

# How To: Breed a Superior Dressage Horse

Creating a successful dressage horse from scratch involves art, science and a little luck. Each parent must contribute positive traits, which in combination produce exceptional offspring. You have to be skillful enough in identifying mares that have a high probability of passing on superior performance traits to produce a noble, correctly built warm-blooded horse capable of superior performance.

## Evaluating a Mare's Strengths

We should begin by judging the mare on her overall impression. Look for an athletic, balanced looking horse with an alert, yet calm, demeanor. All parts of the body should fit together seamlessly to create a picture of harmonious flow. The mare should be:

1. Overall: Look for a noble, large-framed horse that looks capable of the energy, soundness and saneness for performance; the neck, mid-section and hindquarters should be approximately equal in length; the withers should be higher than the croup (uphill), so the mare can lift her front end easily.
2. Breed and sex type: A mare should have her breed's characteristic "look." She should be feminine with a well-defined outline and clean, well-muscled legs.
3. The head: An attractive head is expressive and suited to the mare's body with a large, kind eye.
4. The neck: Look for a neck that rises above the point of the shoulder with a good angle, clean throatlatch and a slight crest.
5. Saddle position: Look for a long, sloping shoulder with clearly pronounced withers that extend well into the back.
6. Frame: The goal is to be able to draw a rectangular frame around the torso and legs. She also needs a smooth top line; a long, powerful, sloping and well-muscled croup; and a strong loin connection.
7. Forelegs: Legs should be clean and well muscled with well-defined strong joints. They need to be straight and stand parallel to each other. A line dropped from the point of the shoulder should bisect the leg evenly.
8. Hind legs: Look for well-muscled and clean hind legs with large, well-defined joints and a strong hock.

When mares are inspected or tested, movements are scored for correctness, impulsion and elasticity. When the mare moves toward you, her legs should move straight ahead without swinging in or winging out. From the side, the mare should move forward with power, bringing up her back and flexing all the joints to create an energetic, forward and fluid impression. The walk should be rhythmical with four, even beats. Her stride should be ground covering, energetic and elastic with the hind hoof print overstepping the fore print.

The trot should have a clear two-beat rhythm and a high level of impulsion, elasticity and balance. A trot with active, well-bending hind legs moving with thrust under the center of gravity is ideal, enabling the shoulder and forequarters to lift and move freely.

Competition-based breeding values come from horses competing in dressage, jumping or events that have been selected for talent in the discipline. You should find Stallions that will improve your mare with traits, such as a good walk or a strong hind leg, so as to score higher than did those of other Stallions in dressage qualities, jumping, or ride ability ■



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