

# BEYOND THE BELL

The NSW Judges Journal

Vol 3



## WELCOME!

Welcome to the third edition of the NSW Judges Journal, Beyond the Bell. It's nice to see winter behind us and some nice spring days for judging! Perfect riding weather as long as you're well stocked on antihistamine!

We have 2 great new Workshops for October and November. The Freestyle Workshop to be held at the National Championships (16-19 October) and a Bloopers Workshop on 5 November. Please make sure you jump on Engage and register for these (links later in the newsletter). Definitely events not to be missed!

Thank you to my contributors this quarter and the great suggestions for different articles. Please keep them coming!

As always, please try to take some candid shots around the grounds and send them through.

I welcome any feedback, ideas for topics you'd like addressed or stories to share, please contact me via email at [mjdoyle034@gmail.com](mailto:mjdoyle034@gmail.com) or on 0414 991599.

Happy Judging, Mel.

## OVER THE PAGE

In this edition, we'll:

- Get an update on JSC news;
- see who's moving through the ranks;
- hear from Sue Scaysbrook and Jobina Kennedy in the second edition of our Through the Paces series;
- find out what the Dutch experts found we really look at when we're judging;
- introduce I.T corner - computerised scoring tips;
- see an update on Engage;
- report on upcoming events for potential sit-in and shadow opportunities.
- Find out about new workshops on offer. Click links to enrol if you're reading online!

## NSW Judges Sub-Committee News

### Maintaining accreditation

As we all know it is a requirement to maintain our EA membership to be allowed to continue to be an accredited judge. This year EA officials membership in NSW is free for those who are only members by virtue of their judging. Please make sure you renew your EA membership for 2025 if you have not already done so.

Also, for those taking a break, please always remember you can come back to judging at a later time if life has just become a bit hectic right now. There are pre-set pathways to do this and the JSC is always here to help you back into the judging fray.

### Grafton Seminar

Grafton ran a very successful G/F/E seminar on 6-7 September 2025 with Nell Marshman following G/F and E zoom theory sessions run the week before. It was great to see 15 attendees at the seminar and some new faces keen to start their judging journey.

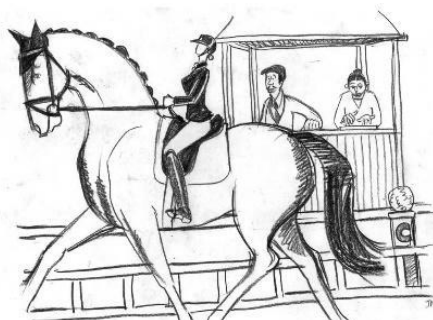
## CONGRATS TO RECENT UPGRADES!

Congratulations to recent upgrades including:

Rosann Tyler – D Level (Fast Track)

Sabine Schmoelzl - to E level

Sonia George & Kirrily Wickham – G Level



Artwork by Jacqui Melbourne

We have a lot of judges working through upgrades at the moment, with 5 NSW judges and several more interstate judges planning to sit their practical exams at the National dressage championships at SIEC in October.

Good Luck everyone, we hope you have nice, uncomplicated classes to judge!

## THANK YOU SUGARLOAF DRESSAGE CLUB

It's the end of an era. After more than 30 years of running competitions and supporting judge education, Sugarloaf Dressage club in the greater Sydney area held its final event on a perfect spring day in September. A huge thank you to the Committee fearlessly led by Pamela Russell-Green. You have recruited judges and supported so many on their upgrading journey, you will be missed.

## THROUGH THE PACES - TROT

by Sue Scaysbrook & Jobina Kennedy

### THE TROT AND ITS VARIATIONS

Following the Walk article in the last issue of Beyond the Bell, we move onto The Trot in Part 2 of our Through the Paces series.

The trot is a two-beat pace of alternate diagonal legs – left fore and right hind: right fore and left hind separated by a moment of suspension. The quality of the trot is characterised by the rhythm and regularity, the elasticity of the horse's steps and the ability to maintain the same rhythm and natural balance during and after transitions. The strides should always remain regular, active, and supple with freedom of movement.

The suppleness of the horse is imperative to encourage the hind legs to engage and swing well under the centre of gravity giving further quality to the suspension phase and greater cadence and expression to the movement.

When the horse's freedom is limited by the rider's aids, the trot will lose its elasticity and show less attractive movement such as flicking of the front legs in an Extended Trot with impaired engagement of the hind legs. It is also important to identify a balanced, natural tempo in all trot work as a tempo that becomes hurried will only serve to flatten the suspension and cadence of the strides. However, the trot is the pace that can more easily be improved through correct training.

The recognised variations within the trot pace are working trot, lengthening of stride, collected trot, medium trot, and extended trot. Piaffe and passage movements will be discussed separately in a future article.

The working trot is our first entry to a Dressage test being included in Preliminary and Novice. As we know, the two-beat rhythm is of utmost importance and needs to show a natural stride, not a "manufactured" trot. At this stage of the horse's training, and particularly so for young horses, the horse should not be asked for collection as its physical development and/or mental understanding is still in the first phase of training - "understanding and confidence" and the work should remain comfortable for the horse, developing a "Happy



Athlete". The horse should show natural balance and self-carriage and remain on the bit with a light accepting contact. The hindlegs should be well activated and show good hock action. The back should remain soft and swinging to allow the hind legs to step under the body in support and produce freedom and mobility of the shoulders. The prints of the hind feet should touch the ground just over the prints of the forefeet. There are situations where the horse may become a little tense and disturb the pure rhythm of the steps or may exhibit symptoms of "bridle lameness" such as head bobbing or uneven strides. This is a difficult situation for the judge as we, in the main, are not vets, but the Welfare of the Horse is of paramount concern at all times. If this unevenness persists, we have little choice but to eliminate the combination with a request that the horse be looked at by a vet for any worrying issues.



Lengthening of strides is shown at Novice level. This variation of the trot allows the horse to lengthen his frame and stride and is the precursor to the Medium trot which first appears in

the Elementary tests. As always, the strides must remain rhythmical and balanced with engagement so that the horse develops a light forehand and self-carriage rather than relying too much on the shoulders and forehand for balance. The contact in this variation, and within the transitions, should be light and giving, so that the horse works confidently over the back and into a secure contact. At this stage of the training, the horse's trust in the bit and the willing acceptance of it, will develop trust in the partnership.

The Collected trot comes into play at Elementary level and right through to Grand Prix and shows varying degrees of Collection at each level of training. Working towards collected movements requires the horse to be quite solid in the second and third phases of training - “Development of Pushing Power” and the “Development of Carrying Power” - with the end result



of a horse showing “Throughness” in all his work. The Collected trot gives the horse the opportunity to show his presence in the arena moving with its head raised and arched coming softly out of the wither, well developed muscular physique whilst maintaining a pliable back, energetic impulsion, from a solid engagement showing well flexed joints, resulting in a majestic self-carriage and alertness. The steps are heightened and shorter with the hindlegs stepping further under the centre of gravity and carrying more weight than working trot. The hindfeet prints step into the prints of the forefeet and while the steps are shorter there should be no loss of cadence or elasticity. The transition into the Collected trot is often a highlight of many a test where the sheer power of adjustability and balance is on show. Precision in these transitions is important to show correct riding but also displays the ability of the horse to collect.



The Medium trot also begins at Elementary level and continues to be an important element through to Intermediate I level. This variation requires moderate length and needs to be quite distinct from the Extended trot. The Medium trot strides are “rounder” than what is seen in Extended Trot but require a greater degree of

engagement from those shown as Lengthened Strides. The horse is allowed a little more frame to stretch the neck and lower the head slightly with the nose more in front of the vertical than at Working or Collected trot with the poll remaining the highest point. The

steps should be well balanced and unconstrained, show suppleness, elasticity and straightness, and energy, with the hind feet touching the ground clearly in front of the fore prints. The tempo should not gather speed to the detriment of impulsion – the tempo should remain constant throughout the test. From this variation, the ability to adjust the frame of the horse back to working or collected trot is developed and needs to be shown in a smooth and balanced way.



The Extended trot can be one of the most exhilarating variations of the trot pace. The Extended trot is developed from Medium Level through to Grand Prix with the engagement of the hindquarters improving through each level. It's a powerful, energetic movement which requires the rider to allow freedom, and a little length of frame, for the horse to work positively over the back from well-articulated hocks through to reaching, supple shoulders. The horse should show the utmost in stride length as possible while maintaining a light contact without any deviation of the quarters from a straight line. It is easy to over-ride this movement when the horse shows such willingness and it is a good rider who maintains the expression and balance throughout the movement. The horse can sometimes appear to “take over” or perhaps is ridden out of its natural balance and then loses the rhythm and breaks into canter which, unfortunately, results in an Insufficient score.

Again, we look at some issues that may occur when judging trot movements in relation to the Training Scale as our guide for marking:

- Rhythm as we know is all important and breaking the rhythm either to walk or canter is a very expensive mistake resulting in an Insufficient mark (4). There are times though

when we might see a trot that surges, changing the tempo and affecting the balance mostly through tension or misunderstanding of the rider's aids. When this happens, we need to be clear that this issue has disturbed the fluency of the movement and we would be in the area of a Satisfactory/Marginal to Sufficient mark (5.0 to 6.0). A helpful comment might be "losing some harmony and fluency" or "maintain balance and even tempo throughout".

- The overall suppleness of the horse is continually being developed through correct training but when we see a horse that shows limited elasticity and adjustability, for instance, in a medium trot, we need to draw attention to this lack of suppleness. There are, of course, varying degrees of this, but if a Medium trot lacks some effort and clarity, we can only give a Satisfactory mark (6.0 or 6.5) with a comment along the lines of "transition into Medium needs to be clearer" or "develop more impulsion and engagement".
- Contact issues are always very expensive when marking. Our job as judges is to determine whether or not the horse is working with a fundamental acceptance to the bit and bridle. Depending on the severity and consistency, contact issues such as an open mouth, visible tongue, working mostly "off the bit", dropping the poll, or coming behind the vertical can only be awarded marks in the Marginal (5.0) to Satisfactory (6.0) range. However, comments need to remain in a positive vein, for instance, "more confidence in accepting the bit to be developed" or "mouth open at times today, try to improve on his confidence into the bridle" or "poll becoming deep at times disturbing suppleness over the back".
- It can also happen that the Extended trot shows little difference to a Medium trot and even though the strides remain rhythmical, we must be clear in our assessment and give a Sufficient/Marginal to Satisfactory mark (5.0 to 6.0) and if there is no attempt to show an Extended Trot at all, it must be considered as Insufficient (4). Comments, for instance, of "keep engagement to improve impulsion and ground cover" or "regular but develop clearer overtrack for clarity in Extended"
- Judging offers us the opportunity of recognising and rewarding good training. When we see a Trot (in any variation) that is engaged with solid impulsion, supple through the back, showing a mobile shoulder, relaxed acceptance of the bit and an uphill, confident self-carriage, we are wanting to give high marks of Very Good to Excellent (9.0 to 10) and be very happy we did so. It is only if there is a momentary falter in one way or another e.g. a moment of hesitation, poll drops slightly, slight loss of balance, not always accurate at marker, we can give a Fairly Good to Good mark (7.0 to 8.0). It's easy to find the words when we look at quality – both in the horse's way of going and the ability of the rider. Some encouraging comments could be "horse shows confidence and expression" (for an Extended Trot) or "clear self-carriage, proud and athletic" (for Collected Trot) or "harmonious work, showing comfortable connection and balance" (for working trot).

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For full information on the Trot and how to judge it, go to the FEI Dressage Handbook – Guidelines for Judging.

Next time in Beyond the Bell, we look at the Canter – enjoy your judging!

Cheers, Sue Scaysbrook

National A Level and Young Horse Judge and Mentor

A special thanks goes to Rodney's Photography for sponsoring local photos for our Through the Paces series!



## WHAT DOES YOUR EYE SEE WHEN YOU'RE JUDGING?

*A study in visual search behaviour*

We all think we know exactly what we're watching when a rider comes down the centreline, but do we? A new eye-tracking study has given us the answer—and it might surprise you.

Researchers tracked the gaze of 20 judges of varying experience as they judged Grand Prix tests on video. The 2024 study found the most prioritized regions include the horse's movement and gait quality, the rider's posture and position, and the overall harmony and fluidity of the performance. So far, this sounds like exactly what we should be looking at!

Interestingly, across the board, judges spent the most time looking at the front of the horse—the head, neck, and shoulders. That's where attention was consistently drawn, no matter the movement. Possibly not that surprising on the basis that a problem in the back end will show in what the front is able to produce.

The study suggests that more experienced judges tend to have more refined and targeted visual search patterns, focusing effectively on important cues, while less experienced judges may distribute their attention more broadly.

But here's where it got interesting:

- Top-level judges focused more on the horse's feet, especially in trot and canter. They were zeroing in on rhythm, straightness, and correctness of the gaits.
- Less experienced judges kept their eyes more on the rider, picking up cues from position and influence.

The takeaway? We don't see everything at once. Our eyes—and experience—guide us toward what we think matters most.



It's not the first time this area has been explored. Inga Wolframm, a German sports psychologist, spoke at the Global Dressage Forum in 2010 on judging bias (Inga is also one of the authors of the 2024 visual bias study). An article following this forum appeared in Euro Dressage and for those wanting to have a read, here it is: <https://eurodressage.com/2010/11/04/natural-bias-hidden-controversy-judging-sports>

The purpose of studies like this is to help shape judge training, improve consistency, and even benefit horse welfare by making scoring more transparent.

So maybe next time you're watching or judging a test, consciously consider, where is my eye drawn?

*Our sincere thanks to Inga Wolframm, Peter Reuter, Julia Zaharia and Johannes Vernooij for their paper, In the eye of the Beholder – Visual Search Behaviour in Equestrian Dressage Judges, 2024. Van Hall Larenstein university, the Netherlands*

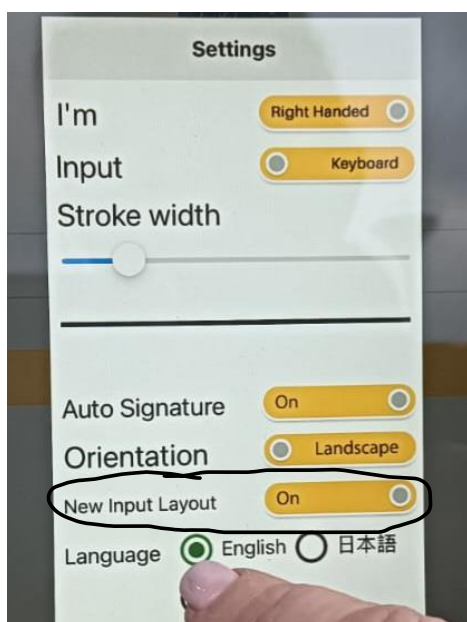
## I.T. CORNER – TIPS AND TRICKS WITH NOMINATE AND BLACKHORSE

Computers and computer-assisted scoring is here to stay, so we thought we'd use this forum to share some tips. Most of us aren't computer gurus and might have started work back in a time when there weren't even computers on desks (I know I did). The 5-minute run through of "here's how it works" is great when everything is working well, machines are fully powered, and the local internet is working at a reasonable speed. However, that's not always the case.

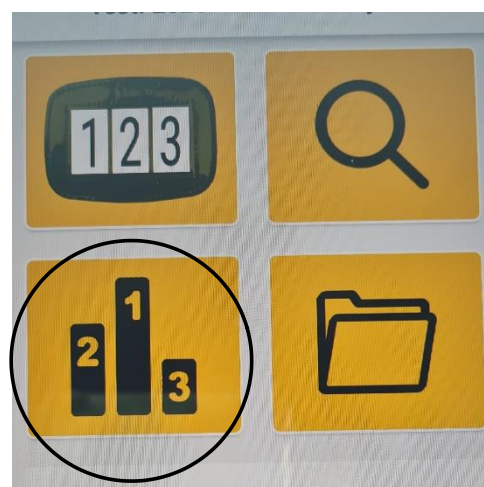
Many of us have had pencilers exclaim they have a black screen, the machine has jumped to a random new page, they're not sure how to get back and you have another 20 movements coming at you in 30 second increments! We all know the drill, go straight to paper until you have a couple of minutes to review the situation. Don't fuss with it, best to tackle it when you have a scratching or a break.

We'll explore some bits and pieces here going forward. We're also working to design a seminar to try and help us all feel a lot more under control with computer scoring.

If you're judging at C and not sure where to find the results of your class, hit the podium button and all will be revealed! You can then click on a particular competitor and see all scores one by one in case you need to explore a difference of marks. Judges at other markers do not have the privilege of seeing the Podium.



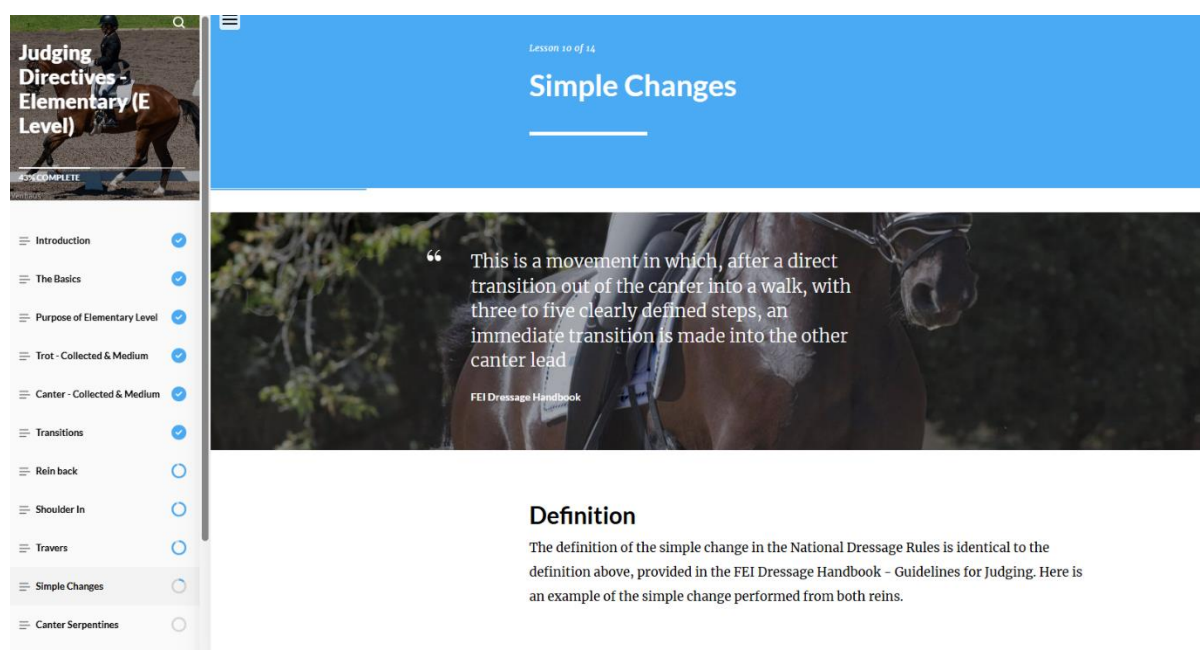
Did you know NominatE has a new layout option when its operating **with a keyboard**? This layout looks the same as the BlackHorse scoring platform, so you can see scores and comments for multiple movements on the same page. If you do have a keyboard set up and want to use this layout, go to settings (the wheel in the top right corner on the first page of NominatE scoring) and choose the "new Layout option" just above the language option. This is where your writer can also choose other layout options.



## What's happening on ENGAGE

Did you know Engage offers courses to support your ongoing judge education—whether you're working towards an upgrade or simply want to refresh your knowledge of judging movements at Preliminary, Novice, Elementary, and Medium levels?

The “**Judging Directives**” courses feature video examples for each movement using the Scale of Marks and referencing The Training Scale, showing you exactly what to look for when assessing performance. Here's an example:



The screenshot displays the Engage LMS interface. On the left is a navigation menu for the course 'Judging Directives - Elementary (E Level)'. The menu items are: Introduction (checked), The Basics (checked), Purpose of Elementary Level (checked), Trot - Collected & Medium (checked), Canter - Collected & Medium (checked), Transitions (checked), Rein back (unchecked), Shoulder In (unchecked), Travers (unchecked), Simple Changes (unchecked), and Canter Serpentine (unchecked). The main content area shows 'Lesson 10 of 14' titled 'Simple Changes'. Below the title is a quote: 'This is a movement in which, after a direct transition out of the canter into a walk, with three to five clearly defined steps, an immediate transition is made into the other canter lead.' This quote is attributed to the 'FEI Dressage Handbook'. Below the quote is a section titled 'Definition' which states: 'The definition of the simple change in the National Dressage Rules is identical to the definition above, provided in the FEI Dressage Handbook - Guidelines for Judging. Here is an example of the simple change performed from both reins.'

You will find this course in the Catalogue:

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

Don't forget, if you've never logged into Engage before, you'll need a New User activation email. Contact [admin@dressagensw.com.au](mailto: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>

## FEI JUDGES HANDBOOK

Did you know you can order the FEI Judges handbook online? Well, now you can via the new EA Portal. Once you are logged on, go to SHOP, then FEI Official items and it should be there. It's now \$102.

## UPCOMING EVENTS, potential sit-in and shadow opportunities

After a busy 3 months of events in Autumn, our upcoming events and upgrade opportunities keep coming. National Championships at SIEC 16-19 October 2025 will afford practical exam opportunities for some and we wish everyone taking these on, the very best of luck.

We have 2 exciting workshops coming up. Please keep your eye out for invitations in your email and make sure you register!

### FREESTYLE – THEORY FOLLOWED BY PRACTICAL AT NATIONALS

Freestyle Theory - [https://officialstraining.nsw.gov.au/view\\_facetoface/81](https://officialstraining.nsw.gov.au/view_facetoface/81)

Freestyle Prac [https://officialstraining.nsw.gov.au/view\\_facetoface/82](https://officialstraining.nsw.gov.au/view_facetoface/82)

## DRESSAGE JUDGES WORKSHOP FREESTYLE



*presented by Virginia Creed (VIC)*

FEI L2/3\* Dressage Judge & Judge Educator



*Theory : Monday 13 October, 2025*

*Online via Zoom*

*Practical : Saturday 18 October, 2025*

*Sydney International Equestrian Centre*

## BELLS & BLOOPERS

Register on engage [https://officialstraining.ensw.org.au/view\\_facetoface/83](https://officialstraining.ensw.org.au/view_facetoface/83)

This session will be led by our judge educators Robyn Targa and Connie Murray.

Do you have a quirky judging story from the arena? Maybe something weird, wonderful, or a moment where you simply weren't sure what to do? We're calling for your stories to share and workshop together—let's learn from the bloopers!



**DRESSAGE JUDGES WORKSHOP**  
**“Bells & Bloopers”**

*Dressage doesn't always go to plan.*

Join our Judge Educators Robyn Targa (NSW) & Connie Murray (QLD) for insights on how to deal with those ‘what now?’ moments in the arena.

 PLUS your questions answered. *“What should I do if....?”*

**Wednesday 5 November, 2025**  
**online via Zoom**

Presented by  DRESSAGE  
NEW SOUTH WALES