



Untangling the Red Tape

Which USDF memberships and horse registrations do you need?
Start by assessing your goals.

BY ROSS CREECH AND MELISSA SCHOEDLBAUER

To some riders, the idea of entering a US Equestrian Federation-licensed/USDF-recognized dressage competition is daunting. Overwhelmed by the thought of sorting out membership categories and horse registrations, they don't know where to begin.

We're two experienced USDF staffers, and we wrote this article to help you out. The good news is that, by gaining a basic understanding of the different types of USDF memberships, horse registrations, and programs, you can successfully complete that entry form and get to the show with little to no headache involved.

For You: The Bare Minimum

You might be surprised to learn that, as a rider or a horse owner, no memberships are required for participation in USEF-licensed/USDF-recognized dressage competition. You will, however, have to pay a **nonmember fee** (this applies to both riders and owners) for each competition that you enter. The exception is those classes on the (aptly named) exception list, which is on the USDF Web site at usdf.org. USDF Introductory Level is just one of the many types of classes that do not require USDF membership.

Even if your horse has more than one owner on file, only one "owner" nonmember fee will be assessed, assuming that none of the owners is a USDF member.

For Your Horse

Except for classes on that exception list, any horse competing in a USEF-licensed/USDF-recognized dressage competition is required to have one of the two types of horse registration available through USDF.

The bare-bones registration is a **USDF Horse Identification Number (HID)**. This number is used as a tracking number for any horse that competes in a recognized show. Obtain a HID by paying a one-time fee, either online at usdf.org or at the horse-show office.

The other registration, which is also a one-time fee, is **USDF Lifetime Horse Registration (LHR)**. LHR fulfills any horse-registration requirements for USDF award programs, provided that all membership and other requirements have been met.

You can upgrade a USDF HID to an LHR at any time; simply pay the difference in cost at the time of upgrade.

For the Competition-Minded Rider and Owner

Paying nonmember fees is a good way to test the show-ring waters; but if you decide that you're going to get out there in a big way, you'll soon discover that it's more economical to join USDF. USDF offers two "competing" membership options for riders and three options for owners.

Option 1: USDF group membership. When you join one of USDF's local affiliate clubs, known as group-member organizations or GMOs, you automatically become a USDF group member. Group membership fulfills owner and rider membership requirements for recognized dressage competition and also allows competitors to participate in the USDF rider-awards program, including USDF rider medals. Group membership does not, however, fulfill eligibility requirements for Adequan/USDF year-end awards programs (e.g., Horse of the Year or All-Breeds) or for Great American Insurance Group/USDF Regional Dressage Championships qualifying and competition.

New Membership: For Education Only

USDF is rolling out a new membership category, called Education Membership or e-Membership. As its name suggests, e-Membership does not fulfill any membership requirements for competition purposes—so if you're an e-Member and you decide to show in USEF-licensed/USDF-recognized dressage competition, you'll pay the nonmember fee.

E-Membership benefits include unlimited online access to articles and videos on equine health care, training, and much more. Also included is full access to USDF's online education library and to the electronic version of *USDF Connection*.

For details, see last month's "Ask USDF" column in the "Heads Up" section of *USDF Connection* or visit the USDF Web site.

Option 2: USDF participating membership. This individual membership, in which a person joins USDF directly, is available in one-year, five-year, and lifetime options. Participating membership fulfills all USDF membership requirements for awards and championship programs.

Option 3 (for horse owners only): USDF business membership. Business membership, such as for a farm, fulfills horse owners' USDF membership requirements for competitions and for awards and championship programs.

If you lease a horse: If USDF has a lease agreement on file, then the lessee on file is considered the owner of record for the term of the lease. Therefore, the lessee must meet all owner membership requirements in order to be eligible to participate in competitions, awards programs, and championship programs. To learn more about filing a lease agreement with USDF, visit the USDF Web site.

Program-Eligibility Requirements Rundown

All Adequan/USDF year-end awards and almost all championship programs require both the owner of record and the rider to be USDF participating members, and the horse competing to have a USDF LHR.

For a horse to be eligible for Adequan/USDF All-Breeds awards, a USDF All-Breeds declaration form and appropriate registration papers must be on file with USDF by August 1 of the current competition year. The All-Breeds participating organizations (the breed and performance registries) also impose their own membership and registration requirements. These vary from registry to registry, so check with the organization from which you wish to receive awards.

Participation in USDF's wide variety of educational programs—among them the USDF Instructor Certification Program, the USDF "L" Education Program, the Platinum Performance/USDF Adult Clinic Series, and the Platinum Performance/USDF FEI Junior/Young Rider Clinic Series—also carries certain membership requirements. Specifics can be found on the USDF Web site.

We hope that we've clarified the differences among the major categories of USDF membership and horse registration. To learn more about USDF membership or programs, visit usdf.org, send e-mail to usdressage@usdf.org, or call (859) 971-2277. ▲

Ross Creech is USDF's senior marketing coordinator. Melissa Schoedlbauer is USDF's senior membership coordinator.

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