

A Visual Guide to Dressage Attire 2026

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE USEF RULES
PERTAINING TO RIDER DRESS

This Learning Module is to help everyone, competitors, judges, technical delegates and competition management to navigate through the dress rules for 2026.

During the Learning Module, the wording of the rules are in standard text for the:

USEF Rules

and our comments are in Italic text:

Comments

We have given examples of different helmets, coats, spurs etc. in order to give everyone more depth in the explanation of the intent of the rules.

The 2026 Rules

1. Dress. The Dress Code provisions of this section apply to all classes and levels, including Championships, at USEF Licensed-USDF recognized dressage competitions.

FEI Dress rules apply only to FEI recognized dressage events (CDIs).

This means that any class, any level in a USEF/USDF competition follows these rules. If the competition is a CDI, in the CDI classes, the FEI Dress Rule prevail.

1.1 Protective Headgear







Protective headgear must be in compliance with the accepted testing standards published on the Federation's website. Protective headgear must carry the applicable quality testing tag and or label.

<https://www.usef.org/forms-pubs/wGqEFLaPc60/list-of-applicable-international>

As TDs, we are not required to inspect any helmet worn by a competitor unless requested by a judge from C or in the situation of an accident.

USEF Information concerning acceptable Protective Headgear

“Protective headgear,” as defined in the USEF General Rule 801, must comply with at least one of the international testing standards listed below. In addition, the product must have passed corresponding quality testing (quality testing monitors the ongoing quality of the product according to the original standard). Products complying with the above will be marked and labeled accordingly. Testing Standards and corresponding quality testing may be contained on the same or separate labels.

International Testing Standards:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• American: ASTM F1163-04a (2011 or later)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Certified through SEI• British Standard PAS 015 – 2011 (or later)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Certified through BSI or IC• European VG1 01.040 2014-12 (or later)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Certified through BSI or IC• Snell – 2016 (or later)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ ISO accredited lab, not 3rd party tested
Quality Control Labels
   

1.1 Protective Headgear

From the time horses are officially admitted to the competition grounds by competition management, anyone mounted on a horse at any time on the competition grounds,

- including non-competing riders,
- riders on non-competing horses,
- mounted participants in exhibition classes,
- and those competing in all classes and tests, including Para Dressage tests,

must wear protective headgear as defined by this rule and otherwise in compliance with GR801.

1.1 Protective Headgear

The harness must be secured and properly fitted. Any rider violating this rule at any time must immediately be prohibited from further riding until the headgear is properly in place.



Mounted/secured/fitted.



*Mounted/secured but
not properly fitted.*



Protective headgear may be the same as or a coordinating color with the coat, and may include contrast coloring, accent, and crystal decoration. See DR136 for dress code rules for exhibitions.



Coordinating colors between the helmet, coat and boots can occur.



All acceptable helmets.

2.2 Competitors are permitted to wear a hat cover and a rain coat, with or without a riding jacket, in inclement weather.



Hat covers can be any color or design.

1.2 Coats and Jackets

A short riding jacket or cutaway coat (modified tailcoat) with short tails is permitted at any level of competition. A tailcoat is permitted in all classes above Fourth level, in the FEI test for 7-year old horses and in tests for FEI Juniors.



Any single color jacket or tailcoat is permitted and may have subtle pin striping, checks or tweeds.



The color of stretch and/or breathable underarm or side of the body panel in a jacket may be black or the same color as the garment fabric.



Examples of Tweed Riding Jackets



Subtle Tweed allowed.

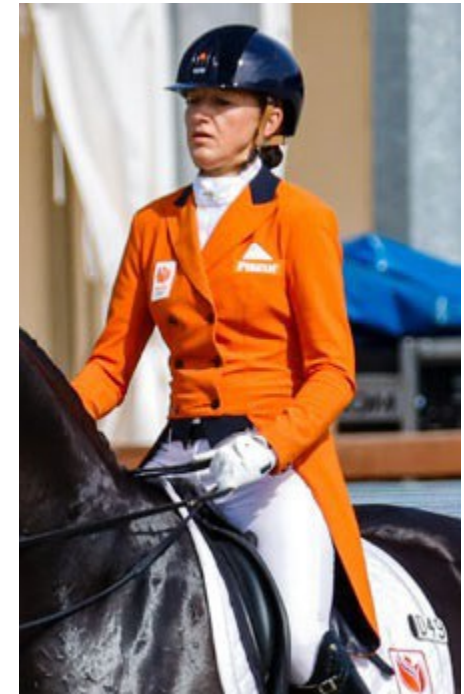


Subtle Tweed allowed.



Not subtle Tweed and not allowed.

Coat colors have a wider range...



These are all examples of legal coats.



These coats are all legal.



Striped or multi-colored jackets or coats are not permitted.



***Stretch/breathable underarm or side of the body panels are not considered striped or multi-colored coats. ***

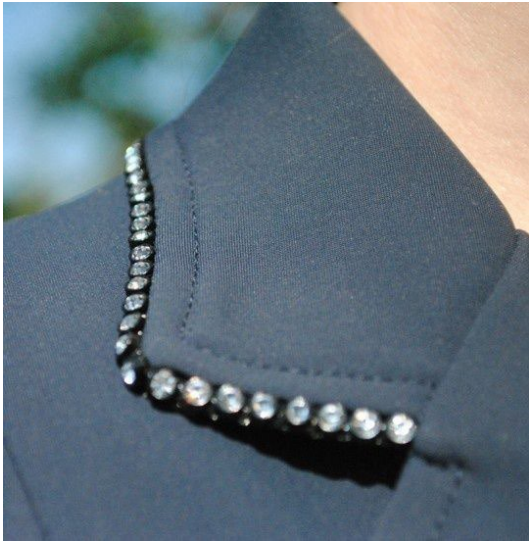
These coats are not subtle and are not allowed.



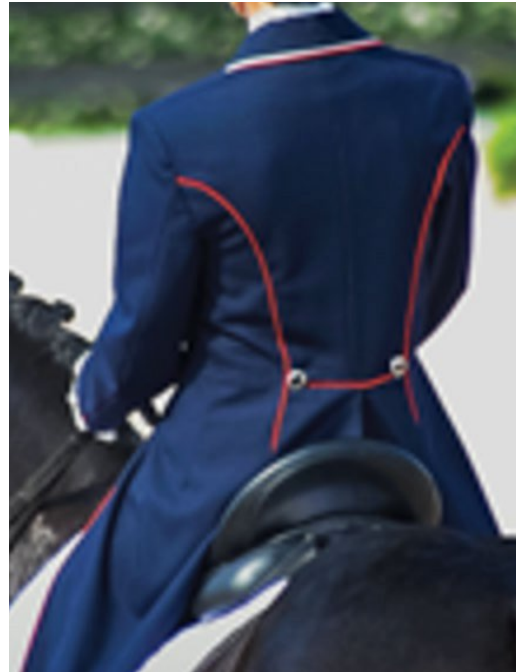
Not subtle pinstriping or tweed pattern – not allowed.



Tasteful and discreet accents, such as a collar of a different hue, modest piping, or crystal decorations, are permitted.



Tasteful and discreet accents, such as a collar of a different hue, modest piping, or crystal decorations, are permitted.



These are permitted.



These are permitted.





The trim on this coat's sleeves is borderline. Some may feel that the cuffs are not discrete and tasteful and others may feel that they are. When in doubt, rule on the side of the competitor.

For TDs, if there is concern expressed concerning this or any type of coat, this should be included in the TD Report and include photos.

Riders competing in Level 1 dressage competitions or in Opportunity classes are not required to wear a riding jacket or coat. If coats are not worn, the same shirt requirements of DR 102.1.5 apply.



1.3 Vests

Vests of any type are permitted but not required. Vests, including cooling vests, may be worn underneath a riding jacket or when jackets are waived.



1.3 Vests.

1.3.1. Per GR801, a body protecting or inflatable vest, specifically designed for use in equestrian sport, may be worn in any division or class without penalty from the judge.



These have the connecting strap that releases the inflation device and it is attached to the saddle.

1.3 Vests.

1.3.2. When the only warm-up available is open to all horses and riders, riders with safety concerns are encouraged to wear an orange vest. This applies to safety concerns of any kind with horse and rider.



1.4 Breeches and Jodhpurs.

White, light or dark colored breeches or jodhpurs are permitted in competition.

Bright colors or patterns are not permitted.

Contrast piping is allowed.



Breeches and Jodphurs



Breeches



Jodphurs have a foot strap



Footstrap is around instep of the boot.

You wear jodphurs with or without garters.



Breeches or jodphurs may be of any white, light or dark color but not bright or patterned.



Bright colors not allowed.

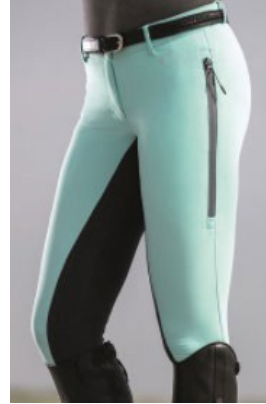
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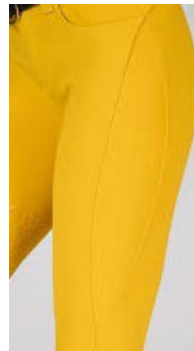
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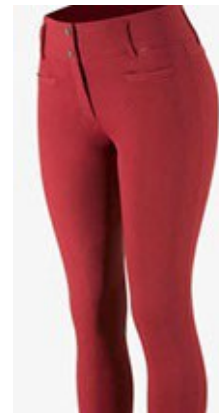
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8



9



10



1-4 are all bright colors and not allowed.

5-10 are all colors that are not bright.
They are allowed.

Patterns are not allowed.



1.5 Shirts and Neckwear.

Shirts with tie, choker, stock tie, (1-5) or integrated stand-up collar(6-7) are required.



1



2



3



4



5



6

7



Ties, chokers, or stock ties may be any color.



Shirts may be of any color.



Shirts may be of any color, with or without pattern and must have sleeves and a collar.

...without neckwear... Which of these is considered neckwear?



Left is an integrated collar, center is a choker, right is a stock tie.

The integrated collar is legal as is. The choker may or may not be 'integrated' and if removable is neckwear and must be removed.

The stock is neckwear and must be removed.

Must the collar be open?



The rule does not specify that the collar has to be open.

Common sense says that it might make the rider cooler to ride with it open...

BUT IT IS NOT REQUIRED.

When a rider is not wearing a jacket, removable neckwear is not allowed.



2. Weather Conditions.

In locations with high average heat and humidity on the date of a competition, competition management may publish in its prize list that jackets will be waived for the duration of the competition. Alternatively, management may announce prior to or during a competition that competitors may show without jackets when extreme heat and/or humidity is forecasted. This waiver applies to national classes at a USEF licensed-USDF recognized dressage competition.



Weather Conditions Rule cont'

Also, when very cold weather conditions are forecasted on the date of a competition, competition management may publish in its prize list that windbreakers or parkas may be worn, rather than riding jackets, for the duration of the competition. Alternatively, management may announce prior to or during a competition that competitors may wear windbreakers or parkas rather than riding jackets when very cold weather is forecasted



2. Weather Conditions.

2.1 Competitors must wear protective headgear and shirt with sleeves and collar, without neckwear. T-shirts are not permitted.

This rider has a sleeveless shirt and is wearing neckwear. This would be fine for the warm-up but not in the competition ring.



2. Weather Conditions.

2.2 Competitors are permitted to wear a hat cover and a rain coat, with or without a riding jacket, in inclement weather.



Equipment needs to be checked under the long coat.

1.6 Boots & Half Chaps.

For tests or classes at Fourth level or below, riders may wear tall boots or paddock/jodhpur boots with half-chaps or garters, matching the color of their boots, and made of smooth leather or leather-like material.



1.6 Boots & Half Chaps.

... boots with half-chaps or garters, matching the color of their boots, and made of smooth leather or leather-like material.

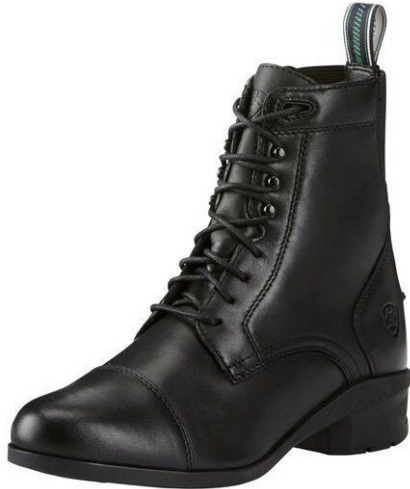


Half Chaps that are not leather like material are not allowed.



Quilted material

Paddock or Jodphur boots



Tall English-style riding boots, including dress or field boots or variations thereof, are required above Fourth Level.



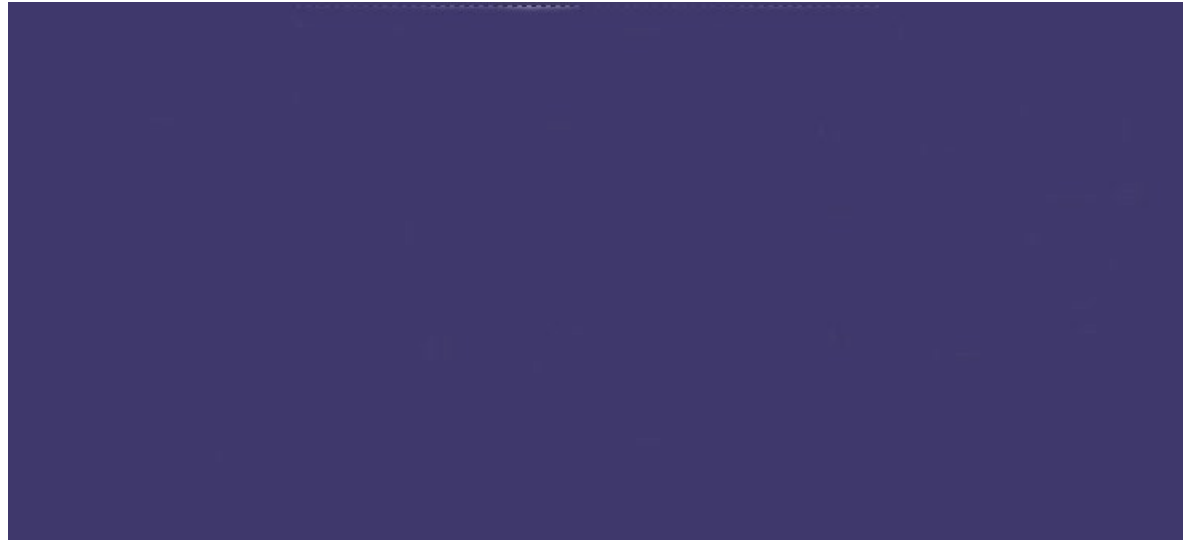
Boots of coordinating color(s), with or without accents, are permitted. Boots/shoes worn while riding anywhere on the competition grounds must have a distinguishable heel. (GR 801.9)



A rider could have a coat of this color with boots that match.



Purple





The rule says boots... It does not specify what the boots look like. These are all legal but...



These are all legal riding boots.

1.7 Gloves.

White or light colored gloves are recommended and any solid color is permitted at Fourth Level and below. Gloves are required in FEI tests or level and must be white, off white or same color as the coat.



1.8 Military.

Current and retired members of the Armed Services and police units may ride in the uniform of their service. All riders who choose to wear Armed Services or police uniform must wear protective headgear as defined in DR120.1.1 and in compliance with GR801. Members of the Armed Services or police units may wear summer uniforms if jackets are waived.



Legal or not legal?



Not legal as the rider has no helmet.



1.9 Pas de Deux and Quadrille Attire.

Riders in Pas de Deux and Quadrille classes are exempt from the dress code requirements of DR120.1.2, 1.4, 1.5, and 1.7. However, headgear and boots as required in DR120.1.1 and 1.6 must be worn. Riders must follow the dress requirements outlined in the USDF Rules and Guidelines for Quadrille Competitions and for Pas de Deux.



Batman has a helmet on under the costume.



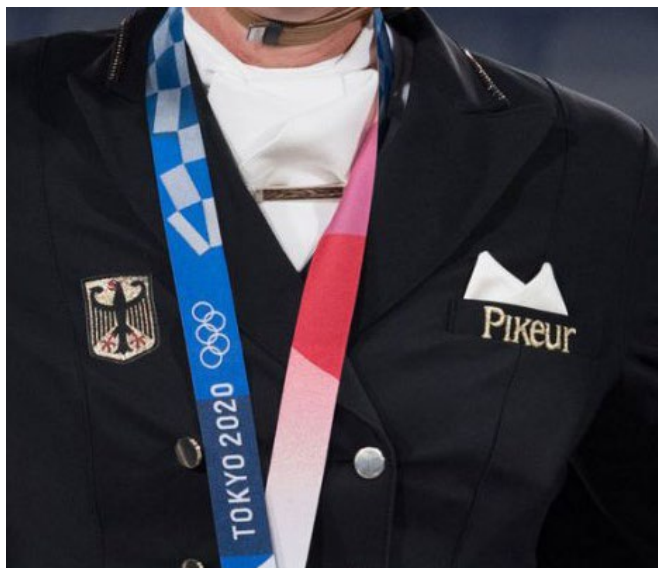
DR 136.3 Horses used in exhibition classes, demonstrations and retirement ceremonies are subject to the provisions of GR839, but are exempt from the dress and saddlery rules of the competition, except that protective headgear is required for all mounted participants in exhibition classes.

Demonstrations that are educational or for entertainment purposes (e.g. vaulting, historical reenactments, trick riding) are exempted from the protective headgear rules except for those competitors riding horses who are entered in the competition.



3. Sponsor logo and Non-Sponsor Logo or Brand Marks.

When sponsorship is permitted in accordance with GR1306, the name and/or logo of the individual's sponsor(s) may appear on each of the two sides of jackets and top garments at the height of breast pockets not exceeding 80 cm² in size. Logos described under DR121 are also permitted. No other sponsor logos are permitted on any garments (including jackets or coats, vests, shirts, or stock ties).



When sponsorship is permitted in accordance with GR1306, the name and/or logo of the individual's sponsor(s) may appear on each of the two sides of jackets and top garments at the height of breast pockets not exceeding 80 cm² in size.

The name and/or logo of an individual's sponsor may also appear on the rider's protective headgear if permitted in accordance with GR1306 and DR121.1.b.



3.1 Dress may include non-sponsor logos or brand marks of any size. Refer to GR1306.



Difference between a Brand Mark (Ariat) and a logo (USEF).



3.2 The name and/or logo of an individual's sponsor may also appear on the rider's protective headgear if permitted in accordance with GR1306 and DR121.1.b.



4. Spurs. Spurs must be made of metal. Only English-style spurs are permitted... If spurs are worn, a separate spur must be worn on each boot.

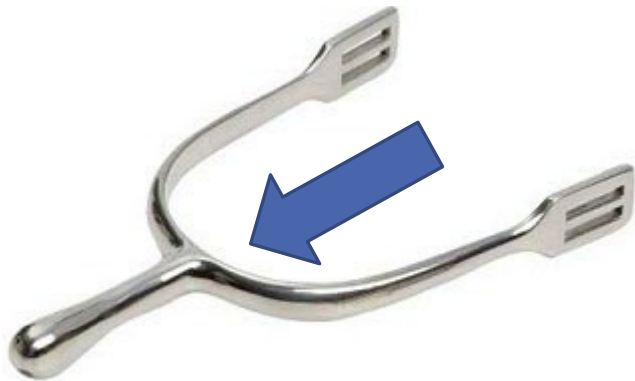


This spur is not permitted.

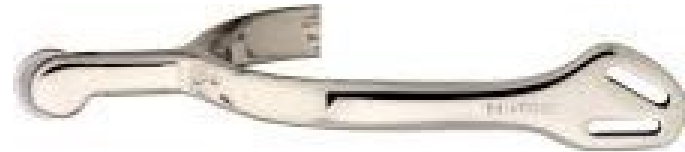
Western Spurs are not allowed.



4.1 The shank must be either curved or straight pointing directly back from the center of the spur when on the rider's boot. If the shank is curved, the spurs must be worn only with the shank directed downwards.



Shank not straight back from center of spur.

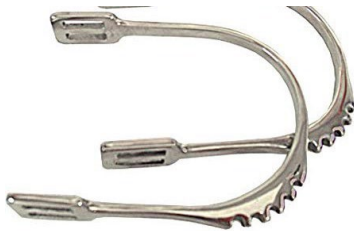


Shank pointing up is not legal.

However, swan necked spurs are permitted.



The inside arm of the spur must be smooth and one or both arms may have rubber covers.



Not Allowed



If rowels are used, they must be blunt/smooth and free to rotate.



Spikes are a NO!

Metal spurs with round hard plastic knobs on the shank are permitted (“Impuls” spur).



“Dummy” spurs (without shank) are permitted. Armless spurs are permitted.



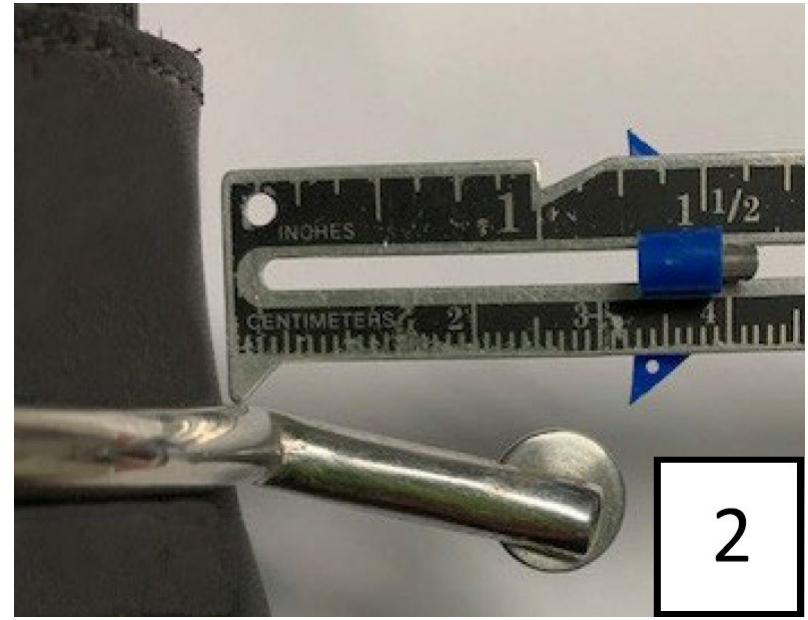
4.2 Spurs are optional during competition in FEI Tests.

4.3 The maximum length for spurs in all classes except the FEI Children tests and the FEI Pony tests is 5.08cm (2 inches) including rowels. **Only blunt metal spurs (i.e., with no rowels) no longer than 3.5cm are permitted for FEI Pony Rider tests and FEI tests for Children.** Spur length is measured from the base to the end of the shank.

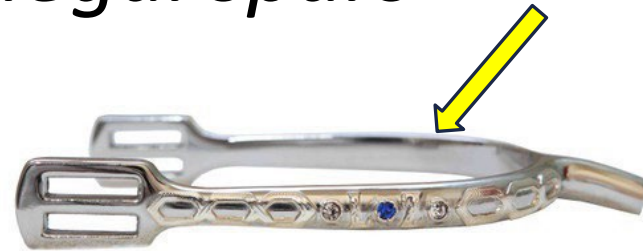
4.4 Offset spurs without rowel are permitted for riders having an appropriate Federation Dispensation/ Classification Certificate.



The length of the spur is measured from the base to the end of the shank (#1) for all except FEI Pony Rider tests and FEI tests for Children. For those classes, it is measured from the boot to the end of the shank (#2).



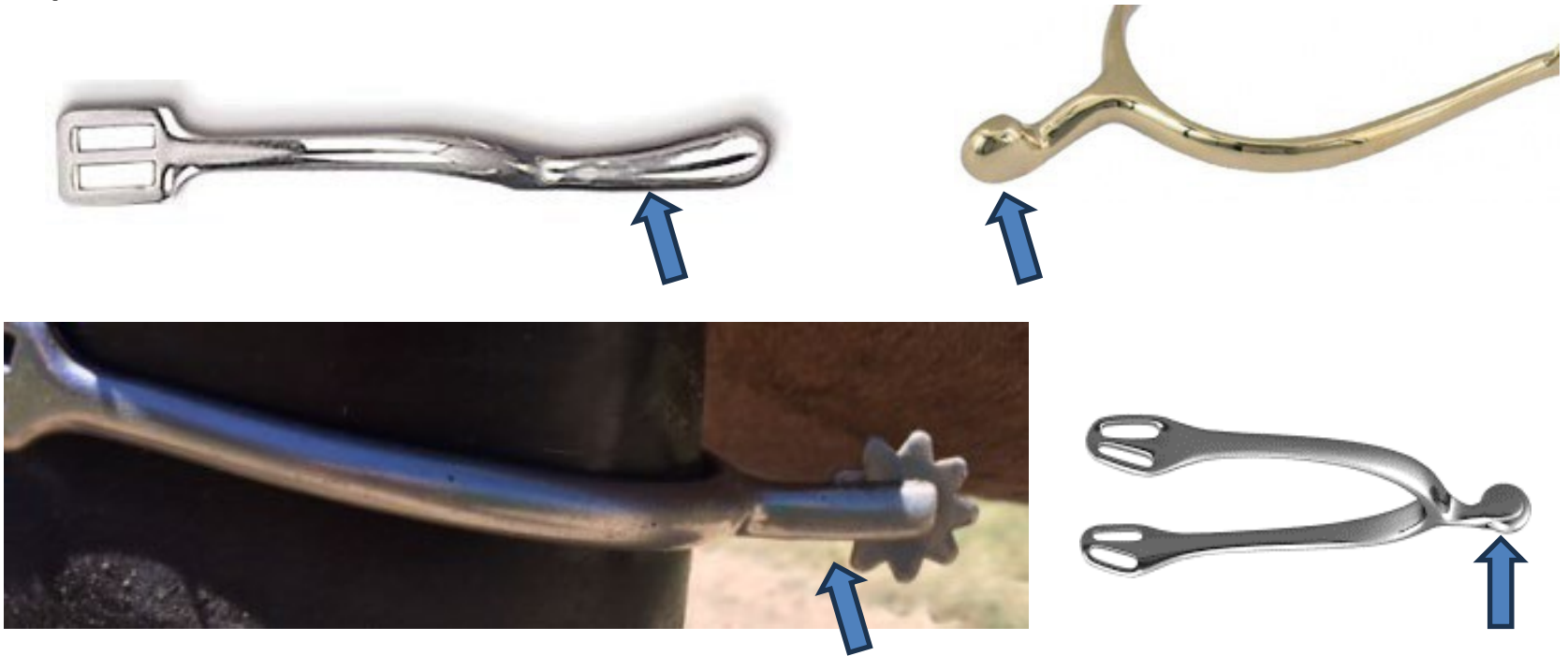
Variations of legal spurs



The inside arm of the spur must be smooth on the side touching the horse.



Spurs with issues...



The shank is pointing up in each of these spurs. Very often riders do not realize they are putting their spurs on their boots upside down. This will result in elimination.



This spur is put on upside down. The flat portion of the shank should be on the top and the curved area of the shank should be on the bottom.

Here is a visual aid for recognizing up from down when putting straps on and then spurs on boots...



Look at the shank first. If the shank is straight when you look at the spur where the spur strap runs through it, the top should be angled and bottom should be flat. This is an additional indication that the spur is the correct side up.



When put on upside down the flat top of the branch spur attachment area is on the bottom and the roller curves upward.

Spur Straps – there are no specifics about color or material of spur straps.



Position of the spurs on the boots



Spurs were intended to be level on the boots, which is why many boots have a built-in spur rest.

But a 'Not level' spur is not illegal. It just indicates a sloppy method of wearing the spurs.



5. Electronic Communication Devices.

Earphones and/or other electronic communication devices are strictly prohibited while competing and such usage is penalized by elimination. Electronic devices that transmit and/or receive information may be used in the stabling area and in warm up areas.

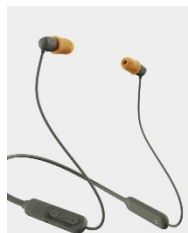
Only one earphone or similar device is permitted while mounted.

The unsafe use of electronic devices, as determined by the competition Technical Delegate in their sole discretion, including cell phones, with or without earphones/buds, while mounted is prohibited in all areas designated for schooling and exercise, and while lungeing horses on competition grounds.

Exception: medical devices, such as hearing aids are allowed to be used for the medical condition for which they are prescribed.

5.1 Electronic devices are permitted for Para Dressage riders if stated on their Federation Dispensation/Classification Certificate.

Review of the earpiece rule



5. Electronic Communication Devices. The use of earphones and/or other electronic communication devices is strictly prohibited while competing and such usage is penalized by elimination. There is no penalty for having cell phones or other electronic devices worn or carried in clothing while competing as long as they are not in use. Electronic devices that transmit and/or receive information may be used in the stabling area and in warm up areas; however, only one earphone or similar device is permitted while mounted or while lunging.



The unsafe use of electronic devices, as determined by the competition Technical Delegate in their sole discretion, including cell phones, with or without earphones/buds, while mounted is prohibited in all areas designated for schooling and exercise, and while lunging horses on competition grounds. Exception: medical devices, such as hearing aids are allowed to be used for the medical condition for which they are prescribed.



A rider may have one earpiece in. Bone Conducting Earpieces (left) are allowed and they could wear one on either side as they do not go in the ear or cover the ear.

**Be aware that the one on the right is labeled/sold as Bone Conducting but it sits in/over the ear. They could have one of these but not two. They will argue that they are bone conducting but they are not what was included in the rule. The issue is that it sits over the ear and deadens sound no matter what it is called.



6. Federation Dispensation/Classification Certificates

Individuals holding Federation Dispensation/Classification Certificates may be allowed exceptions. See DR307.

All exceptions to required dress must be listed on the rider's Federation Dispensation/Classification Certificate. BOD 6/28/21 Effective 12/1/21

USEF Dispensation/Classification Certificates and Federation Presidential Modification Letters

Riders with a diagnosed permanent disability who require the use of compensatory aids or adaptive equipment must hold a Federation Dispensation/Classification Certificate indicating their International (FEI) or their National (Federation) classification status. A copy of an athlete's Dispensation/Classification Certificate listing all of his or her allowed compensating aids and adaptive equipment must be included with the riders entry, with a copy then attached to each of their Dressage sheets for the Judge's reference. A copy must remain with the entry records for review by the Technical Delegate.

Athletes in FEI Para Dressage tests must have a current Federation Dispensation/Classification Certificate which indicates their Classification status to be eligible to participate.

Riders who do not submit a current Federation Dispensation/Classification Certificate or a Federation Presidential Modification letter to the competition secretary cannot compete within any modifications, compensatory aids, or dispensations to the rules in DR Chapter 1. Federation affidavits cannot be used to compete with modifications or compensatory aids when either the Federation Dispensation/Classification Certificate or Presidential Modification is not available.

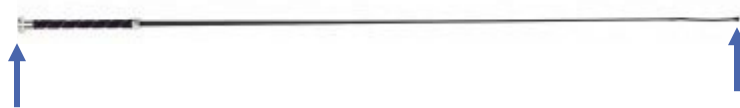
7. Back braces, wrist braces, and similar protective wraps that are designed to be worn for therapeutic or protective purposes while riding or unmounted may be worn underneath or outside of clothing in competition or schooling.

Body bands, straps, positional devices, and other devices designed to aid rider position are not permitted in competition or schooling.



DR 121.17. Whips. *(Although whips are in DR 121, we will mention them here also)*

The length of the lash is included in measurements of the length of the whip.



For schooling the rider while mounted is permitted to carry one whip that is no longer than 120 cm (47.2 inches) or 100 cm (39.4 inches) for FEI Pony Riders.

One whip no longer than 120 cm (47.2 inches) may be carried in all classes except, under penalty of elimination, USEF/USDF Championships, USEF National Dressage Championships, USEF High Performance Championships, and USEF High Performance qualifying and selection trials. Exception: Competitors riding side-saddle may carry a whip no longer than 120 cm (47.2 inches) in USEF/USDF Championships.

A whip may be carried in any equitation class of any level, in any competition including an Equitation class at the Regional Finals. Any equitation class, anywhere, any level, any time.

One whip no longer than 120 cm (47.2 inches) may be carried in all qualifying classes (including NAYRC and NAJC) unless such use is otherwise prohibited by FEI or Federation rules or selection procedures for the classes. However, when a whip is permitted for FEI Pony Tests, the maximum length is 100 cm (39.4 inches).

An adjustable-length whip may not be carried by a mounted rider.

The use of one lungeing whip is permitted only when lungeing. There is no restriction on the length of whip permitted for working a horse in hand or on the lunge.

Dressage Whip (top), Neon Whip, Crop, Bat, Bat with flapper
All are Legal as the rule does not establish a minimum length.



Remember GR803 Use of Whips pplies

...No appendages of any kind are permitted... Some breed and/or disciplines may have Division whip rules that depart from this rule and as such, the division rule governs.



These are not considered appendages as long as they are 'as manufactured' parts of the whip/bat.

These are appendages...



SADDLE PADS

Although these are under DR121, we thought it might be beneficial to cover these in greater detail at this time.

The rule states DR 121.1.b Saddle pads are optional and when used must be white or of conservative color. Contrast color and piping are permitted. Striped or multi-colored pads are not permitted.



Conservative color pad
with piping



Contrast piping allowed.

Saddle pads are optional and when used should be white or of conservative color.

The colors indicated in the chart are all acceptable colors as long as they are not bright, shiny and/or reflective shades of these colors.

Dayglow and neon shades of each color are not acceptable.

Blush	Beige	Burgundy	Brown	Cherry	Chocolate
Coast	Cream	Gray	Hunter	Ivy	Kelly
Lavender	Lemon	Magenta	Mint	Mustard	Navy
Olive	Orange	Lime	Peach	Pink	Pumpkin
Purple	Red	Rose	Royal	Rust	Salmon
Sea Blue	Sky Blue	Smoke	Stone	Tan	Pine
Teal	Black	White			

Bright/Shiny/Dayglow – are not acceptable



These pads have an acceptable base color but the shine/reflectivity is very high, especially when you are in the sunlight. Not permitted.



The objective of this rule is to not have something on the horse that distracts the judge's eye from their primary focus of the 'horse/rider'. In the sunlight, these pads sparkle and are very distracting to judges.

These pads may be acceptable in the competition ring as they both have a sheen to the material but are not 'glittery' or reflective. These are satin pads.



This is the difference between satin and glitter. The horse boot is glittery. The satin pad is not.

These are all fine for warmup areas but not for the competition ring.



These are all variations of striped pads and are not allowed.



While in the competition ring and during awards ceremonies, a logo, monogram or name may appear on either or both sides of a saddle pad. Logos shall not exceed 200 sq. cm (26.632 sq. inches) in size.

Only the following logos or names are permitted: a breed logo for horses registered with that breed; a national flag for citizens of that country; Federation or USDF names/logos. Professionals of any age may have a business or product name/logo of their official sponsor. Amateurs shall not have a business or product name/logo displayed unless they own the business. Competition award pads and stable name pads are permitted. No other advertisement or publicity is permitted on saddle pads or horses, except as noted in DR121.8 fly hoods.



We hope that this Learning Module has proven to be helpful in navigating through the complexities of the Dress Rules for 2026.

If you have any questions, please contact the USEF Dressage Department.