



EQUESTRIAN  
NEW SOUTH WALES



DRESSAGE  
NEW SOUTH WALES

# DRESSAGE

## Athlete Pathway

Foundations

Talent

Elite

Mastery

# Table of Contents

## Page:

- 3. Athlete Pathway
- 4. FTEM Framework
- 5. What is Dressage
- 6. FEI Rule and Tack Apps
- 7. Equestrian Pathway Overview
- 8. Foundation Stage (F1)
- 9. Foundation Stage (F2)
- 10. Foundation Stage (F3)
- 11. Dressage NSW Squads
- 12. Talent Stage (T1)
- 13. Talent Stage (T2)
- 14. Talent Stage (T3)
- 15. Talent Stage (T4)

### What is an athlete pathway?

Every equestrian is developing in their own way and at their own pace. In addition, every equestrian has their own goal whether it be lifelong participation in equestrian sport or sporting excellence at an elite level. The athlete pathway provides a discipline specific, practical guide for equestrians in reaching their own goals.

Each stage of the equestrian athlete pathway provides an overview of athlete preparation, programs, on and off horse development, equipment, competition, support and education. It is designed to inform our community about the pathways to high performance, and to support program providers to deliver long-term athlete development opportunities.

### Purpose of this document

This document has been developed to outline a clear and accessible athlete pathway within Equestrian NSW. It provides a structured overview of how participants can develop and progress at their own pace, from foundational grassroots involvement through to high performance. The pathway aligns with Equestrian Australia frameworks and standards, ensuring consistency and quality across all levels.

# Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

## Dressage

The Australian Institute of Sport has developed a framework known as the FTEM. The FTEM is an evidence-based framework that focuses on the Foundation, Talent, Elite, and Mastery levels of sport. The framework has been used to support equestrians to participate and progress in their chosen discipline while promoting a holistic athlete approach on and off the horse. More information regarding the FTEM Framework can be found here: [\(FTEM\) Pathways | ASC](#)

### What is FTEM?



#### Foundations

Foundations contribute to and underpin our Participation Pathway. These progressive and dedicated levels are pivotal to acquiring and refining the fundamental movement skills and early physical literacy required for athletic development.

#### Talent

Talent supports the pathways to high performance. Using best practice, inclusive and holistic approach, the future talent potential of a pre-elite athlete is identified, confirmed and developed through effective programming and competitive opportunity.

#### Elite and Mastery

Elite and Mastery focus on the pinnacle of the sport pathway. Athletes enter and perform on the world stage and are supported through a dedicated and individualised approach including committed preparation, camps, sport science/sports medicine and quality coaching.

### WHAT IS DRESSAGE?

Dressage, which means “training” in French, is one of the oldest forms of horse sport. Dressage develops balance, control and communication between horse and rider, and the skills learned are useful for all disciplines, including show jumping, eventing and pleasure riding.

In competitions, riders perform set tests that show the horse’s suppleness, obedience and strength. Judges score each movement for accuracy and quality, as well as the overall harmony between horse and rider.

The purpose of dressage is to create a horse that is calm, supple, confident and responsive.

Dressage reflects true harmony and understanding between horse and rider.

More information can be found [here](#).

#### Horse requirements

- Official competition horses must exceed 148 cms, be 3 years of age or over, registered with the EA and have a current performance card.
- Official Pony Dressage requires the pony to not exceed 148cm be 3 years of age or over, registered with the EA and have a current performance card.

#### Age requirements for Riders

- Official dressage competitors must be at least 12 years of age.
- Official Pony Dressage competitors must be at least 10 years of age.

### FEI Rule and Tack Apps

The FEI has released two cross discipline RuleApp and TackApp which are available for free from the iTunes and Google play store. The FEI TackApp provides clear, organised, and searchable information on allowed and prohibited tack, equipment, and dress for FEI competitions. Arranged by discipline and category, with each item illustrated through photos, illustrations, or videos. Each piece includes its legal reference and is clearly marked as allowed or prohibited, with an exclamation mark (!) indicating any special conditions. More information can be found [here](#)

FEI RuleApp is useful to stay informed about the latest FEI rules and regulations. The app allows users to quickly search for specific information, bookmark important pages, and share relevant sections when needed. By regularly viewing the RuleApp, participants can ensure they are always aware of current rules and fully prepared for competition requirements. More information can be found [here](#)

# Equestrian Sport Pathway

## EQUESTRIAN FOR LIFE Participation & Officials



Competition in official, participation & club events from Interschools to National level

Enjoyment of recreational equestrian activities across the lifespan privately or with clubs

Engagement in off horse equestrian activities; official qualifications, organising and volunteering

## SPORT EXCELLENCE Talent to Elite Pathway to High Performance



**Podium - National Teams/ Olympics Representation**  
Sustained International Success

M1

**Podium Ready EA HP National Squads**  
Podium success in peak international / world cup competition

E2

**Podium Ready State Discipline Committees**  
Elite Status through State Representation/ achievement at National Level Competition

E1

**Podium Potential - State Rising Star/ Development Squads**  
Preparation for transition through Individual development plans, competition preparation & exposure

T4

**Developing**  
Top 10 performance at FEI level competition. Commitment to Individual development plan (IDP).

T3

**Emerging**  
Performance potential identified through athlete profiling supported by IDP

T2

**Potential Identified**  
Initial demonstration of skills at State or Official Competitions/ coach identification

T1

**Regular coaching & participation in club activities and competitions. Introduction to event coordination/ volunteering/ officials pathways**

F3

**Introduction to competition through clubs/ interschools. Skill development through clubs and private coaching**

F2

**Learning and acquiring the basic foundations of equestrian activities fundamental for safe and effective participation via clubs, pony club & private coaching**

F1

# Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

## Dressage

# F<sub>1</sub>

**Learning and acquiring the basic foundations of equestrian activity fundamentals for safe and effective participation.**

Participants are enjoying their first horse riding experience or may be re-learning to ride a horse.

### Competition

At this stage, participants are not yet competing.

### On-Horse Development

Participants explore the fundamental skills of horse riding. Participants may learn to or build on their current skills (mounting and dismounting) with an accredited coach or riding school.

### Off-Horse Development

Athletes may learn key movement skills while off the horse (i.e. posture, core strength, balance) that will promote a healthy lifestyle and support safe and enjoyable riding. Participants are encouraged to read and become familiar with the EA Dressage rules found [here](#).

### Horse Welfare

While it may not be necessary for athletes to own a horse, participants are able to learn about horse welfare and how to ensure the horse is well cared for and healthy. Equestrian NSW offers helpful online learning modules to support your understanding of horse welfare, including:  
[Horse Welfare - The Other 23 Hours](#)  
[Ethics & Welfare - an introduction](#)  
[Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse](#)

### Equipment

Seek guidance from a professional to ensure basic riding equipment is correctly fitted. Basic riding equipment includes:  
 Helmet  
 Riding boots  
 Bridle, saddle, and saddle accessories  
[Check current helmet safety standards](#)

### Programs & Support

Local clubs and organisations can provide valuable opportunities to gain experience, meet fellow equestrians, and provide access to ongoing support and guidance:  
[Pony Club NSW](#)  
[ENSW Affiliated Clubs](#)

# F<sub>2</sub>

**Introduction to competition through clubs/interschools. Skill Development is through clubs and private coaching.**

Participants are finding enjoyment in furthering their fundamental skills through spending time in the saddle.

### Competition

At this stage, the focus is on having fun and building confidence at club events.

### On-Horse Development

Participants are enjoying spending time in the saddle. Participants may be interested in further developing their fundamental riding skills by riding more regularly with an accredited coach and engaging in local club activities.

### Off-Horse Development

Athletes are engaged and enjoying participating in specific off the horse exercises which will promote a healthy lifestyle, body awareness, coordination, and control. Athletes may choose to spend time volunteering to gain an understanding of how dressage events are run e.g. protocol of riding in the warmup arena.

### Horse Welfare

Horse welfare goes beyond basic care; it is important to prioritise the horse's physical and mental wellbeing. Continue learning how to keep horses happy, healthy, and well cared for. Individuals may seek guidance from accredited coaches or equine professionals.

[Basic management and care](#)

[Maintaining a healthy horse](#)

[Grooming horses](#)

[Housing of horses](#)

[Basic hoof care](#)

### Equipment

It's important to understand which tack is appropriate for the horse's comfort and safety and the type of riding you do.

[Evaluating saddle fit](#)

[English saddles](#)

[Bridles](#)

[Bits](#)

[Tacking up & untacking](#)

### Programs & Support

Participants may benefit from engaging with local schools, clubs, fellow equestrians, and coaches by attending local events, lessons, or volunteering. This provides participants with the opportunity to meet like-minded equestrians and experience positive sportsmanship.

# F<sub>3</sub>

**Regular coaching & participation in club activities & competition across the lifespan. Introduction to event management /volunteering and officials pathways.**

Participants are building more confidence allowing their riding skills to become more technical. Participants are beginning to display commitment to regular coaching with a certified coach or regularly attend a discipline-based club.

### Competition

At this stage, athletes may begin to compete at local events.

### On-Horse Development

Riders are enjoying regular sessions with an accredited EA coach or are actively involved in a local club. They are demonstrating confidence and are continuing to develop their fundamental riding skills. They may begin to focus on specific riding patterns required for their dressage test. More information on dressage tests can be found [here](#).

### Off-Horse Development

Participants may expand their off the horse skills by exploring the [FEI Campus](#). The FEI Campus is a community platform and offers various equestrian e-learning courses such as: [Competition manipulation](#) [The Musculoskeletal System Basics](#) [Foundation Course for Dressage Officials](#)

### Horse Welfare

Athletes develop a further understanding of horse welfare with a focus on caring for horses at events. Learning how to support a horse's wellbeing during travel and competition is an essential part of responsible horsemanship.

[Transporting Horses](#)

[Horse Care and Riding in Winter](#)

[Think Outside The Box](#)

[Equestrian Sport in Hot and Humid](#)

[Environment](#)

### Equipment

Participants may use the FEI [TackApp](#) to stay up to date with suitable tack, equipment, and dress codes for competitions, helping them easily identify what is approved or prohibited. This ensures they remain compliant and well-prepared for competition day.

Alternatively review the Dressage rules [here](#).

### Programs & Support

Participants may benefit from engaging with local riding schools, clubs, fellow equestrians, and coaches by attending events, lessons, or volunteering. Participants may also begin assisting or working with an established athlete to gain practical insight into professional training and competition preparation.

### Dressage NSW Squads

DNSW has several training squads to help riders develop through the talent to elite stages of the FTEM pathway. The intention of a squad is to aid the athlete and horses' partnership.

Riders are selected for a squad based on performance, eligibility, horse welfare, and behaviour. More information can be found [here](#).

Squad	FTEM Stage	Stage Description
Blue Squad	T1 - T2	Riders who have demonstrated skill and their potential has been Identified
White Squad	T3 - T4	Talented riders who are committed to developing their skills
Silver Squad	E1 +	High Performance riders

# Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

## Dressage

T<sub>1</sub>

**Potential Identified.**  
Initial demonstration of skills at State or Official Competitions/coach identification.

A coach or club may have recognised that a participant has demonstrated potential for higher performance or participants have performed well at local events and have recognised their potential for higher performance.

### Competition

Riders are developing a passion for competition and are consistently competing.

### On-Horse Development

Participants are using their fundamental skills developed in the F1-F3 stages to build on their accuracy and precision in training and competition settings.

### Off-Horse Development

Athletes are encouraged to take a holistic approach to off - the horse training by focusing on both physical and mental wellbeing. They may start setting SMARTER goals to support their growth and competition preparation.

### Horse Welfare

As athletes compete more frequently, they develop greater responsibility for their horse's care at events, learning effective feeding, watering, tying up, and yarding practices. Prioritising their horse's ongoing health and welfare assists with performance. [Horse Welfare at Events v2](#)

### Equipment

Riders explore the correct tack and equipment required for the level of competition.  
All equipment must comply with the regulatory standards set by Equestrian Australia (EA) and the Federation Equestrian Internationale (FEI).

### Programs & Support

Participants are encouraged to widen their network within the dressage community and seek information and encouragement from those who have or are progressing at higher levels.

# Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

## Dressage

# T<sub>2</sub>

**Emerging.**  
Performance potential identified through athlete profiling supported by Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Participants are continuing to demonstrate a potential for High Performance, while having a strong desire to keep learning and acquiring new skills both on and off the horse.

Participants are also demonstrating commitment, motivation and coachability.

### Competition

Athletes are increasing the volume of competition experience and may begin to invest more time into dressage competitions and travel to regional areas or interstate depending on the events being offered.

### On-Horse Development

Rider's work with coaches to identify areas which require further development by creating an Individual Development Plan (IDP), focusing on the skills required for competitions.

### Off-Horse Development

Athletes focus on strategies to effectively manage competition stress, developing tailored competition-day routines and time management skills. These practices help maintain composure, optimise performance, and minimise anxiety.

### Horse Welfare

With travel to longer-distance competitions care extends over multiple days, requiring careful management of transport, feeding, hydration, and stress monitoring. Adapting to new environments and paying attention to heat, cold, and recovery ensures the horse's ongoing health, wellbeing, and performance readiness.

### Equipment

Riders explore the correct tack and equipment required for the level of competition.  
All equipment must comply with the regulatory standards set by Equestrian Australia (EA) and the Federation Equestrian Internationale (FEI).

### Programs & Support

Engaging in volunteer opportunities may deepen knowledge of horse care, management, and competition preparation while building connections within the dressage community.

# Equestrian NSW Athlete Pathway

## Dressage

# T<sub>3</sub>

**Top 10 performance at FEI level competition. Commitment to Individual Development Plan (IDP).**

Participants have demonstrated commitment to their day-to-day training and are aware of their physical, psychological, and tactical approach to competition.

### Competition

At this stage, athletes are performing well at high performance levels such as State Championships.

### On-Horse Development

Participants follow a structured Individual Development Plan (IDP) with clear performance goals. Emphasis is placed on refinement of technique, and improving presentation.

### Off-Horse Development

Following competitions, athletes focus on developing self-reflection skills to critically assess their results, recognise strengths, and pinpoint areas requiring further improvement. This process supports ongoing growth and performance development.

### Horse Welfare

As the volume and intensity of a competition schedule increases, understanding how to keep horses healthy and free from prohibited substances is a key part of responsible horse care in competition. Clean sport is essential for protecting horse welfare. Everyday management decisions such as, feeding, medication, and supplements, can impact competition readiness, longevity, compliance and anti-doping rules.

[Equine Prohibited Substances](#)

### Equipment

Riders explore the correct tack and equipment required for the level of competition. All equipment must comply with the regulatory standards set by Equestrian Australia (EA) and the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI).

### Programs & Support

Participants may benefit from structured support which helps refine their skills and prepares the individual for the next level of competition. This includes exploring development squads, high level coaching, and mentoring from experienced riders and officials. Riders engage in targeted competition exposure.

# T<sub>4</sub>

**Podium Potential - State Rising Star/Development Squads. Preparation for transition through IDP's, competition preparation & exposure.**

Participants have demonstrated podium potential by consistently performing and are prepared to increase training, travel, and performance demands.

### Competition

At this stage, athletes are consistently achieving strong results, with a focus on preparing for higher level events and advancing to the next stage of performance.

### On-Horse Development

Riders concentrate on refining advanced skills and enhancing competition readiness. Programs are designed to promote consistent performance, technical accuracy, and the progressive development of the horses capability.

### Off-Horse Development

Participants continue to incorporate technical, physical, physiological and psychological practices off the horse to improve their performance

### Horse Welfare

As horses compete consistently at higher levels, soundness assessments become increasingly important. Ensuring horses are fit for the demands of competition reduces the risk of injury and supports long-term wellbeing. These practices align with [FEI Veterinary Regulations](#) and the [FEI's Code of Conduct](#), which promote ethical care and horse welfare at all levels of the sport.

### Equipment

Riders explore the correct tack and equipment required for the level of competition. All equipment must comply with the regulatory standards set by Equestrian Australia (EA) and the Federation Equestrian Internationale (FEI).

### Programs & Support

With a more demanding competition schedule, athletes are encouraged to engage a wider range of experts to optimise performance. Support may include sports psychologists, nutritionists, and physiologists for the rider, alongside equine specialists to ensure the horse's wellbeing and readiness.