

Dressage (pronounced *dress-ahzh*) is a French term which means “training” and the goal is to create a relaxed and effortless performance by development of a horse’s natural athletic ability with minimal aids by the rider. During the Renaissance and up until the advent of the automobile, European aristocrats displayed their horses’ training in equestrian pageants. Today, riders display their horses’ training through competitions, from amateur to the Olympics. The sequential training techniques of the great European riding masters of the Renaissance has changed little over the years as classical dressage is still considered the basis of trained modern dressage. In today’s modern competitions, the *passage* (collected, high stepping trot) and *piaffe* (trot in place) are still performed.

Lipizzans are renowned for the "school jumps," or "airs above the ground" which are a series of higher-level dressage maneuvers where the horse leaves the ground. These airs comprise of the *levade*, *courbette*, *ballotade*, *croupade*, *capriole* and *mezair* and require that the horse is trained through all levels of dressage, include the *passage* and *piaffe* before attempting the airs.

Not every Lipizzan can do school jumps and of those that do, rarely is a horse taught more than one jump. Collection is the key to school jumps and horses are usually taught each air on the long rein without a rider, which is less strenuous for the animal, before asking the horse to perform the movement under a rider.

The airs are derived from the *piaffe*, the trot in place. In the *pesade* and *levade*, the horse raises his forehand off the ground and tucks his forelegs evenly, carrying all his weight on the hindquarters. In the *pesade*, the horse forms a 45 degree angle to the ground while in the *levade*, the horse coils his loins and seeks closer to the ground and holds the position at 30-35 degrees and requires much more effort from the horse. Neither of these movements are the same as rearing – the move requires precise control, excellent balance and a great deal of strength and are the product of correct training, rather than resistance from the horse.

From the *pesade* and *levade*, the other airs evolve. In the *courbette*, the horse raises his forehand off the ground, tucks up his forelegs evenly, and then jumps forward on his hindlegs, usually three or four leaps, before allowing the forelegs to touch down,. The record number of leaps is 10.

The *capriole* is one of the most difficult jumps. The horse jumps from a raised position of the forehand, straight up into the air, and kicks out with the hindlegs and lands on all four legs, more or less at the same time.

Other movements, rarely practiced at the Spanish Riding School, include the *croupade* and *ballotade*. These movements look similar to the *capriole* but are distinct in that in the *croupade*, the horse, while remaining parallel to the ground, does not kick out at the height of elevation, but keeps his hind legs tucked tightly under. In the *ballotade*, again the horse rises into the air like the *capriole*, but does not kick out and you can see its shoes if watching from behind, but the horse is not asked to kick out.

The *mezair* was originally called the *courbette* by the old dressage masters, and it is no longer practiced at the Spanish Riding School. In the *mezair*, the horse rears up from the *pesade* or *levade*, and strikes out with its forelegs. Unlike the *pesade* and *levade*, the horse moves forward with each successive movement and touches the ground with its front legs before pushing up again.