

Conformation 101

What to look for in a dressage horse

This is a Warmblood cross mare (right). Starting with her hindquarters, you can see that her LS is slightly behind her point of hip, which will inhibit her ability to transfer the power that she creates with her hindquarters, and will make elevating her forequarters more difficult. These things alone would prevent her from becoming a grand prix dressage horse.

Her stifle is far enough away from her body to encourage a good length of stride and not hinder 'sitting.' The length of her femur (point of buttock to stifle) is greater than the length of ilium (point of buttocks to point of hip), which is a dressage trait. These proportions are typically found in dressage horse as opposed to jumpers or eventers. The longer femur and shorter ilium in the dressage horse make maintaining collection easier – less closing of angles and therefore less muscle fatigue.



Although this mare has a high point of shoulder, notice that the line through her pillar of support emerges just in front of her withers, whereas that same line on Brentina (left), who was third at the World Cup in 2005, emerges well in front of her withers. This is why the mare has been using the muscles on the underside of her neck to assist in lightening the forehand. Below the knee, you can see that the weight would be more to the front of the fetlock, making her more prone to chips.

In addition, this mare is shorter and much steeper from withers to point of shoulder than Brentina is, which means that despite her elevated point of shoulder, she will not be able to use her full length of stride. This, combined with the information in the previous paragraph, would indicate a constant battle to stay on the bit. Add the fact that her LS is less than perfect, and you can imagine the argument that would result if she were asked to collect.

Lower level work will be most comfortable for this mare and she would benefit from exercised aimed at strengthening her abdominal muscles before attempting to reshape her neck, which is also longer than most top dressage horses.

Brentina's LS is well placed - in line from hip to hip. Stifle placement is similar on both mares, but the front ends vary considerably...as do their abilities in dressage.



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