

# Combined Training PRIMER

This is not a comprehensive covering of all the rules for combined training – that would require an entire book and hours of time to read it! However, those who are new to combined training may find this primer useful in getting started on the right foot.

Combined training in its different forms (horse trials, combined tests, three-day events, two-day events) involves completion of two or three separate tests ("phases") used to evaluate a horse's overall level of training, ability, courage, and fitness. In combined training, the rider competes on the same horse throughout all phases of a given competition.

**IMPORTANT** – *In combined training, the rider and horse face each phase as a team, with no outside assistance.*

*Verbal or physical assistance to the competitor while actually competing in any phase incurs elimination. No clucking, calling out directions or instructions, waving of arms, pointing, etc. is permitted.*

*Observers/coaches/parents are limited to applause – after final salute of the dressage test, after crossing the finish line of the stadium round, or after safe completion of a cross country obstacle.*

Horse trials are comprised of dressage, stadium, and cross country phases. Combined tests are comprised of any two of these three, but typically dressage and stadium.

**1. Dressage test** The first phase is an individual test on the “flat” (doesn't involve jumping or negotiation of obstacles) involving a prescribed series of movements ridden in a certain size arena with letters around the edge so that the judge knows how precisely the horse performed the movements.

In addition to whether the prescribed movements are performed, the horse is rated from 1 to 10 on how they are performed. The judge is looking for elastic, rhythmic forward movement in a round, relaxed frame, straightness along the long sides of the arena and center line, and appropriate curves on the circles, not to mention complete submission to the rider. Although dressage test maneuvers may sound simple, achieving all of the above is much easier said than done! No special gadgets or devices are permitted – no martingales, no draw reins, no leg wraps, etc. Confirm your bit is legal for dressage. The rider may wear spurs (check your spur type is legal) but may not carry a whip in dressage. In combined training, no “readers” of the test are permitted. The competitor must have the test memorized. The judge's good marks for each horse/rider team are converted into penalty points, hence the lower the score the better the ride.

**Protocol** The rider must NOT enter the dressage ring until the judge's signal (to do so incurs elimination). After the signal, the rider has 60 seconds to enter the dressage arena at "A". Late entry incurs elimination. The rider performs the required movements, salutes the dressage judge at end of the test, and leaves the arena mounted, at the walk, on a loose rein. *The audience should remain silent during the test and should not applaud until after the final salute.*

**2. Stadium jumping test** This phase tests the horse over a course of jumps that fall down if touched.

The stadium phase is ridden individually in an arena over a course of stadium jumps, each of which must be negotiated in a particular order and within a certain "optimum" time. Form is not judged. The horse/rider team incurs penalty points for refusals, run-outs, falls and going overtime. Whereas cross-country fences do not fall down if the horse strikes them, stadium jumps do, and penalty points are incurred for such "knock-downs" (technically the "lowering of any element of an obstacle" on the course). A perfect stadium score is "zero".

**Protocol** The rider enters the arena and waits for the judge's signal to start. The rider may walk, trot or canter around the arena until the start signal. After the start signal, the rider has 45 seconds to cross the starting line in the correct direction and commence riding the course. The clock stops when the rider crosses the finish line after jumping the last fence on the course. The rider does not salute at the end of the stadium round. The rider must leave the arena mounted or incur elimination. Leg wraps are permitted, as are running martingales. The rider may carry a whip. *The audience should remain silent during the stadium round and should not applaud until after the final crossing of the finish line.*

3. **Cross-country phase** This phase tests the horse's boldness, agility, strength, training, and endurance (level of fitness) over a course of solid obstacles that do not fall down if hit.

The x-c test, ridden at a certain average rate of speed, is run on a measured course over varying terrain which includes natural and man-made obstacles (jumps, ditches, banks, creeks) each of which must be negotiated. The rider's goal is to safely complete the course in just under the preestablished "optimum" time. Running overtime incurs penalty points. Completing the course in way less than optimum time incurs speed penalties. Refusals and run-outs incur penalties, while a fall of horse or rider incurs elimination. A perfect x-c score (no time or jumping penalties) is "zero".

**Protocol** The rider must leave from a starting box. The starter gives the rider a final countdown from 10 to 1, and the rider is officially "on course" as soon as the starter says "go". The competitor must attempt a standing start with the horse entirely within the starting box. In the event of a false start, the rider must go back into the box and leave again (no more countdowns, though - the clock has already started!) or incur elimination. Once officially started, outside assistance of any kind whether solicited or not will incur elimination. The one exception is in the event of a fall, at which point all forms of assistance are permitted. The clock stops when the rider crosses the final finish line. Running martingales and gallop boots are permitted. The rider may wear spurs and carry a whip. *The audience should hold applaud until safe completion of the obstacle they are spectating.*

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At the end of the day, each competitor's penalty points from the 2 phases (CT) or 3 phases (HT) are added together for a total number of penalties for the competition. Lowest score wins.