

## **GUIDELINES FOR JUDGING THE “QUALITY OF RIDING” MARK IN CHILDREN COMPETITIONS**

The purpose of these Guidelines is to enable judges to understand the four different criteria of the ‘quality of riding mark’ judges give when judging jointly the performances from the long side:

1. Rider`s Position and Seat,
2. Effectiveness of Aids,
3. Precision,
4. General Impression,

and to show them how to use these criteria in Children competitions. They are not intended to be all-inclusive or to contain absolute rules.

Children competitions must be assessed with the focus on the rider’s seat, the aids and the precision and effectiveness of his riding. The quality of the horse should have no influence on the marks as long as the rider’s seat and the use of his aids are not seen as having a negative effect on the horse’s paces. Only in the mark for General Impression, where the overall picture is assessed, the quality of the horse might have a small impact.

The judge should not hesitate to give very high marks when appropriate. Similar to when judging competitions for 7-year-old horses, the mark for the technical assessment and the ‘quality of riding mark’ may differ.

In the following, the different criteria and possible mistakes are described and proposals for the scoring are given. Please, be aware that some criteria might overlap or one is the consequence of the other, e.g. a well-defined, fluent transition, clearly at the marker, will be the consequence of both: the correct use of the aids as well as of precision in riding.

In these Guidelines, the use of the masculine shall be interpreted to also include the feminine form.

### **RIDER’S POSITION AND SEAT:**

*Many descriptions, mainly to the rider’s seat, were taken from the US ‘Guidelines for Judging Dressage Seat Equitation Classes’.*

What to assess?

The picture of the rider’s seat (head, shoulder, upper body, hips and back, arms and hands, legs and heels) and his body language (good upper body control, elastic vs. stiff or loose or unsteady seat) must be compared to the requirements of a good, well balanced seat. The judge should not be influenced by the body shape of the rider.

Seat: Well balanced, naturally elastic, sitting in centre/deepest part of saddle, smoothly absorbing the movements of the horse

Correct position of upper body, tall and supple

Shoulders balanced over hips  
Head carried over shoulders with chin level  
Ear, shoulder, hip, heel in vertical line to the ground

Minor faults:

Sitting slightly to one side, slightly before/behind the vertical  
Slight stiffness of shoulders or back, rounded back, chin  
Collapsed hip, slightly crooked  
One shoulder higher or rotated against the direction the horse moves to  
Chair seat (Stuhlsitz)

Major faults:

Any of the above taken to extreme  
Rider bounces in the saddle, or totally sits against the movement of the horse

Legs: Centred under body, steady and well stretched down with adequate angle of the knee joint

Heels to be the lowest point  
Thigh rotated in; inside of calf lying close to and lightly on horse's side

Minor faults:

Legs slightly unsteady, too much forward or back  
Lifting of heel to give aid  
Toe pointed out  
Knee momentarily off saddle  
Stirrups too short (use of leg is restricted) or too long (heel is pulled up)  
Loss of stirrup, immediately corrected

Major faults:

Any of above taken to extreme  
Knee permanently pulled up and off saddle or knee overstretched  
Lower legs gripping  
Spur in horse's side or constantly kicking into the horse  
Loss of stirrup, not immediately corrected

Hands and Arms:

Soft fists, hands carried steadily close together with the thumb as highest point, not too high, keeping steady contact with horse's mouth  
Upper arms hanging relaxed, in the vertical, elbows close to the body  
Straight line from elbow through hand to horse's mouth  
Arms following motion of horse's head and neck, maintaining elastic contact

Minor faults:

Hands slightly too high, too low, too wide apart, hands rotated, busy, not elastic, open fists, momentary loss of contact  
Elbows too far back, elbows straight, not close to the body

Major faults:

Any of above taken to extreme  
Hanging, jerking or pulling on mouth, hands constantly bouncing

Major rigidity or tension in arms and hands

Criteria for marking the position and seat:

- 9 - 10: Very good to excellent in all criteria. Outstanding basics. Rider gives impression of being exceptionally effective and harmonious
- 8 - 8.9: No major position flaw and very good basics. Rider might have one of the minor flaws listed above to a minor degree
- 7 - 7.9: Still a very positive picture. Rider may have a few minor flaws, but they do not impede the correctness of the presentation and are not detrimental to the horse
- 6 - 6.9: Rider has several minor position flaws that might spoil the general picture (e.g. hands somewhat too high, rider sitting slightly to one side, knee momentarily off saddle etc.)  
OR the rider sits generally correct with the exception of one basic mistake (e.g. too much use of spurs, permanently poking the horse)
- 5 - 5.9: The rider has several major position faults (e.g. sitting permanently to the outside, hands constantly pounding, unable to control the position of his legs etc.) and/or rides the horse in a detrimental manner (e.g. hard hands, too much use of spurs, unable to absorb the movements of the horse, bouncing in the saddle etc.)
- < 5: Abusive riding, very hard hands permanently pulling on mouth, excessive use of spurs

## **EFFECTIVENESS of AIDS:**

Influence of aids on presentation of the horse acc. to the Scale of Training.

Influence of aids on correct presentation of movements/paces.

Sensitive use of aids.

Independence of rider's seat.

What to assess?

1. Ability of the rider to influence his horse positively and to present him correctly in regard to the Scale of Training. In Children competitions - other than in dressage competitions on higher levels - the focus lies mainly on suppleness, contact, straightness and balance (beginning collection).

The general quality of the horse should be of minor importance.

Exception: Bad or abusive riding that makes the horse lose its rhythm must reduce the mark.

2. Fulfilment of required movements being precise in transitions; preparation/completion of movements; geometry and figures

3. Use of aids (sensitive vs. rough; imperceptible vs. very visible; accurate or poor timing of aids)

4. Independence of rider's seat

5. Impression of a harmonious cooperation between horse and rider

## Minor faults:

Scale of Training not always maintained, e.g.

- momentary stiffening of the horse,
- contact sometimes a little unsteady,
- more engagement of hind legs needed,
- horse not always totally straight, etc.)

Rider not able to execute movements for a 'fairly good' mark or better,

Aids sometimes too visible

Wrong lead, immediately corrected

## Major faults:

Horse not presented according to the Scale of Training, e.g.

- significant rhythm/balance problems due to incorrect and/or abusive riding
- lack of suppleness: tight in back throughout
- serious contact problems: against hand, neck pulled together, above the bit, nose line behind vertical, low poll, open mouth, tongue out to the side, etc.
- lack of impulsion: hind legs not engaged, paces not shown in correct tempo
- very crooked, escaping with the quarters
- not possible to show collection when required

Serious mistakes in movements, paces, transitions, rough riding with very visible aids

Seat not independent, rider hangs permanently on to the reins, clings with the legs

Wrong lead, not immediately corrected

## Criteria for marking the effectiveness of the aids:

- 9 - 10: Horse presentation very good to excellent according to the Scale of Training with sensitive, imperceptible aids. No apparent effort of rider, impression of full harmony between rider and horse  
Potential of the horse shown to its best  
Precise fulfilment of all required movements, no faults
- 8 - 8.9: Effectively presented in a very good, correct form according to the Scale of Training, but not as convincing as above AND  
No major faults, impression of a good cooperation between rider and horse
- 7 - 7.9: Horse is fairly obedient and mostly presented according to the Scale of Training  
a) a few minor flaws or small mistakes in execution, however no basic mistakes, OR  
b) a good presentation with one major mistake (e.g. a wrong lead not immediately corrected)
- 6 - 6.9: Horse is obedient but shows some deficiencies according to the Scale of Training  
a) several minor flaws or recognizable mistakes in execution, however no basic mistakes, OR  
b) a fairly good presentation with one major mistake (see above), OR  
c) inappropriate use of spurs throughout
- 5 - 5.9: Horse is not presented according to the Scale of Training  
Some serious mistakes or resistance with the rider not finding a way to solve the problem  
Excessive use of spurs
- < 5: Horse is permanently off the aids  
Abusive way of riding with a very negative influence on the horse and his performance  
Excessive use of spurs

## PRECISION:

Preparation of movements  
Accuracy of execution of figures  
Execution of movements at markers prescribed  
Maintenance of correct tempo

What to assess?

1. The way the rider prepares the movements (e.g. shoulder fore vs. quarters leading, collection etc.)
2. Whether movements are executed accurately (e.g. size of voltes, correct corners, serpentines etc.)
3. Whether movements are shown at the markers, on the lines prescribed
4. Whether the rider shows/keeps the tempo required (e.g. working trot/canter vs. collected trot/canter)

Minor faults:

Inaccurate beginning/ending of movements (e.g. horse not straightened before corner after shoulder-in)  
Movements/ transitions shown slightly before/after the marker prescribed, not totally on required line  
Corners slightly cut, serpentines with the horse going too deep into the corners  
Horse shown with slight outside flexion; slightly crooked before corners  
Tempo not always maintained or not always shown correctly (e.g. working trot instead of collected trot)  
Patterns not correctly executed (e.g. ½ voltes or voltes too large/too small)  
Break of pace, wrong canter, changing canter, immediately corrected

Major faults:

Any of above taken to extreme  
Many serious mistakes in the execution of movements, paces, transitions; significant resistance  
Break of pace, wrong canter, changing canter, not immediately corrected

Criteria for marking Precision:

- 9 - 10: All movements, transitions, corners and lines executed with very good to excellent precision (e.g. size of voltes, straightness of diagonal lines to markers prescribed, no. of steps in simple change ...), AND  
All movements and transitions very well prepared and completed, AND  
Maintaining the correct tempo throughout (e.g. difference between working and collected trot), AND  
No faults in execution of test
- 8 - 8.9: All movements and transitions executed at markers prescribed, AND  
Good understanding of riding corners and correct lines, AND  
Movements and transitions well prepared and completed, AND  
Maintaining the correct tempo, AND  
No major faults, possibly a few minor flaws in execution of test
- 7 - 7.9: Most of the movements executed more or less at markers prescribed

- Mostly correct understanding of riding corners and lines  
Most of the movements and transitions more or less well prepared and completed  
Mostly maintaining the correct tempo  
Some minor technical execution problems, OR generally very precise riding but with one major mistake in execution, immediately corrected
- 6 - 6.9: Some basic technical problems that make it impossible to present the horse in a more than just satisfactory way with regard to precision
- 5 - 5.9: Some problems in technical riding make it impossible to show a precisely ridden, harmonious test
- < 5: Many major faults in a detrimental manner (e.g. horse breaks pace, no walk sequence in simple changes, stuck with both legs in turn on haunches, no halt during salute ...) and/or tension or resistance of the horse have a very negative effect on the performance

## GENERAL IMPRESSION:

Harmony of presentation  
Correctness of paces  
Ability to present the horse favourably

What to assess?

1. The lightness and ease of the presentation, free from any tension or serious basic or technical mistakes, as well as the harmonious partnership between rider and horse
2. This mark contains also the correctness of the paces. If the rider is having a detrimental effect on the paces, causing the horse to have e.g. a lateral walk, a permanently unbalanced trot or unclear rhythm in canter, the presentation cannot get a high mark for the general impression whereas a very good, elastic horse might positively influence this mark.
3. Whether the rider is able to present his horse at its best which requires already a high degree of riding skills

Minor faults:

Minor flaws in any of the criteria mentioned above: seat, effectiveness of aids and precision  
Slight technical mistakes, moments of tension  
Walk not always in clear four beat, trot not always fully balanced, canter slightly unbalanced or unclear in rhythm  
Rider is not yet able to present all strong points of his horse

Major faults:

Significant problems in any of the criteria mentioned above: seat, effectiveness of aids and precision  
Many technical mistakes, significant tension  
Walk ambling, trot not regular on both reins, canter too unbalanced or unclear, very difficult to control  
Rider has a detrimental effect on the horse's paces and movements

Criteria for marking the General Impression:

- 9 - 10: Very good to excellent in all criteria mentioned above, very good to excellent understanding of cooperation between rider and horse, flawless presentation, horse ridden to the best of its ability
- 8 - 8.9: Fulfilling all criteria required in a very good/good way, very good/good partnership between rider and horse, very correct presentation, horse nearly ridden to the best of its ability
- 7 - 7.9: Good cooperation between rider and horse, minor technical problems
- 6 - 6.9: Some basic problems and technical mistakes; the rider is not able to present his horse in more than a just satisfactory way.
- 5 - 5.9: Several problems in all criteria mentioned above. Many basic and technical mistakes and/or some resistance of the horse. The presentation lacks harmony
- < 5: Many significant problems in all criteria mentioned above. Many major faults and/or resistance.  
The rider has a negative effect on the performance. The presentation lacks harmony throughout.