal with the exciting Grand Prix freestyle, or simply catch up with the latest in appropriate judging language in the levels to which you aspire.

Jo Gunn is coordinating our scribes this year, so watch out for an email soon with all of the details. Perhaps you need a weekend away with seminars, scribing, and a little retail therapy!

Make sure you save the dates and start planning your Sydney CDI weekend!

Training link available on EA website!

Did you know there is a national calendar for dressage judge education on the EA website. Here is the link:

<https://www.equestrian.org.au/sites/default/files/National%20Calendar%20of%20Dressage%20Seminars-Workshops-%20February%202026.pdf>

You can find it under the Education tab on the EA home page, then under the I AM AN OFFICIAL heading choose Course Calendar and then scroll down to near the bottom of the page and dressage has its own button to take you through to the above calendar.

Links to ENGAGE

Don't forget to jump onto Engage and review a course or two on these hot or stormy days. In case you're wondering where to find them, here's the link:

[Engage LMS | Dressage New South Wales](#)

If you've never logged into Engage before, you'll need a New User activation email. Contact admin@dressagensw.com.au and Mary will assist you. If you have logged in before but need to reset your password, you can do this from the login page.

Here is the login page for Engage LMS:

<https://officialstraining.ensw.org.au>

TRANS-TASMAN Judging Exchange

Did you know that there is a formal judging exchange between Australia & New Zealand? The aim of the exchange is to:

- encourage AUS/NZ officials to experience officiating out of their usual domain.
- grow and consolidate their skills while actively being a good ambassador for their State and sport of dressage; and
- allow candidates to choose to incorporate dates of Judging into a planned break or potential holiday.

A, B and C level Judges are considered for the exchange, another reason to get cracking on that upgrade! The usual conditions of the exchange are:

- Initial liaison between the NZ Judge Officer / NZ Exchange co-ordinator and Australian chairs of JSC who may appoint a designated member to oversee the Exchange Program within their State. This discussion will determine possible dates for Events willing to host, and to identify and recommend interested participants.
 - Once accepted, the participant communicates directly with the OC host to be informed of necessary details.
 - Exchange Judge pays for their own return travel expenses including airfare to NZ/AUS, travel to and from airport and any parking incurred.
 - The show committees (OC) host the visiting official once they arrive at destination by providing transfers, accommodation, meals & transport during the show.
 - Host OC will pay participant a judging /stewarding payment at the normal National rate.
 - The Exchange participant is required to provide a written report of their experience to both the Host OC and their own JSC on return.
- The Program is also available to stewards.

Recently we had our very own Chair, Ann-Maree Lourey fly to Ashburton (an hour from Christchurch) to judge at a Premier League competition with Helen Mackay, from Pitt Town in NSW, and Judy Atkinson, from Tasmania.

Here's what Ann-Maree reported back about the trip:

Under the terms of the agreement, I paid my own way there and back, while the very hospitable organising committee looked after me whilst I was there.

It was incredibly encouraging to see that our marks were absolutely on par with the New Zealand judges, which was a real pat on the back for the education programs on both sides of the 'ditch'. In many cases we were only 'point-something' apart.

I judged from preliminary to Inter I level both days, with quality ranging from 45% in a very tense advanced to 69% in a very smooth Inter I.

The committee could not have been more welcoming; the catering could not have been more delicious – think, real farmers with real food! – and the weather was almost perfect with an icy wind from Antarctica. Or so it felt.



It was a real novelty to be referred to as an 'international judge' and to feel so appreciated for having made the trip. For me, the best bit of the weekend was the presentations each day – upwards of 50 people milling around, drinking champagne, wine and orange juice and eating homemade goodies while awaiting their ribbons and prizes. It was a reminder of the good old days before tablets!

Highly recommended and will definitely take advantage of this opportunity again in the future.

Chatter from around the world in Dressage

UK

From January 2026, British Dressage (BD) and British Riding Clubs (BRC) will allow "discreet" use of vocal aids, including tongue clicking, during tests. BRC has also ruled that nosebands will no longer be compulsory in dressage.

"Going forward, riders can now use discreet vocal aids in their dressage tests to support their natural riding aids, such as tongue clicking. However, the use of the voice must remain unobtrusive and must not cause distraction or interference to other riders, horses and officials."

BD CEO Jason Brautigam told *Horse & Hound (H&H)* that after BD outlined its equine welfare action plan in 2024, members got in touch with "constructive suggestions about how we could potentially improve our sport, in terms of the rules and regulations".

The rule was published on 1 December and applies to all regular competition, including young horse and pony classes, but not at championship level (regional champs, festivals etc).

Olympic dressage rider and trainer Richard Davison was supportive of the change when interviewed by *H&H*. "It's a really good thing from a horse learning angle," he said. "Everybody knows the voice is, mostly, an acceptable way to influence the horse – and we've all used a 'whoa' or a click in the arena for years, but careful not to where the judge could overhear!"

USA

The United States Dressage Federation officially launched their "You be the Judge" education module to all USDF members. Made possible by The Dressage Foundation's (TDF) Mary Anne and Walter McPhail Judge Education Fund, and USDF's partnership with Black Horse One, the program is specifically designed to help achieve the late Mary Ann McPhail's desire for riders and trainers to be on the same page as the judges.

We hope that providing access to Beyond the Bell to all via the Dressage NSW website, we can also enhance transparency here in Australia.

Europe

As many would be aware, the FEI is undertaking a full review of the dressage rules this year. The new rules are expected for 2027, so it looks as though we'll have a full program for the new rules workshop in 2027!

AROUND THE GROUNDS IN NSW



Goulburn Dressage is a club with a long history and one of great resilience! The club has faced many challenges in the last few years after having their grounds washed away multiple times in 2022. In the last flooding of the Mulwaree river, the Club shed became an island, and the sand arenas were washed away, poles and all. Not a cub to let things get the better of them, they secured use of the Goulburn Pony Club Grounds and are back offering a very comprehensive range of classes with fantastic line up of judges which they actively seek to change so that

riders aren't riding under the same judges time and time again.

Over the past year, a new committee has come together with a shared love of dressage and a genuine and strong desire to contribute positively to their local dressage community. What has been achieved in a very short time is something they are all very proud of (and should be). Through teamwork, dedication, and a willingness to learn along the way, the committee has worked to support the club and create opportunities for riders, officials and supporters alike. Their motivation is simple – a passion for dressage and a commitment to ensuring it continues to thrive locally. They are a humble team, grateful for the support and encouragement they have received, and look forward to building on the positive momentum for the benefit of everyone involved in the dressage community.

A very welcoming club, they have prizes for first place in every class (official and unofficial), reflecting a commitment to encouraging participation, supporting development, and recognising

achievement at every stage. The club was also offering riders training on Equestrian Hub at their last event; knowledge is not assumed and newcomers are welcomed and helped in every way possible. Comp days usually include the highly essential coffee van, a food van and also an ice cream van to keep everyone's energy up!

Recently they held their March comp under ideal weather conditions and with a full program from 8.30 until after 4.30. Judges on the day included Justin Bayley, Nell Marshman, Sue Scaysbrook, , Michelle Becchio and Kate Still (pictured right). The more locally based the judge, the lighter the clothing. Goulburn can offer fresh mornings, even in the warmer months, be prepared and you'll have a fabulous day judging at Goulburn!



Photo credit: Collected Captures