

Judging the stretchy trot circle

We have the opportunity to see horses stretching on a long rein on a 20metre circle in the current EA Preliminary 1B, 1C & in all three of the EA Novice Level Tests

There is always a Coefficient on this exercise in tests, the double marks are there to reward combinations who can demonstrate 'throughness', proving that they have relaxation, suppleness, obedience and balance.

The EA Rules say: 'as the neck stretches forward and downwards, the mouth should reach more or less to the horizontal line corresponding with the point of the shoulder.' (p. 27, EA Dressage Rules, 2020). This amount of stretch will require a horse to lift his back and use his core muscles while still maintaining his longitudinal balance, keeping approximately 50% of his weight balanced on his hind legs and 50% on his front legs.

If we told riders we wanted 'more stretch' than his mouth being in line with his point of shoulder, we would put horses at risk of losing their balance, which would disturb their rhythm. Of course, rhythm is the first priority in the Training Scale. The stretch on a long rein is not meant to be a competition to see who can stretch the most!



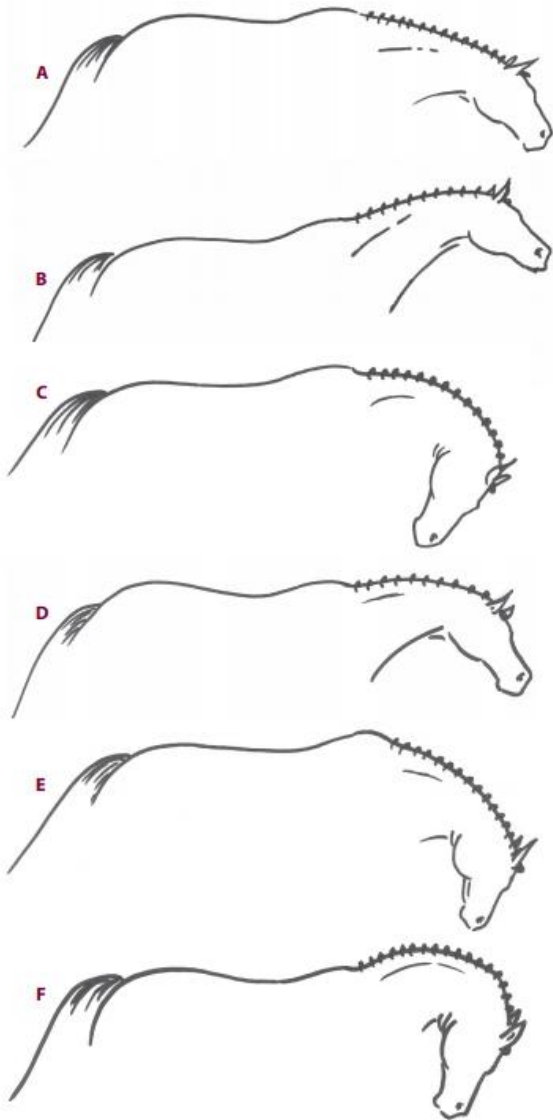
This horse has stretched forward & downward well – his mouth is approx. level with his point of shoulder, he remains well balanced - light in the shoulders with his hind legs well engaged, maintaining an elastic and consistent contact with the rider's hands.

(Retrieved from <https://dressagetoday.com/instruction/christoph-hess-the-importance-of-the-stretch>)



This horse has clearly chewed the rein out – he has taken his mouth lower than his point of shoulder, but he does show willingness to make a forward, downward stretch with an elastic contact, & a well engaged hind leg, so must be rewarded. (Retrieved from *USDF comments not-so-perfect_horse-_chapter_5.pdf*)

To enable the horse to keep his rhythm and balance, in the first quarter of the circle the rider should allow the horse to chew the rein out gradually. For the middle half a circle, the stretch should be maintained consistently. The last quarter of the circle is where the rider should quietly shorten the reins to have the horse back in a working trot frame as they finish the circle. Experienced riders will keep the lateral bending as they pick up the reins so the horse stays soft and does not raise his neck too quickly.



(Retrieved from USDF comments not-so-perfect_horse-_chapter_5.pdf)

- A** This horse has stretched forwards & downwards, but we cannot be sure he has released his back unless we see him moving.
- B** This horse has stretched forward, but not downward, he is stiff in the back
- C** This horse has stretched downward, but has not taken the contact forward
- D** This horse has stretched forward, but needs to show more downward stretch to round his back more
- E** This horse has stretched downward but could show more forward stretch by taking his nose line slightly in front of the vertical so the gullet is clearly open
- F** This horse is crest high, with his nose clearly behind the vertical. He has stretched downward, but has not chewed the rein out. This could be either because he has either been constrained by a rein which has not yielded, or he has dropped the contact. The part of his neck that is just in front of his wither is not round, and he would very probably not be supple in the back.

2.4.6 Stretching on a long rein

- a) the 'stretching on a long rein' exercise gives a clear impression of the 'throughness' of the horse and proves its balance, suppleness, obedience and relaxation. In order to execute the exercise 'stretching on a long rein' correctly, the rider must lengthen the reins as the horse stretches gradually forward and downward
- b) as the neck stretches forward and downwards, the mouth should reach more or less to the horizontal line corresponding with the point of the shoulder
- c) an elastic and consistent contact with the rider's hands must be maintained
- d) the pace must maintain its rhythm, and the horse should remain light in the shoulders with the hind legs well engaged
- e) during the retake of the reins the horse must accept the contact without resistance in the mouth or poll (pp. 27-28, EA Dressage Rules, 2020)

Directive ideas in the tests

In the Preliminary Test Sheets (1B, 1C), the phrasing is: 'Forward and downward stretch over the back into a light contact maintaining balance and quality of trot; bend; shape & size of circle; willing calm transitions'

In the 3 Novice Test Sheets – the phrasing is: Forward and downward stretch over the back into a light contact maintaining balance and quality of trot; bend; shape & size of circle; willing clear transitions.'



Retrieved from <https://www.successful-horse-training-and-care.com/how-to-ride-a-perfect-stretchy-circle.html>

This stretch on a long rein is a movement where judges may see clear, improved throughness, where horses let loose, swing more through their backs, and produce more expression in their trot. This may be our opportunity to reward well-trained combinations, perhaps giving the exercise the highest mark in a rider's test!

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