

SOLITAIRE GROUP  
WRITTEN BY  
A KENWARD 2011

Inside find out  
about

- Getting Started Easy as 123
- Movement Matters
- Recording your Routine
- Choosing your Music
- All you need to compete
- Spectators Guide
- Performance
- Qualification Guide



Alison Kenward  
BHS II SM regd  
Rides  
Roughway Jack

# Choreography Challenges

ALISON KENWARD C 2011

EBOOK EDITION

## Why Freestyle?

Freestyle tests give competitors the chance to bring a touch of individuality to the arena.

Whilst there are compulsory elements to include and a time limit for performance competitors have more of a “free rein” in the arena. Compulsory movements are specified on the test sheet and each movement is marked out of ten as in pure dressage to give a mark for technical execution.

Freestyle is **FUN!** Watch any dressage to music class and you will see both horse and rider enjoying themselves even when things go slightly wrong the performance can be recovered and “the show goes on”. Remember the judge does not know what you planned to show in your test.

Horses are often motivated by music and can have as clear a preference for the style of the music as the rider. Freestyle competitions attract audiences, they also create a level playing field for every horse and rider combination because they have artistic and technical elements. Freestyle routines can be created for every level and ability. The technical part of the test has the same movements as the pure tests but you can ride the pattern as you wish so you can play to your strengths and impress the judge and the audience with your choreography.

The artistic marks reward riders for their imagination and flair in choosing music that matches their horse and their routine. Freestyle classes are frequently won by the “ordinary” or family horse or pony, by the combination that shows real harmony with each other and the music.



Roughway Jack at  
Winter National  
Elementary  
Freestyle  
Championship

## Getting Started. As easy as 123

**A great freestyle test will involve the audience, will capture the imagination of those watching and will allow people an insight into the special and very individual relationship that riders share with their horse.**

The performance should allow the combination to show off their strengths, to have a bit of fun or to borrow from the “Queen of Pop” to “Express themselves!”

Pure dressage is about assessing the horse’s training and ability; marks are awarded for the quality of the horse’s work as well as the rider’s accuracy and execution of the test.

These requirements are present in freestyle too but there is a magic ingredient: **MUSIC**.

Interpretation of the music is key.

How does the rider choreograph the routine?  
How does the horse react and move the music?  
Does the audience feel involved with the music?  
How does the judge perceive the music and the presentation?

The performance should be about you and your horse, about your tastes and relationship and getting started in freestyle is as easy as 123.

1. Movement matters.
2. Record your routine.
3. Choosing and matching your music.

# 1. How to Plan your Routine

**Your first task is to decide whether you need to plan a test for a long or short arena**, this will depend whether you are preparing for a specific competition or whether you want to create a routine you can enjoy riding at home to spice up your schooling sessions.

Arena size is important as you need to be familiar with the timings of your test to present a polished performance. All is not lost if you only have a short arena to practice in but want to compete in long arena competitions; just make sure you borrow a long arena for the design stage.

To design your floorplan you will need the **test sheet for your level** with the compulsory movements listed, a marked out arena, a pair of helping hands to time you and give you feedback on the look and shape of your routine, a notepad and pencil (one with a rubber on the end is very handy for alterations) a stopwatch or watch with a second hand and about an hour set aside to plan your routine.

Remember to give your horse frequent rest breaks in walk and to warm up before you start practising. Split your arena time into sections so you work out portions of the test and don't tire your horse before the "final take"

**Freestyle tests give riders the chance to show the judge and audience their strengths.**

IS canter your best pace? Perhaps you can make a feature of it by designing a routine where you canter at the end to leave the judge with a lasting impression? Perhaps the canter is great but the trot work improves tenfold after the canter? In this case think about riding the canter work first and finish the test in trot.

**First impressions** are important so think about your entrance. Arena craft has a part to play here. Think about your presentation and give a positive message to the judge that for you and your horse this is fun! A smile is vital and so is a good music choice. Most freestyle tests allow 5 minutes (a minimum of 4.30 is average) so you should aim to finish between 4.45 and 4.50 to give a good impression. In reality you need to make sure you present the compulsory technical movements early on in each phase of the test (pace) to present the judge with an opportunity to mark you. There will be a little time for extras to give your test the edge.

**Clever choreography linking the movements together in a balanced way will earn even more marks.**

Be careful not to try and cram lots into the test or the flow will be spoilt and the test could appear fragmented.

Divide your test into three or perhaps four segments his way you will be able to produce a music routine that flows too, judges can get distracted with lots of changes in musical style and tempo.

Ask a friend to draw the shapes you ride and to time the segments. If you work with a trainer they will guide you through suitable choreography, a horsey friend can be perfect "eyes on the ground" too.

As a guide allow between 2 minutes and 2 minutes 20 seconds for trot work, 40 seconds for walk and 1.40 for canter- this allows you to include the compulsory movements and to be creative with how you join them together.

Think about riding away from the track and riding shapes opposite the markers so you have a test that is a little different. Before you ride, sketch your ideas for ways to change the rein to link patterns together without riding large around the arena.

# Top Tips for Videoing a Test



- Position the camera at the C to view from the judge's perspective.
- Use a tripod, this makes filming easier for the operator and gives "steadier" footage.
- Make sure you can see the horse's legs and hooves in the frame.
- Check before you start that you are not facing into sunlight and can follow the horse and rider around the whole arena.
- Try and keep the horse and rider in the centre of the frame.
- Make sure the operator presses the record button!
- If the rider goes wrong either pause or keep filming. Don't stop and rewind as this plays havoc with the timing when editing.
- If possible, film the whole test in one go.
- Make sure you have a spare battery or power source.
- Use a new tape and make sure you label the tape and box with the date, horse's name and level of test.

## 2. Recording Your Routine

Designing a test is fun but it can be frustrating so when something works aesthetically and to time make a note of what you did. It's very helpful to sketch your routine and write next to the shape what you did.

This helps make sure you have included all the compulsory movements. It's easy to design a pleasing pattern and then to find that both circles are on the same rein or that you only show one simple change or counter canter on one lead for example.

For music matching it's very helpful if you can have a friend or helper video the test for you so that you can watch the routine, see what enhances the pattern and upload it to your computer to edit a soundtrack or send the recording to a music producer.

## 3. Choosing and Matching Your Music

**The key to a memorable freestyle is to make sure that you are riding to the music** rather than riding a test with music playing in the background.

Riders will have varied musical tastes and horses too can have a clear preference- the **rhythm of the track will have an impact on the horse's way of going** and the beat will also affect the rider's pulse rate- a soundtrack that motivates a runner may not be an ideal track for the walk work. When choosing music it is important to select a style which matches the horse and that the rider and judge will enjoy.

A good choice will enhance the way of going – Roughway Jack dances to the Entertainer as it appeals to him but some styles will make him uneasy and as he tries to work to their beat he can appear uneven as he worries and tries to adjust his stride pattern.

**Hours of fun await you as you search for music to ride to!** There are thousands of tracks on iTunes and Amazon and music touches our lives in many ways. I discovered my canter music driving to the airport listening to Radio 2 and it has also featured on TV advertising a breakfast cereal. I also ride to different music and Jack will perform to the tracks he enjoys. A useful way to learn about your horse's natural rhythm is to calculate the beats per minute of his paces- you need to be very careful here as different music tracks can share the same bpm but some may not suit your horse. **Ride to as many different tracks as you can access** though possibly not on the same day and you will begin to get a feel for what works for you and your horse. Enlist your friends or trainer to feedback to you on what works- ask them and yourself about **how the music made you feel, whether it lifted your horse and was easy to ride to** or whether you felt uncomfortable and tense. There are several companies who will help you to create a soundtrack for freestyle competition. To make the most of the chance to have your music matched to your horse think about the styles of music you don't like and discuss with the producer the **type of horse you ride**. Remember you will be living with your routine for sometime in the build up to competition as you will need to know your music very well to produce a strong performance and with this in mind the music needs to "fit" or you will quickly tire of the soundtrack.



## All You Need to Compete

To perform a freestyle test at a competition you will need to be a BD Music Member. Full members of BD already have music membership and BD work with the Pony Club and British Riding Clubs to offer a favourable rate for members to become music members. The reason for this is that riders must comply with the PPL licence agreement to ride to music in public. PPL look after the interests of music publishers. To comply with PPL as a dressage rider is simple.

- Become a Music Member of BD
- Sign the BD licence agreement to receive your BD Music forms
- Complete the BD form stating the title of the track, the artist and the publisher/year
- Fill in the music labels provided by BD and fix these to the CD box (You will need to label the disc too)

Make sure you have two copies of your music cd so you have a spare.

It is a good idea to have your floorplan written down so that you know where you are going though remember if you make a mistake or get ahead of your music you can improvise as the judge will not know what you had planned and it is best to ride to the music so make the transition as the music changes- circle if you need to fill in time.

The only exception to this might be if your trot music changed as you were riding a 15m circle for instance then you should complete the circle to earn your mark for this movement- you will drop marks for interpretation of the music but you must complete your compulsory movements.

## 4. Spectators Guide

**Freestyle tests give competitors the chance to bring a touch of individuality to the arena.**

At entry level spectators can expect to see combinations enter the arena at walk or trot with entrance music that hints at the style of the performance to come. Having halted and saluted the judge the test is deemed to have begun. Though not marked the type of entrance the competitor makes will count as a **first impression** and hopefully attract the judge's attention. Most competitors will move off in trot (a two beat pace) and show the compulsory movements early on so that the judge may award the first few marks.

At Novice level two 15m diameter circles need to be shown, one on each rein or more simply one in each direction. Riders also need to demonstrate some medium trot strides where the horse lengthens its stride whilst maintaining the same rhythm. These lengthened strides may be shown across the diagonal line of the arena, along the long side of the arena or on a half 20m circle.

The trot also offers a chance to show some creativity by including movements that show off the horse's **paces and personality** and demonstrate to the judge that the rider has planned their arena pattern or floorplan.

**Artistic marks** will be awarded by the judge for the **rhythm** and energy of the horse or more simply the quality and regularity of its paces. Then the **harmony** between the horse and rider is graded. There is a mark for **choreography** and a further mark for **music** choice and interpretation.

The four artistic marks at entry level carry a co-efficient of three so for example a music mark of 9/10 will add an impressive 27 marks to the total giving a real boost to the final percentage.

A movement favoured at first level is a serpentine. If this is accurately ridden and the horse maintains an even trot rhythm this can add variety to the test. It is important that combinations are not seen riding round and round the arena with no school figures (circles/serpentines etc.) included as this would attract a low mark for the choreography. Riders could choose to include 1/2 circles of 10m or 20m diameter. Other popular choices are loops and inclines.



Cuddles at the end of the test for Jack with a square halt for the judges.

Riders must **show their horse's walk** and judges look for a regular four beat rhythm. Riders need to show medium walk and free walk on a long rein where the horse is encouraged to stretch forward, to lengthen its steps to cover more ground and maintain a regular rhythm whilst on a long rein. This is a test of the rider's ability to offer the horse freedom to stretch with the horse showing its training by maintaining the walk even though the rider has less influence through the reins.

The free walk will demonstrate to the judge the level of relaxation, harmony and trust between horse and rider.

The third element of the test is the **canter work**. Canter is a three beat pace with a moment of suspension. Canter work must include 2 20 m diameter circles, one on each rein. So on the left rein the left foreleg leads and on the right rein the right foreleg leads. The rider needs to change the lead through trot or make a progressive transition to walk. No simple or flying changes are allowed at novice level. There are several ways to show the change of lead through trot, more established combinations may show a few strides of counter canter before returning to trot to pick up the new canter lead.

To conclude the test the rider must once again ride to **halt on the centre line facing the judge** and salute as the music ends (practice and a knowledge of the routine and music phrasing is needed!)

The judge will be looking for a straight, square halt, that is to say that the halt is on the centre line and the front and hind feet are level.

## 5,6,7,8 Performance!

**Maximise your marks!** Freestyle tests are your chance to show the judge how well you and your horse work together and as with pure tests you need to present every movement to the judge to give them the chance to award high marks. Judging freestyle tests are a challenge because the judge has no idea what movements are coming up next. Help the judge to follow your plan by keeping the pattern simple. Judges often talk about routines telling a story and I would interpret this as a way of linking the movements so if you follow a 15m circle by lengthened strides and use a serpentine to change the rein the story might repeat on the other rein by following a 15m circle with lengthened strides. The music can play a part too with the phrasing repeating to emphasise the choreography.

As with great stories your freestyle should have a beginning, a middle and an end too— you can create this with your music choices as well as with your patterns.

**Competition Day.** As soon as you arrive take your cd to the secretary's office and make sure it is correctly labelled with your name, the test you have entered, your PPL labels and instructions for how you wish to start eg. Rider will raise hand to start music outside arena.

Work your horse in as usual, some riders like to listen to their routine on an iPod. Think about how your horse feels and take your time. Music classes are fun and if you are calm you will ride your horse to the music better.

When it is your turn, ride past the judge and around the arena as usual. When the judge rings the bell this is your signal to go to your mark and halt ready to signal for your music to begin. This is a moment to take a deep breath and relax, if your horse fidgets, halt before your mark and walk towards your mark to raise your hand. The music starts and its show time! Think about how your horse is feeling and don't try and rush your horse to keep with the music— feel the beat instead and allow your horse to feel the rhythm too. It's a truism to say that freestyle routines are rarely the same twice, arena surfaces can affect the timing and cutting a corner will change the timing however this can work to your advantage if you are behind. Keep listening to your music and remember to use the phrasing for instance if you have a track where the track rises to a crescendo this can be a moment to show lengthened strides. If you have a phrase that lends itself to changes then time your simple change or direct transition to happen on the upbeat. If you find yourself ahead of the music with your pattern then add in a 10m circle so that you can get back on track with the music's phrasing. When the test is over make much of your horse and do try and watch some of the other competitors as you can pick up ideas for varying the pattern and music choices.

Don't forget to collect your cds before you go home.



Roughway Jack  
at the Regional  
Freestyle  
Championships

**Performance Review.** After the event read through your test sheet and think about the judge's feedback, reflect on your own feelings of the way the test worked, things that worked well and things you might change.

It can be useful to ask a friend to video your test so that you have visual feedback too and perhaps you can ask your instructor to help you review your performance too?

After the event you can ask yourself where you may be able to earn extra marks. Perhaps you need to work on the way you ride your figures or perhaps you need to prepare for your transitions a little earlier. If you had a winning test and achieved your goals it might be time to think about moving up a level or choosing new music. When its time to go back to the design phase it will be very useful to look at patterns, shapes and tempos that worked.

**Encore!** Many riders find they like to perform their freestyle tests again and again. If your horse begins to learn the routine then find different ways to practise riding to the music so you can show the judge that your horse is on the aids and taking direction from you. Try riding large around the arena in the pace dictated by the music and improvise as the music suggests. On the other hand it is very special to ride a horse that knows and enjoys their music and in this case the rider can apply minimal aids and earn a high harmony mark. Roughway Jack knows his routine so well I don't need to ask him to flow from walk to canter he does it himself, exactly on the beat and my only job is to relax and go with him—the smile comes naturally too as there is no better feeling than being in tune with your horse.

## 9. BD Qualification Guide

British Dressage run a Music Championship as part of the Winter Championships currently held at Hartpury College in April. To qualify for this prestigious championship riders must compete in a first round competition. At Novice and Elementary level the class is split into Restricted and Open sections. Competitors who achieve the qualifying score and place 1st or second go through to the Winter Regionals. In Medium classes and above riders need to achieve the qualifying score and place in the top three.

The qualifying percentages and numbers going through to the second round are detailed in the BD rulebook each year.

Riders who qualify for the 2nd round of the competition are sent a confirmation letter by BD and they will need to send a copy of this letter when entering the 2nd round. These are held at BD Winter Semi-Finals in each BD region and riders may enter only one semi final with each horse they qualify.

From the Semi-Final riders achieving a top three placing and the required percentage go forward to the Championship class at Hartpury. Each year a few wild cards are awarded too to riders who achieved high percentages and just missed out on the placing.





## Solitaire Dressage

Alison Kenward BHS II SM Regd  
BD Trainers Database  
Regular Freestyle Clinics  
& Solitaire Hoofbeats classes

Contact Alison  
07808 714370

**Alison is a qualified instructor and coach who enjoys teaching riders of all abilities.**

**Alison has played international polocrosse as well as hunting and eventing overseas before choosing dressage in 2005. Alison has competed at the Winter Nationals with Roughway Jack and the Home International with Langarth Sebastian.**

**Alison is a versatile rider and trainer who enjoys working with horses and getting to know their personalities and outlook.**

[www.solitairedressage.weebly.com](http://www.solitairedressage.weebly.com)

## 10. Freestyle Design Tried & Tested by Lucy Bryce

Lucy Bryce plans to compete in Elementary Freestyle Dressage to Music classes. To begin with Lucy attended Hoofbeats classes to get a feel for how music affected her horse and how different styles had an impact on the quality of the paces. Lucy then arranged for Alison to come and design the test.

Lucy and Alison worked together for an hour with Lucy putting Clive through his paces to give Alison an idea of how Clive coped with the technical requirements.

Clive was soon confidently working around the arena and Alison began the design process creating a routine that starts with Canter.

The test was designed in segments with the patterns including the technical elements and the routine timed.

Alison and Lucy discussed how the routine felt to ride and then Lucy rode through the new floorplan which was timed from start to finish.

Then after allowing the pair a breather the whole routine was filmed. Alison later uploaded the footage to YouTube and drew out the floorplan for Lucy to refer to .

Lucy then worked with a music producer who suggested a selection of tracks for Lucy to approve before creating music cds and explaining the PPL requirements so Lucy is ready to compete.



**Lucy Bryce riding Willowhill Classic**

“Alison made freestyle design easy, I would struggle with knowing I was definitely doing the movements and distances required without her help. I like

being able to start in canter, Clive can be spooky but generally less so in canter, he settles much better in an arena if we can quickly get into canter. It was helpful to watch the test on video I can see lots of places where I could pick up marks, I don't have mirrors

at home so being videoed has removed the guess work. I love my music its fun and upbeat and I think it suits Clive.”