

Putting Together a Standard Skill Performance

A workshop presented in 1996 by John Foss, the 1988 Standard Skill World Champion
and Chairman of the IUF Rules Committee

Assembling and performing a Standard Skill artistic routine is a simple enough concept. Pick 18 skills from the list, memorize their order and ride them as best you can. But behind that simplicity are a number of steps you must take to get your best 18 skills and be able to perform them well. Follow the steps below organize the process of assembling your routine.

1. **WEED HIGH:** Go through the list and remove all skills that are too difficult for you currently.
2. **WEED LOW:** Go through the list again and remove any skills that you know are too easy for you.*
3. **CATEGORIZE:** Take what you have left and divide it into three categories: skills you can already do solidly, skills you can do shakily, and skills you hope to learn in time for the competition.
4. **18 VS. 3:** You are allowed 18 skills, but are allowed to use less. They all have to fit within the 3 minute time limit.
5. **RESTRICTIONS:** Remember the restrictions. You are only allowed six skills from among the mounts and transitions. This is because those skills can be performed quickly and don't involve the same time penalty as slower circles and eights. You are also only allowed one variation of each numbered skill. In other words, if you are doing 3b, seat in front, you may not also use 3d, seat in front in a figure 8.
6. **WHICH SKILLS?:** It will require practice for you to know how long it will take to perform your routine. This is the part that's hard to figure out before you know which 18 skills you will be using. Remember that mounts, transitions and stationary skills usually take the least amount of time, followed by skills done in a straight line, then circles, then eights. It is for this reason we don't see that many figure eights being performed in Standard Skill competitions. It's not because they are hard to do, but they take a lot of valuable time. This is especially true for slow skills like walking the wheel.
7. **BUILD THE SEQUENCE:** As you start to get your list of skills narrowed down, start assembling them in a logical order. They can be in any order you like, but you will want them to be arranged so that you have the least amount of wasted time and effort between skills.
8. **TIPS:** Mounts don't have to be at the beginning of the act. You may save time by starting with a riding skill (already riding when the time starts), and do your mount in the middle to give you a short break from riding. You can also do intentional dismounts to get to those hard-to-reach skills, such as side ride. This will allow you to step off your unicycle and get a clean start into the next skill. If you are using a skill that is worth a lot of points but you don't have a good success rate doing it (and you're leaving it in against my advice below), save it for last. Otherwise, put your lowest scoring skills last, if possible. This way if you run out of time you are not losing as much.
9. **FIT THE TIME LIMIT:** A common mistake for beginners is to get their 18 best skills, but to forget to practice them *all together*. There is a very big difference between being able to perform each individual skill and being able to squeeze them all into the 3 minute time limit. At this point you will probably have to do two things:
Practice the routine so you are comfortable with all the transitions, and so you memorize the order.
Cut when it becomes obvious that your chosen skills aren't going to fit the 3 minutes.
10. **WHAT TO CUT:** Cut the skills that you obviously won't be able to do in time. If you can't do it at least 50% of the time, it shouldn't be in your routine. If you want to be competitive, shoot for at least 80%. No matter how badly you may want to show a certain skill, you must ask yourself if it's worth the penalty if you miss it. You lose 2 points for a normal dismount. If you try again and miss, you lose another 2 points, plus the value of the skill.
You can also cut the skills that take too long. Trim the eights to circles and the circles to lines. You must strike a balance between points and time. To get all the points, you have to fit into the time!
11. **AFTER A DIAMOND IS CUT, IT GETS POLISHED:** Practice that routine again and again. The process of cutting and polishing can be spread out over weeks or months, as long as you finish with a routine that fits the time limit. Lots of practice will also help you to memorize the sequence. Remember, if you perform your skills out of order, you risk losing all points for those skills. If you forget one, you can't go back, unless you repeat all the skills after it.

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