

“You Know, That Judge Must Have Been Blind”

How many times have we all said something similar after receiving our dressage sheets? After all, as we competitors know, Dressage judges hardly ever get it right!

“It was true that I didn’t stop exactly at X (actually, a couple of metres before it) but fancy being marked down for that!”

Imagine my trepidation then, when Gail Palmer asked me to judge at the Easter Hall Park one-day event this September. Suddenly I was going to sit on the other side of the fence (along with my trusty writer and advisor, Margi Hawkins) and find out what it was really like. “Well”, I thought to myself “at least I can try to do the thing so many judges seem to find so hard to do, Smile!”

The day dawned and I arrived in plenty of time. Gail and Nic had organised a truly superb event and the arena was no exception. Not only was it flat, but there were potted plants around the edge as well. It looked splendid and gave a real feeling of a ‘proper event’ to one nervous judge and competitors alike. In proper judge fashion I was equipped with a large hat and, to both cope with the sun and hide behind, a pair of very dark sunglasses. Much to my horror, as the morning progressed; I discovered that despite my partial disguise, most competitors seemed to recognise me! So if I got it wrong, they would know who to come and find.

A quick word with the ring stewards, then into the car, sort out the dressage sheets (and correct a mistake in the wording!), a toot on the horn and we were off with the first competitor coming up the centre line.

“Now what was it? Oh yes, *SMILE* through the windscreen”. Then acknowledge the salute and sit back and watch. Well no not really sit back and watch, more go through the test with the competitor. Agonised intakes of breath come and go when things don’t go quite right. Smiles and a sigh when a movement goes well, and all the time having to try to **judge** if the competitor has properly executed each movement exactly as it is laid down in the test.

It is surprising what you can and can’t see as a judge. In many ways you can see much more than I ever thought, as a competitor. As a test is supposed to ‘flow’ it becomes easy to spot when inaccuracies occur, this tends to spoil the look of the test. This not only applies to inaccurate figures, but also to late or early transitions. Quickly I got into the swing of judging the marks for each movement. I hate to say it but I was starting to enjoy it.

All too soon the final competitor was completing the final test. Had I enjoyed it? “Well yes”. Would I do it again? “Yes, it was both interesting and a great education”. Best of all was that most competitors seemed to be happy with the judging (At least they were within my hearing!) and nobody came and complained – Phew!

Penny Bragg