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# IRRESISTIBLE Iberian Horse

ABOVE: Lusitanos have agile, elevated movements said to be very comfortable to ride. Stallion Bizet Interagro displays the flashy movement and strong elegant conformation that makes Lusitanos a pleasure to watch and ride.

By Melanie Huggett

The Iberian Peninsula of southwest Europe contains the countries of Spain, Portugal, Andorra, and Gibraltar, as well as a very small portion of France. The land's mountainous slopes, arid plateaus, deep river valleys, and expansive coastline have been home to horses for many millennia. Today, there are 17 breeds native to the peninsula, which are thusly named Iberian horses.

However, two of these 17 breeds truly stand out: The Pura Raza Espanola (PRE) of Spain, more commonly known as the Andalusian, and Puro Sangu Lusitano (PSL), or simply

Lusitano, of Portugal are well known for their beauty, athleticism, and ability to inspire passion.

The history of the PRE and PSL is closely related and dates back to 30,000 BC. Archeological evidence suggests that their ancestor is the Sorraia, a small, dun coloured wild horse native to southern Iberia. Cave paintings dating back as far as 20,000 BC look remarkably like the modern Andalusian and Lusitano.

Since being mounted and ridden by man for the first time around 4000 BC, the Iberian horse's primary use has been as a

## The ANDALUSIAN and LUSITANO



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war horse. Archeological findings show that cavalry battles with halberds, a weapon used to dismount the enemy, occurred during the Bronze Age on the southern peninsula.

Later on, both the Greeks and Romans used Iberian horses for their cavalry. The famous Greek cavalry officer, Xenophon, praised the "gifted Iberian horses," which helped the Spartans defeat the Athenians during the Peloponnesian Wars in 400 BC.

Much later, Iberian Horses were used during the Crusades of the Middle Ages. Considered noble horses, they were ridden by many famous individuals, including the great warrior King Richard I of England, also known as Richard the Lion Heart.

At this time, bulls began to be used in both Spain and Portugal to keep horses and warriors fit for war. A series of exercises and tricks were used to fight the aggressive bull.

During the Renaissance, Iberians became prized for their ability to perform high school dressage, becoming common at royal courts and classical riding academies across Europe. Again, due to his noble appearance, the Iberian became the principle mount of royalty and nobility in many countries.

Iberian horses also began to make their way to North and South America aboard Spanish, Portuguese, and French ships between the 15th and 17th centuries. All the horse breeds developed on the American continents are either directly or indirectly descended from Iberian horses. These breeds include the Quarter Horse,

Mustang, Appaloosa, Canadian Horse, Mangalarga Marchador, Paso Fino, Peruvian Paso, and many others. In Europe around the same time, the Iberian became the foundation of the Lippizan, Kladruher, and, later, many European Warmbloods.

Until 300 years ago, the Iberian ancestor of PRE and PSL horses was the same. The separation between the Lusitano and Andalusian began primarily in the 18th century, when bullfighting in Spain ceased to be performed on horseback; a man on foot, or matador, became the primary bullfighter in Spain at that time. In Portugal, however, bullfighting on horseback remained, and is still practiced to this day, though the bull is not killed in the ring like in Spain.

Arsenio Raposo Cordeiro explains in his book *Cavalo Lusitano* (Lusitano Horse): "The end of the bullfight on horseback in Spain forced the introduction of a new selection process in horse breeding... which became focused on the selection of a sporting horse with elevated and exuberant movements. In Portugal however, where bullfighting on horseback continued to be the only accepted form, a more cautious selection was practiced to produce a specialized fighting horse."

### Pura Raza Espanola

The PRE or Pure Spanish Horse is often called the "Horse of Kings" for his noble looks, fine temperament, and history as a mount for nobility.

In North America, Andalusians can be registered with the International Andalusian and Lusitano Horse Association (IALHA), however, the main studbook for the PRE is in Spain,

The PRE horse should be well balanced, with a well set neck, medium length head with straight or subconvex profile, and strong back and hindquarters. This stallion is owned by Carlos Lara of the Cuatro L Andalusian Breeding Centre in Wainwright, Alberta.

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and is managed by the National Association of Purebred Spanish Horse Breeders (ANCCE). To be registered, a foal must have both parents verified in the PRE studbook.

The vast majority of Andalusians are grey. In the past, grey, bay, and black were the only allowable colours, but today other colours and dilutions are permitted.

Standing 15.2 to 16.2 hands high on average, they should be as long as they are tall. Andalusians are a baroque type horse, with high set, arched necks and well developed, strong bodies. The head should be of medium length, the profile straight or subconvex, and the eyes oblique rather than round. The back should be short to medium length and flat, with a wide chest, deep girth, and strong loins. The legs are sturdy but fine, with upright hooves. The tail is low set, and the mane and tail long and ample. A stallion's hair is never cut, though traditionally mares are roached for practical reasons.

Mares and stallions tend to have distinctively "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics. Mares are delicate, less muscular, and shorter. Conversely, stallions tend to be very muscular and typically more beautiful. "The emblematic Spanish Horse is a male horse," said Carlos Lara, President of the Canadian Association of the PRE Horse (CAPREH).

"Their (the PRE horse's) biggest physical trait is their ability to collect and to bring themselves (under) and transfer their centre of gravity to their hind end," said Lara, who breeds PRE horses at

ABOVE, LEFT: Lusitanos such as this stallion, Blackstone Interagro, are powerful and athletic, possessing stamina and speed.

ABOVE, RIGHT: Iberians are admirable jumpers, as demonstrated by this PRE mare.

Cuatro L Andalusian Breeding Centre in Wainwright, Alberta. This ability to shift their weight back makes PRE excel at the collected movements in dressage and *Alta Escuela* (high school dressage), especially the airs above the ground.

"The terrain in Spain is very rocky, so through evolution, in order to get away from predators, they had to step high over rocks and sandy soil. They developed the ability to have very expressive front end movement," continued Lara. Due to their wonderful high knee action and uphill balance, Spanish horses do not naturally extend like Warmbloods or Thoroughbreds. It can certainly be taught to them with training, but is not as natural as collection.

Besides dressage, PRE can be used for a number of different disciplines, both English and Western. "They can be used for any discipline because these horses tend to be so brave," said Lara. "They do a decent job at most everything."

"The Andalusian is built with natural balance, collection, impulsion, and agility — an all around athlete," said Bette-Lyn Eger of the Pacific Association of the Andalusian and Lusitano Horse (PAALH). "They excel in upper level dressage. Andalusians also participate in driving, jumping, eventing, reining, performance, and exhibitions."

Often referred to as "the original cow horse," Andalusians are also great for working cows either competitively or on the farm. Spanish vaqueros have used Andalusians since the Middle Ages for cattle ranching. Their technique of training horses to work with cattle, called *Doma Vaquera*, has now been turned into a competitive sport and art form.

Besides their bravery, there are many other qualities that make the PRE a wonderful partner for almost any equestrian. "Andalusians are people orientated, possessing a proud but kind temperament," said Eger. "They are sensitive, and particularly intelligent, responsive and cooperative, learning quickly and easily when treated with respect. It is said with the ideal Andalusian temperament, the horse will carry itself with presence and pride in the show ring, as well as be able to follow quietly behind a child."

Getting the best out of an Andalusian requires patient training. "They often try to please and can be pushed too quickly. If so, they may internalize and nervous signs of stress will appear," said Eger.

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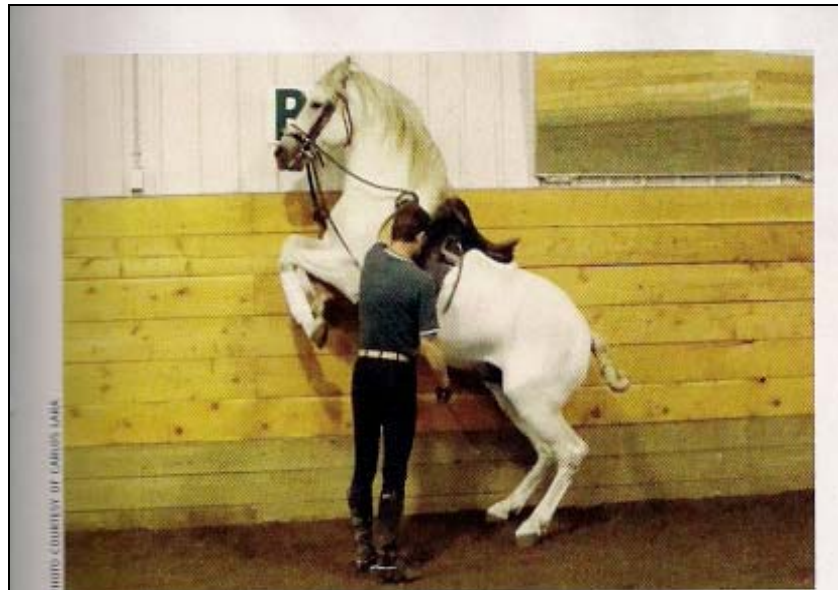
Iberians have often been the mounts of nobility due to their elegant looks and regal presence.



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Andalusians excel at high school dressage due to their natural ability to collect. This Andalusian from Cuatro L Andalusian Breeding Centre demonstrates a lavade.

One of the most famous Lusitanos is the grey stallion Novilheiro, who was ridden by Grand Prix show jumper John Whitaker of Britain during the 1980s. Novilheiro, out of a Veiga mare and by an Andrade stallion, was a top competitor during his day. Novilheiro has gone on to sire a great many exceptional sport horses. Not to be outdone, Novilheiro's full brother Opus II was one of the most famous bullfighting horses of his day, proving that the breed is truly versatile.

Lusitanos also make a fine light driving horse. At the 1996 World Driving Championships in Belgium, a team of Lusitanos won the four-in-hand class.

Of course, Lusitanos, like the PRE horse, still excel at dressage, especially collection and the high school manoeuvres. Many Lusitanos were present at the 2008 Olympics in Hong Kong in the dressage competitions: