

History

It is believed by some that the origins of vaulting could be traced to the ancient Roman games, where acrobats usually displayed their skills on cantering horses. Others, however, believe that vaulting originated in ancient Crete, where Bull-leaping was prevalent. In either case, people have been performing acrobatic and dance-like movements on (or over) the backs of moving horses/animals for more than 2,000 years.

Renaissance and Middle Ages history include numerous references to vaulting or similar activities. The present name of the sport/art comes from the French "La Voltige," which it acquired during the Renaissance, when it was a form of riding drill and agility exercise for knights and noblemen, and also used as a symbol of status.

Modern vaulting developed in post-war Germany as an initiative to introduce children to equestrian sports.

In 1983, vaulting became one of the disciplines recognized by the FEI. European Championships were first held in Austria in 1984, and the first FEI World Vaulting Championship was held in Switzerland in 1986. Vaulting was included in the World Equestrian Games in Stockholm in 1990 and in all subsequent editions of the games. It was demonstrated as an art during the 1984 and 1996 Olympic Games events.

Competitive vaulting

Individual freestyle

In competitive vaulting, vaulters compete as individuals, pairs (or pas-de-deux), and teams. Beginning vaulters compete at the walk or trot while experienced vaulters compete at the canter. The vaulting horse moves in a 15-metre circle and is directed by a lunger who stands in the center of the circle. In competitive vaulting, the rider will first be judged on a score from 1-10. If two competitors tie, then the horse is judged.

Vaulting competitions consist of compulsory exercises and choreographed freestyle exercises done to music. There are seven compulsory exercises: mount, basic seat, flag, mill, scissors, stand and flank. Each exercise is scored on a scale from 0–10. Horses also receive a score and are judged on the quality of their movement as well as their behavior.

Vaulters also compete in team and individual freestyles (previously known as a Kur). An individual Kur is a 1 minute freestyle and team is 4 minutes. They are both choreographed to music. The components of a freestyle vaulting routine may include mounts and dismounts, handstands, kneeling and standing and aerial moves such jumps, leaps and tumbling skills. However many of these skills are only seen in the highest levels. A typical routine for a child or beginner teen/adult will more likely contain variations on simple kneels and planks. Teams also

carry, lift, or even toss another vaulter in the air. Judging is based on technique, performance, form, difficulty, balance, security, and consideration of the horse; the horse is also scored.

Vaulting horses are not saddled, but wear a surcingle and a thick back pad. The surcingle has special handles which aid the vaulter in performing certain moves as well as leather loops called "cossack stirrups". The finished competition horse wears a bridle and side reins. The horses today are wearing halters and Guido has not yet grown comfortable with the side reins. The lunge line is usually attached to the inside bit ring.

Vaulting horses typically move on the left rein (counter clockwise), but in some competitions the horse canters in the other direction believing this benefits the horse and the vaulter.

Competition Movements

Vaulters perform various movements on the back of the horse. Novice and beginning vaulters may perform at the walk or the trot while higher level vaulters perform at the canter. There are a number of compulsory exercises and depending on class the vaulter perform seven or eight of them.

Vault On - The vault-on leads to the front ways seat on the horse. After jumping on both feet, the right leg swings up immediately, as high as possible, lifting the pelvis higher than the head, while the left leg remains stretched down. The shoulders and hips are parallel to the shoulder axis of the horse. When the pelvis is at the highest possible point, the vaulter lowers the stretched right leg and lands softly, erect and centred in the seat astride with the upper body vertical.

Basic Seat - An astride position (the vaulter sits on the horse as a rider would), with the arms held to the side and the hands raised to ear level. Hands should be held with closed fingers and palms facing downward, with the fingers arching slightly upward. Legs are wrapped around the horse's barrel, soles facing rearward, with toes down and feet arched. Vaulter holds this position for four full strides.

Flag - From the astride position, the vaulter hops to his or her knees and extends the right leg straight out behind, holding it slightly above his or her head so the leg is parallel to the horse's spine. The other leg should have pressure distributed through the shin and foot, most weight should be on the back of the ankle, to avoid digging the knee into the horse's back. The left arm is then stretched straight forward, at a height nearly that of the right leg. The hand should be held as it is in basic seat (palm down, fingers together). The right foot should be arched and the sole should face skyward. This movement should be held for four full strides after the arm and leg are raised.

Mill - From the astride position, the vaulter brings the right leg over the horse's neck. The grips must be ungrasped and retaken as the leg is brought over. The left leg is then brought in a full arc over the croup, again with a change of grips, before the right leg follows it, and the left leg

moves over the neck to complete the full turn of the vaulter. The vaulter performs each leg movement in four strides each, completing the Mill movement in sixteen full strides. During the leg passes, the legs should be held perfectly straight, with the toes pointed. When the legs are on the same side of the horse, they should be pressed together.

Scissors 1st part - From the astride position, the vaulter swings into a handstand. At the apex, the vaulter's body should be turned to the lunge and the inner leg should be crossed over the outer leg. The vaulter then comes down and lands so that she is facing backward on the horse, toward the tail.

Scissors 2nd part - From seat rear ways on the horse the vaulter swings up with the outside leg over the inside leg, and lands facing forward once again. If the vaulter lands hard on the horse's back, they are severely penalized. Scissors is judged on the elevation of the movement.

Stand - The vaulter moves from the astride position onto the shins and immediately onto both feet, and releases the grips. The vaulter then straightens up with both knees bent, the buttocks tucked forward, and the hands held as they are in basic seat. The vaulter must hold the position for four full strides.

The compulsories are performed in succession in the above order, without pause or dismounts.

Dress Code

The FEI regulates dress codes for competitive vaulting. Every 2-3 years, new guidelines are released, which consistently declare that vaulters must wear formfitting uniforms that do not conceal the line and form of the vaulter's body, as well as not hinder the movement of the vaulter or the safe interaction between the vaulters. For that reason, accessories such as belts, capes or hats are prohibited. Additionally, men's trousers must be secured at the ankle. It is also expected that clothing be appropriate for the competition and does not give the effect of nudity. The most common formfitting uniforms worn by vaulters are unitards.

Non-Competitive Vaulting

In addition to competition, vaulting is also a form of artistry, recreation and entertainment. Vaulters range in age from 3 years and older, practicing individual and team skills and routines. The youngest athletes begin at the walk gait and progress to trot, and canter, based on strength, height, and ability to mount and perform on the horse.

Vaulting is also used on a therapeutic level in some instances. People with disabilities can often benefit from interacting with the horse and team members, and by doing simple movements with the help of "spotters." Also, vaulting is often seen on a recreational level, through vaulting "demonstrations,"