

**CFD JR/YR Representative Melanie Doughty  
Explains Dressage Seat Medal Program**

**The USDF Dressage Seat Medal Program** was my first experience at a large Dressage competition. I qualified for the 2014 GAIG/USDF Regional Championships held in Conyers, GA and entered the Seat Medal Semi-Finals there.

**Here is how I got to the finals.**

- I qualified at 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> level to go to the Region 3 GAIG/USDF Championships
- I placed in the top two at the GAIG/USDF semi-finals at the Region 3 Championships in order to qualify for the USDF Dressage Seat Finals held at Lamplight Equestrian Center in Michigan.

Note: The rules allow two ways to qualify. One way you can enter the Semi-Finals at Regional's if you have qualified at another level (like I did) or the second way to qualify is to enter any open Dressage Seat Equitation class and get a score of 70% or above. The top two riders in the Regional Semi-Final are automatically qualified for the Finals but they don't have to accept. If they choose to not accept, the third and fourth placed riders are invited to the Finals instead.

**Here is what I learned and experienced while competing in the USDF Dressage Seat Medal Program**

1. **You have the option of bringing your own horse or borrowing one.** I borrowed a lovely horse each of the three times I competed and am grateful that their owners allowed me to do so. You usually only have two or three days to get to know the horse before the competition if you borrow one. Even though I had such a short time practicing with the horse, I built a bond and a working relationship with my borrowed horse. This bonding enabled us to work as a team at the competition. It was rewarding and a lot of fun to participate plus it really improved my seat and my feel!

**Note to self:** Horses have extremely sensitive skin; they can feel the

moment a fly lands on them. This sensitivity makes the seat the most important tool in riding. The horse feels the slightest of movements from the rider, whether it's an aid or not.

2. The USEF/USDF created the Dressage Seat Medal Program to have a competition where the judge is **judging the rider's position instead of the horse's movements**. The horse's frame is taken into consideration as it gives details about the rider's seat. The judge evaluates the leg and hand position, balance, rhythm, and the effectiveness and use of aids that do not interfere with the horse's movements.
3. Unlike the average Dressage test **it's not just you** and your horse in the arena, there are many horse and rider combinations riding with you.
4. There are two age groups, 13 years old and under, and 14 to 18 years old. I competed in the 13 and under category.
5. You are also given a **pattern** the night before to memorize and then perform as an individual test during the class in the competition. The pattern difficulty ranges based on the age group you are in, but each age group rides the same pattern.
6. **The Dressage Seat Finals** are held as a part of the Markel/USEF Young and Developing Dressage Horse National Championships. This is a very big deal!

Participating in the Dressage Seat Program for me was a unique and valuable experience. The program not only improved my seat and competitive poise but it gave me a chance to meet different types of people from all over the country. I even met one of my best friends at this competition and who has been very important in my life ever since. I encourage every junior or young rider ride in this program.