

From Hunters to Half Pass  
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I'll never forget my first horse show. It was a small, local saddle club type show held at an arena near my house. I was only attending as a spectator, but I dreamed of one day being able to compete myself. Everything about it appealed to me. The beautiful show outfits and braided manes made me realize I had found my passion.

I found my way into the hunter ring. I rode hunters for many years from local shows to the A circuit. I enjoyed quite a bit of success with a quarter horse named The Supreme Skipper. When he retired I bought another quarter horse, my current mount, A Cash Vantage aka "Casey". We gave some AQHA shows a try, but during that time in Georgia there were almost no AQHA shows with hunter over fences classes. At the same time, I started to find myself wanting to try something new. I tried western pleasure and trail, but it just wasn't my bag of tricks. I had attended the Atlanta Olympics with front row seats to the Dressage competition and so I thought I would take some dressage lessons.



I took a few lessons with a local trainer and attended a schooling show soon thereafter. I was hooked immediately. Knowing exactly what minute I will enter the show ring is fabulous. It's amazing how much more relaxing a horse show is when you know when to get dressed, tack up and warm up because

you know exactly what time you will show. Getting a test sheet back from the judge scoring every movement we rode and what I need to improve on is fantastic! It is almost like going to a clinic every time you horse show. The icing on the cake was that my horse liked it as much as I did. Finally, the opportunity to ride a musical freestyle had always been a dream of mine. Dressage would be the discipline that would help me realize that dream.

The United States Dressage Federation offers awards for horses and riders. They are based on the scores you earn over time and are not based on who you might beat on a particular day. There is opportunity for achievement at every level. USDF also presents additional awards each year based on the horse's breed. There are many participating organizations including AQHA. During my first year of showing at USDF/USEF sanctioned shows, my horse was 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation at training level in the adult amateur

division. WOW! That felt like a pretty big achievement for someone who had been riding hunters forever. I earned my qualified rider award that same year. Since then, I have earned my First Level Rider Performance award and Casey earned his Training Level Performance award. We have also earned many year-end awards through our local GMO (Group Member Organization).

To say that I was excited when AQHA approved dressage would be a massive understatement. Finally, I would have the opportunity to put AQHA points on my horse's show record. Oh, did I mention he's incentive fund nominated too? We attended our first AQHA sanctioned dressage show in April 2010 and earned 4.5 AQHA points in one day.

I hope that many quarter horses will give dressage a try. Its training benefits are invaluable regardless of the discipline in which you compete. Dressage not only helps make your horse supple, but it also opens a communication channel you might not otherwise find. Be careful though...you just might get hooked like I did!