

Equipment Check Process for Western Dressage

Once the exhibitor leaves the arena, the exhibitor must remain mounted until they reach the C2 Steward or equipment inspector. At that time, the exhibitor will dismount for the equipment inspection. Competitors will be asked to drop the bridle of the horse, removing the bit to below the mouth of the horse. A metal detector and/or magnet may be used to detect the presence of metal in nosebands. Random pulling of leg wraps will also occur at this time. See also WD119.

General Information:

- Tack and bits on both sides of the horse of a minimum of one third (1/3) of the horses in each class/test must be inspected immediately as the horse leaves the arena.
- New disposable gloves must be available for and used by bit inspectors if a mouthpiece must be handled by the inspector.
- Use the proper tools and maintain cleanliness of the tools between horses. Hand sanitizer is very easy to carry, and the exhibitors really do appreciate seeing it used every time before a bit check if a mouthpiece has previously been touched. Same with cleaning the measuring device. Hand sanitizer and/or a small spray bottle of rubbing alcohol works great.
- Exhibitors must drop the bridle of the horse, removing the bit to below the horse's mouth. **RIDER MUST DISMOUNT PRIOR TO DROPPING BRIDLE.**
- Checking of the bridle must be done with the greatest caution, as some horses are very touchy and sensitive about their mouths.
- Random pulling of protective "polo" style leg wraps will also occur at this time.
- Any evidence of blood on the horse's mouth or sides or the addition of substances or devices behind protective "polo" leg wraps will result in elimination of the entry for that class/test.

Following is an efficient process to conduct an equipment check:

1. Discuss with the judge the manner of notification if evidence of abuse or illegal equipment is found.
2. Find a safe area that is fairly close to the exit gate, but out of the way of the next entry into the ring to conduct the checks. Keep the check area consistent so the exhibitors always know where to go upon exiting their test.
3. There is no rush, so be sure to tell the exhibitor to take their time. Sometimes the exhibitor is in a hurry to get to their next ride, and they may have an assistant drop the bridle for you. Some riders need a step stool to dismount and/or re-mount. Give them a chance to get one.
4. All riders **MUST** dismount before dropping the bridle. This is **NOT** optional.
5. The rider (usually) dismounts on the near (left) side of the horse, and the steward should be positioned out of the way on the off (right) side of the horse. Ask the rider to please drop the bridle.

6. At this time, the steward is looking at the bridle and outside of the bit. The curb strap/chain is in plain view. The steward can see the horse's mouth, outside corners of the lips, reins and rein attachments, snaffle bit hobble (if used), curb strap/chain and nose band/cavesson/pencil bosal. You are also looking at the rings of the snaffle and the shanks of the curb for size/length at this time.
7. If a noseband is used, it must be a pencil bosal type or smooth leather. Check the tightness of the noseband before the bridle is dropped. If you can plainly see that it is not tight, you do not need to touch it at all. If it looks to be tightly adjusted, gently feel to see that you can get 2 fingers (placed side by side) between the side jaws of the horse and the noseband strap. If it is adjusted too tightly, advise the exhibitor that it should not be tight. Often this can easily be found and corrected in a casual pre-check in the warm-up area.
8. Many riders will undo the curb strap/chain before dropping the bridle. The steward should have taken note before it is undone to make sure that the chain is not twisted and lays flat. The curb strap/chain should not make contact with the jaw when the reins are loose and two fingers are placed side-by-side between the curb strap/chain and the jaw. If there is a problem with the curb chain or strap, ask the handler to leave the bridle on the horse, and take a picture of it with your phone. Also explain the problem to the exhibitor at this time. Then proceed with the bridle drop.
9. It is a good idea to ask the rider to leave a rein over the horse's neck while the bridle is dropped.
10. As the bridle is being lowered so that the bit is below the horse's mouth, the steward should hold his/her right hand a few inches below the mouthpiece so that if something drops out it will be caught in the hand.
11. It is also a good idea to hold your left hand between the horse's head and your head. This is to protect you if the horse tosses his head as the bridle is dropped.
12. It is recommended that you DO NOT touch the bit or bridle until it is removed from the horse.
13. NEVER attempt to assist the handler with the bridle removal unless they ask for your assistance, or if there is a safety issue involved.
14. Once the bridle is dropped so that the bit is below the horse's mouth, look at the mouthpiece. If you suspect that the bars might be too thin, you should measure them at this time. If the mouthpiece is of illegal formation, you must take a picture of it with your phone and explain the problem to the exhibitor. The judge should be notified at this time. The same process is taken if there is blood on the mouthpiece. The judge should confirm the findings if there is a problem.
15. Only touch the mouthpiece of the bit if absolutely necessary. Often it is prudent to hold a shank as you inspect the mouthpiece to keep it still. If you must touch the mouthpiece, you should use a clean exam glove. Always keep disinfectant gel/spray on hand to disinfect your hands and measurement tools between each horse to prevent cross contamination.
16. Check the curb chain to make sure that is at least ½" wide and does not have any prongs or rough areas on the inside. If a curb strap is used, make sure that it is flexible and does not have anything other than smooth leather on the inside. If it is not flexible, check it with a metal detector to determine the presence of a metal bar between the leather layers. You will not be able to tell by looking.

17. Also check the noseband to make sure that it is flexible and that there are there are no metal studs on the inside. There should only be smooth leather on the inside of the noseband.
18. When the bars of a bit are wrapped in latex, they can sometimes exceed the maximum $\frac{3}{4}$ " thickness allowed measured 1" in from the side of the bit. Notify the exhibitor of this if a bit is close to exceeding, or only slightly exceeds the allowed measurements due to the wrap.
19. If the length of the bit shank is questionable, it should be measured using a vertical line from the upper most part of the headstall slot to the point of rein pull. – see illustration.
20. To check a bosal, ask the handler to remove it from the horse's head. Look for rubs on the jaws and on the front of the face. Check the flexibility of the bosal, **and if there is a lack of flexibility** use a metal detector to check for metal in the core of the bosal. It is OK if the metal detector alerts on the end ball of the bosal, since this area does not affect the integrity of the bosal in any way. Often there is a metal ring in the ball that is used in the making of the bosal.
21. Smooth electrical tape on the sides and nose part of the bosal are ok. Anything other than smooth electrical tape is disallowed. If the tape is twisted or applied in any way other than a smooth wrap, it is disallowed, and the judge should be notified. **Electrical tape should also be felt to ensure there are no foreign substances underneath.**
22. Tell the handlers "Thank you" after you are through checking the bridle and tell them they may now put the bridle back on if they desire. Sometimes the horse is haltered at this time. When you are sure they have control of the horse, go ahead and do the walk-around.
23. Walk around the front or the back to check the equipment on both sides, and to check for cuts on the legs or sides of the horse.
24. If you find a spur cut or evidence of abuse, take a picture of it with your phone and notify the judge. The judge will come out and view the horse if abuse is found.
25. If the horse has nicked his coronary band or cannon, just tell the handler so they can treat it. If you see any rubs in the girth area, corners of the mouth from the bit, let the handler know so they can take action to protect the area.
26. Thank the exhibitor to let them know that your check is complete.
27. This entire process is very quick, and the exhibitors usually appreciate an efficient and smooth equipment check.
28. This process has worked very well for many stewards and is very fast and thorough. Always remember that you are the steward of the horse, and the popularity or notoriety of the rider is of no concern. All horses are equal in a check and deserve the same respectful exam.

