



Terminology for Driven Dressage

This summary is a guide to frequently-used descriptive terms and phrases with interpretation(s) as related to Driven Dressage. Consistent use of these terms and phrases will assist in clear communication between drivers, trainers, judges, and scribes.

ABOVE THE BIT

The horse avoids reaching for the bit by not stretching his topline and instead engages the muscles of his lower neck. His muzzle will be pushed forward and upward. Often his back will also be hollow.

ACCEPTANCE

Lack of evasion, resistance, or protest; acquiescence. An unconditional tolerance of and submission to the aids.

ACTIVITY

Energy, vigor, liveliness – referring here to the engagement of the haunches.

AGAINST THE BIT

The horse avoids proper soft bit contact by stiffening in the jaws or in the whole neck. He is pushing against the bit without yielding to it. His head carriage may appear in spite of this to be correct, but there will be tension in the jaw.

AMBLE

A “lateral walk.” Pacey. The horse’s legs no longer move in an even four beat, but each pair (front and hind) move at or almost at the same time forward or back respectively. The purity of the walk as evidenced when the legs make momentarily a “V” on either side, is no longer existent.

BALANCE

Relative distribution of the horse’s natural weight and when in harness upon his fore and hind legs (longitudinal balance), and his left and right legs (lateral balance). He is said to be in good balance when he does not appear front-heavy due to engaged hindquarters and carries the same weight on his left and right side – in other words, he is straight. Loss of balance means the sudden increase of weight onto the forehand or to one side.

BASICS

Reference to the basics that are the correct foundation of the progressive training of the horse, independent of the execution of specific test movements. The basics include the following (as suitable to the level and exercise):

- pure rhythm with suitable tempo
- relaxation, suppleness, elasticity, looseness
- correct contact, connection
- impulsion, straightness and longitudinal balance

Correctness of the basics is indicated by the preservation and/or improvement in the purity and quality of the gaits and paces, the gymnastic ability and physique of the horse, and the horse’s attitude and willingness to be driven.

BEAT

Footfall within a gait. A hoof (or pair of hooves simultaneously) striking the ground. The walk has four beats; the trot, two; the canter, three.

BEHIND THE BIT

The horse avoids proper bit acceptance by giving up any amount of contact. The reins feel totally loose. The head may or may not be behind the vertical. Visual diagnosis from the ground can be very difficult.

BEHIND THE VERTICAL

The horse’s head is no longer perpendicular towards the ground but falls behind (towards his chest); however he maintains contact with the reins. NOT the same as “behind the bit.”

BEND

We differentiate two bends:

1. The lateral bend. The horse’s whole spine is laterally curved in an even arc from poll to tail, either to the right or to the left.
2. The longitudinal bend. The horse stretches his topline from poll to hocks, his neck telescopes from the withers with its base pushed upward, he is flexing at the poll and his belly muscles contract to allow for the full stretch of his dorsal ligaments. His head is on, or slightly in front of, the vertical.

BLOCKED

The connection between driver and horse is impaired due to horse having sustained muscular contraction that creates rigid areas.

BLOCKED IN BACK

The hind legs are prevented from stepping under due to tense back muscles.

BROKEN NECKLINE

The position of the neck in which there is excessive flexion between the second and third, or third and fourth, cervical vertebrae, so that the poll is no longer the highest point of the skeleton, and the silhouette of the topline of the neck no longer forms an even, smooth arc.

CADENCE

The marked accentuation of the rhythm and emphasized beat that is the result of suitable tempo harmonizing with impulsion.

CAMPED

In the halt the hind legs are placed out behind the horse’s body, not engaged.

CANTER LEAD

The “lead” of a canter refers to the order in which the footfalls occur. If the left hind leg is placed first (beat one) which would then be followed by the right hind and left foreleg (beat two) before the right foreleg (beat three), the horse is said to be on the “right lead.” If the right hind leg is beat one, then the left foreleg will be the last leg to ground, and the horse will be said to be on the “left lead.” Therefore, a person on the ground can tell which lead the horse is on by watching the front and rear legs and



determining which side the legs are literally “leading,” landing in front of the opposing side.

The horse is on the “correct” lead when the leading leg matches the direction the horse is going. Therefore a horse travelling to the left with the left fore leading (beat three) will be on the correct lead.

CHEWING THE BIT

The movements of the horse’s mouth, gently and softly mouthing the bit, showing mobility and relaxation of the jaw and causing secretion of saliva for a “wet mouth.” Not to be confused with a fussy and nervous mouthing of the bit and grinding of the teeth.

CLARITY

Marked distinction between the footfalls (beats) of a gait.

CLOSED HALT

A posture at the halt in which the horse is secure in balance and attitude, and has his hind legs sufficiently under the body so that his weight is well distributed. He is said to be engaged in the halt. It does not necessarily mean “square.” A horse can be square with the hind legs camped out.

COLLECTION

The horse uses created energy more to carry himself through his hind legs rather than to propel himself forward. Relative to working and extended paces, the strides are shorter, yet more powerful and agile and the shoulders can move more freely; his whole outline appears shorter with his neck more raised – unrestrained and out of lifted withers – and his loins are more coiled, resulting in a lowered croup.

His legs remain a fraction longer in the support phase on the ground as the joints in his hind legs compress stronger to produce the necessary increase of energy. Due to this slightly longer ground contact, his tempo will remain the same as in the other paces, in spite of the shortened steps.

CONFIDENCE

The horse performs with boldness and self-assurance and shows total trust in his partnership with the driver, and vice versa, the driver shows trust in his partnership with his horse.

CONNECTION

The uninterrupted and harmonious circuit between the horse’s mouth and the driver’s hands. The unrestricted influence from the driver’s hands to the horse and back.

CONSTRAINED

Forced or compelled against the will. Not necessarily the same as “restrained” (the horse may be constrained to move forward at speed).

CONRICTED

Limited by constraint, restraint, or sustained muscular contraction. Held together, forcefully shortened, or physically tight.

CONTACT

Tautness or stretch of the reins. Correct contact, or acceptance of contact, is determined by the elasticity of the connection between horse and driver. Any slackness in the reins means a loss of contact.

CROOKEDNESS

A horse is said to be crooked, when the alignment of his entire spine does not conform to the line he is moving on.

CROSS CANTER

A horse cantering with the fore and hind legs on different leads so that the sequence of footfalls is not correct for the canter lead. Same as Disunited Canter.

DEFINITION

Distinction, clear demarcation. Usually used in reference to transitions within gaits (between paces).

DISOBEDIENCE

The horse either avoids with determination what is asked from him or tries persistently to do what is not asked.

DISUNITED CANTER

Same as Cross Canter. A horse cantering with the fore and hind legs on different leads so that the sequence of footfalls is not correct for the canter lead.

DRAGGING

Refers to dragging of the hind feet or inactivity of the hind legs.

ELASTICITY

The ability or tendency to stretch and contract the musculature smoothly, giving the impression of “springiness” or “stretchiness.”

ELEVATION

The unrestrained raising of the head and neck out of the withers, as a result of the withers themselves being raised due to a lowering of the croup. This raising of head, neck and withers always has to be relative to the lowering of the croup.

ENGAGEMENT

Increased flexion of the joints of the hind legs and of the sacro-lumbar area (coiling of the loins), lowering the croup relative to the forehead, with the hind legs supporting a greater proportion of the load. A prerequisite for thrust/impulsion.

EVASION

Avoidance of the difficulty, correctness, or purpose of the movement, often without obvious resistance or disobedience. A slight tilt with the head, increased contact on one rein, over bending in the neck are examples for this.

EXPRESSION

Cadence.

EXTENSION

A pace that shows maximum length of stride, frame and phase of suspension. The horse covers as much ground as possible with each stride, but maintains the same tempo as in the other paces. The uphill balance of the horse is greater than in Lengthened paces.

FALLING

Falling in, falling on inside shoulder, falling out, falling over outside shoulder.

Lateral deviation of the shoulders caused by loss of straightness and balance.



FIGURE

Geometrical component of a dressage test, such as a circle, change of rein, figure of eight. Erroneously used interchangeably with “movement.”

FLEXIBILITY

The ability to move the joints freely, to quickly adjust the body to new maneuvers and change of bend as in a serpentine.

FLEXION

Refers to a folding of a joint. Usually used when describing the horse's yielding to the bit in the poll.

“Longitudinal flexion” refers to flexion of head-neck joint, “lateral flexion” occurs in the joint of the second cervical (when bending laterally).

Erroneously used interchangeably with “bend.”

FORWARD

Forward is a direction as opposed to backward. However, it is being commonly used to designate more impulsion, speed, tempo or stride length.

Expressions such as “needs energy,” “needs reach,” “needs longer strides,” “needs to cover more ground,” “needs livelier tempo,” etc, more accurately express HOW the horse should proceed in a forward direction.

Accurate usage of the phrase “more forward” is in reference to standing still, moving backward, or too much sideways (e.g., in move-off from halt the horse steps sideways or backward).

FRAME

Silhouette. Posture. The longer or shorter outline of a horse's body when correctly on the aids and relative to the degree of relaxation or collection (e.g., working trot versus collected trot).

FREEDOM

In absence of any constriction, the horse moves all four limbs freely with full reach and scope.

GAIT

Any of the various foot movements of a horse, as a walk, trot or canter.

GOOSE-STEPPING

Exaggerated movement of the forelegs, in which the forefeet are not set down where the forelegs are pointing. Also called flipping.

HALF HALT

An effect of all the aids (not necessarily just the reins) which increases the attention and improves the balance of the horse, to be comparable with a momentary brief attempt of collection or, when in collection, a momentary increase of it.

HOLLOW BACK

Sagging or depressed back caused by sustained contraction of the back muscles. A result of lack of stretch of the topline and lack of contraction of the belly muscles.

HURRIED, HASTY, QUICK, RUSHED, RAPID

All refer to quickness of tempo

IMPULSION

Is the thrust and energy with which the horse volunteers to move himself and his vehicle. Impulsion implies the horse's willingness

(psychological) to push the body forward (physiological) from coiled loins (postural).

INSIDE

1. The direction toward which the horse should be positioned in lateral bend.
2. The side of the horse towards the center of the ring.

IRREGULAR

Impure, unlevel, or uneven. Can be momentary or pervasive, and may or may not be due to unsoundness. Does not mean unsteady in tempo.

LATE

Usually applied to transitions executed beyond the marker.

LENGTHENING

Elongation of the stride and the outline of the horse.

LIGHTNESS

1. Refers to the horse's lightness on its feet due to good balance and engagement.
2. Lightness of the forehand due to lowering of the croup.
3. A light rein contact due to good self-carriage.

LONGITUDINAL

Is the lengthwise dimension (as opposed to lateral), from front-to-back or back-to-front.

MARCHING

Purposefulness in the steps of the walk, not to be confused with goose-stepping or a restrained walk out of tight shoulders.

MOBILITY

Easy maneuverability of the shoulders/forehand, made possible by the shifting of weight to the hindquarters.

MOVEMENT

1. The manner in which the horse moves over the ground.
2. A section of a dressage test to be scored
3. A gymnastic exercise (lengthening, reinback, etc.) as opposed to a figure (circle, change of rein, etc.)

NECK TELESCOPING GESTURE

This gesture is a result of contraction of the scalenus muscles which flatten out the lower curve in the base of the neck. This effect can then be seen by the lower third of the crest arching up, the horse's forehead being pushed away from his chest and the complexus muscle bulging and then becoming visible.

OBEDIENCE

Willingness to perform the movement, transition, or figure asked by the driver. May demonstrate resistance or evasion, yet still be “obedient” (e.g., the horse may perform a precise circle, but still may be against the bit or not be engaged enough; thus he obediently performs the task, but not necessarily submissively, supplely, etc.)

ON THE AIDS

The horse is responding instantly and continuously to all the aids, accepting the contact, and maintaining connection.



ON THE BIT

Supple and quiet acceptance of the contact with the neck stretched into the bit and the poll flexed accordingly.

ON THE FOREHAND

Longitudinally poor balance; the horse places too much weight on the forelegs for the task at hand.

OUTLINE

The carriage, posture, profile, or silhouette of the horse

OUTSIDE

1. The direction away from which the horse should be laterally bent.
2. The side that is away from the center of the arena.

OVER-BENT

Excessive lateral displacement of the neck relative to the body, occurring in the neck itself or at the base of the neck, causing lack of uniformity of the lateral curve of the horse.

OVER-FLEXED

Behind the vertical.

OVERSTEP, OVERSTRIDE, OVERTRACK

The placement of the hind foot in front of the print of the forefoot.

PACE

1. Any one of the variations within each gait: working, lengthened, medium, extended, collected.
2. A gait in which the ipsilateral pairs of legs move in unison (also called “amble” – not a pure or correct gait for dressage).

PARKED

Used in reference to the halt. The hind legs placed out behind the horse's body, not engaged, same as “camped.”

POLL

The highest point of the horse's skull (the occipital crest). In common dressage usage, “flexion at the poll” refers to the lateral and longitudinal flexion in the two joints immediately behind the poll (see flexion).

PURITY

Correctness of the order of the footfalls and phases of the gaits.

PUSHING OUT

Hind legs operating too far behind the horse, pushing backwards more than carrying (e.g., in a collected trot due to tension of the back).

REGULARITY

Correctness of the gait, to include purity, evenness, and levelness. Irregularities may be momentary or pervasive, and they may or may not be caused by unsoundness.

In the Collective Mark for gaits, regularity is used to address only purity and soundness. (Not used to mean unvarying tempo.)

RELAXATION

1. Unruffled mental state. Calmness, without anxiety or nervousness.

2. Absence of muscular tension (contraction) other than that needed for optimal self-carriage, strength, and range and fluency of movement.

RESISTANCE

Physical opposition by the horse against the driver. Not synonymous with disobedience nor with evasion. Can be momentary or pervasive.

RHYTHM

The characteristic sequence of footfalls and phases of a given gait. For purposes of driven dressage, the only correct rhythms are those of the pure walk, pure trot and pure canter (not those of amble or pace). Not to be confused with “tempo” or “cadence.”

ROUNDNESS

1. The convexity of the profile of the horse's topline. The long topline due to correct longitudinal bend versus the short topline due to a hollow back and engaged lower neck muscles.
2. Characterizing the circular movement or action of the horse's limbs, as opposed to linear or flat quality
3. The correct shape of a circle.

RUNNING

Rushing. The horse makes quick and hurried steps due to a lack of longitudinal balance and mental relaxation. The strides do not cover enough ground. Often observed in incorrectly executed lengthenings.

SCOPE

Magnitude of horse's range of motion

SELF-CARRIAGE

State in which the horse carries itself in a balanced, correct, and unconstrained posture, with proper connection to the driver's hand.

SLACK

1. Used in reference to the condition of the musculature of the horse's topline/back: sagging, lacking muscle tone or springy resilience.
2. Used in reference to the reins: lacking contact.

SNATCHING

1. Horse attempting to jerk reins through driver's hands.
2. Used in reference to one or both hind legs: picking up the leg(s) jerkily, and sometimes excessively high.

SPEED

Refers to miles per hour, i.e., how fast the ground is covered. The horse's speed can be increased through increasing the length of stride or increasing the tempo, or both. Increased tempo does not necessarily mean increased speed. NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH IMPULSION.

STICKY

Reluctance to lift the feet off the ground. Earthbound.

STIFF/STIFFNESS

Inability (as opposed to unwillingness) to flex the joints or stretch the musculature to the degree and in the way required to perform the task at hand (often confused with “tense” or “resistant”).



STRADDLING

Wide behind in lengthenings and extensions.

STRAIGHTNESS

1. Used in reference to tracking: the hind legs follow the same path and step in the same direction as the forelegs (e.g., haunches neither left nor right on centerline).
2. Used in reference to the alignment: the horse's body parts are in correct alignment with each other for the task at hand (e.g., straight on a straight line, correctly bent on a curved line). The opposite of crooked.
3. Used in reference to line of travel: the directness of the route by which the horse proceeds from one point to another.

STRIDE

Cycle of movements that is completed when the horse's legs regain their initial positions. Length of stride refers to the amount of ground covered by an entire sequence.

STRUNG OUT

Too elongated; lacking good carriage, longitudinal balance, and connection; lack of push from behind.

SUBMISSION

The yielding of the horse's will to that of the driver, as revealed by constant attention, willingness, and confidence in the attitude of the horse, as well as by the harmony and ease displayed in the correct execution of the movements, including correct bend, acceptance of and obedience to the driver's aids, and a balance appropriate to the task at hand.

SUPPLENESS

Pliability; showing ability to smoothly adjust the carriage (longitudinally) and the bend (laterally), without impairment of the flow of movement, or of the balance.

SUSPENSION

The moment or phase of the trot or canter in which the horse has no feet on the ground. Time "off the ground" in the stride.

SWINGING BACK

The alternating rhythmic contraction and stretching of the long back muscles, first on one side, then the other, which gives springiness and elasticity to the horse's movements, and allows the thrust from the hind legs to come "through the back."

SWINGING HEAD

The horse's muzzle moves left-right, indicating constraint or incorrect acceptance of contact.

TEMPO

Rate of repetition of the rhythm. Faster tempo is more strides or beats per minute. Tempo is not necessarily correlated with length of stride or miles per hour. The words "rhythm" and "regularity" are often mistakenly used interchangeably with tempo.

TENSE

1. (verb) To contract or shorten the muscles; generally used to indicate sustained contraction (without the requisite alternating relaxation of the muscles).
2. (adj.) Referring to the horse's mental state: anxious, nervous
3. (adj) Referring to the horse's physical state: strained; taut; showing sustained muscular contraction (impairing optimal

carriage, and range and fluency of movement). Often the physical and mental states go hand-in-hand.

THROUGHNESS (COMING THROUGH, STEPPING THROUGH)

The supple, stretched, and unblocked state of the horse's musculature and mental acquiescence that permits the aids (esp. the rein aids) to go through and reach and influence the hind legs in a positive way (e.g., the acceptance of a half-halt). If the horse is not "through," the attempted half-halt will merely stiffen the horse.

TILTING

Tipping or cocking the head (lowering one ear) – an evasion.

TRACK/TRACKS

1. The path along the rail in an arena.
2. (verb) Move along a path (as in "track right" where the direction of travel has the right hand towards the center of the arena).
3. (verb) Referring to a foot or feet, to travel in a line or path (e.g., the horse tracks straight with his left hind).
4. (noun) The lines of travel of feet, viewed and counted by the observer as the horse approaches him. A straight horse moving on a straight line would move on two tracks while a horse moving in a shoulder-in would be on three tracks.

TRACKING UP

The hind feet step into the tracks of the forefeet.

TRAILING

Used to refer to the operation of the hind legs too far behind the horse (as in trailing hind legs). Not connected from behind. Total lack of engagement.

UNEVEN

Unequal in length of steps. Can be due to unsoundness, poor balance, or a too-restraining rein contact.

UNLEVEL

Unequal height of steps or bearing of weight on both sides.

WANDERING, WAVERING, WEAVING

Meandering, drifting, not moving forward on a straight line from one point to another.

WIDE BEHIND

The horse travels with the hind feet further apart than the forefeet (a lack of engagement which occurs most commonly in lengthening of the stride – also called straddling, or in the halt).

WOBBLING

Appearing to lose balance from side to side, even while traveling on a straight line.