

THE HORSE OF HISTORY-The Horse of Spain

Until recent times, horse breeding was concentrated in the south of Spain, most noticeably around the lush delta of the Rio Guadalquivir, in the heartland of Andalucia. Thus the horse acquired its widely recognised title of "Andalucian". Here, for millennia, horses have run wild, descendants of the ancient Sorraia, which roamed both north and south of the pre-glacial land-bridge which linked Spain to North Africa. With the splitting of the continents, these aboriginal horses evolved into two separate breeds with a common ancestry and evolutionary factors, the Barb and the Spanish horse. Both breeds are strong, close coupled and agile, able to thrive in such varied terrain as high, rough mountain slopes and lowland, marshy belts around the coastal deltas. Both breeds are Hot Blooded.



Moorish Horsemen from Alhambra, 14th Century



Spanish Stallion from a 1572 book illustration

kingdom which the Moors invaded had a power base strongly centred around the Christian Church and much of the horsebreeding of the period was under monastic control. Not only did the invaders initially practice religious tolerance but also their understanding of the necessity of protecting suitable breeding stock allowed the Spanish Horse to survive intact. Later many breeding establishments retreated northwards into the unconquered regions of the peninsular, thereby preserving the purity of their horses. It was from here that the Christian Armies launched the Re-conquest in the 11th century and their greatest hero, El Cid is immortalised in numerous statues mounted on his monastery-bred stallion Babieca. After three centuries of Moorish

Like all Blood Horses the Purebred Spanish horse is fiery and courageous whilst at all times remaining attuned to his rider's wishes with a high degree of intelligence. This "non violent violence" which he possess has made the Spanish Horse constantly desirable as a horse of war for thousands of years. From the Carthaginians of coastal Spain in the 6th century BC, famed for their mercenary cavalry units, to the all-conquering Roman cohorts who drew over 1\3rd of their remounts from the province of Hispania, the courage and strength of the Spanish Horse was exhorted.

The Muslim invasion of Spain in the 8th Century did little to alter the already prepotent breed in the peninsular. Of the small number of cavalry units involved, the majority were local recruits drawn from the North African Berbers and thus were mounted on that very close relative of the Spanish Horse, the Barb. The Visigothic



Spanish riders - Escorial, 16th Century



Charles IV of Austria on his Spanish Stallion, 16th Century

English Thoroughbred, providing the main foundation mare line based on the Royal Mares at the studs in Britain.

dominion, this animal has the unmistakable stamp of the Spanish Horse.

Throughout history, via the early Norman “destrier”, the foundation of the Frankish war machine, epitomised by the black Spanish stallion ridden by Duke William at Hastings, to the state of the art palfreys of the later Middle Ages, the same morphological elements of the Spanish horse are repeated. Later pictorial evidence is backed up by documentary clarification. Records stating the origins and desirability of Spanish Horses are numerous in the 16th and 17th centuries and this popularity was evident in the European wide demand for the breed in order to upgrade and establish local breeds, the most notable of which was the Lipizzaner in 1598. Later in the 18th century the Spanish Horse played a most important role in the creation of the



Elizabeth I of England on a Spanish horse

In later centuries the Spanish Horse moved his skills perfected in mounted combat away from the arena of war and into the riding academies of Europe where his ability to perform High School manoeuvres remains unsurpassed.



Francis I of France on his Spanish Stallion, 16th Century

Today the Spanish Horse has numerous accomplishments within the sphere of equine endeavours to add to his historical status, yet it is his role in history which has made him the true aristocrat of the Equine world. Throughout history no ruler has appeared complete without the company of a Spanish charger and his depiction thereon. Artistic ideals may change yet the same horse is depicted over and over again, be it in classical treatise on horsemanship, marble friezes, statues or paintings. The Horse of History, the Horse of Spain.



The Spanish Horse in the 20th Century -

Right: Evento - Top Winner in the International Dressage Arena

Left: Centello - National Champion of Spain (in Hand) 1984

