

PRINCIPE - THE SPANISH UNICORN

The film LEGEND is now on general release, and hopefully many members will be able to get to see it - and the Andalusian horses who feature as unicorns in the story of the conflict between darkness and light. Five horses were bought in Spain by the Legend film company, and travelled to England in early 1984. The oldest of them was the pure-bred white stallion "Principe", bred by Don Fernando de la Camara Galvez near Sevilla, and it is he who is featured in nearly all the unicorn scenes in LEGEND. The film is a timeless fairy-tale, quite scary in parts, with elves, goblins, a beautiful princess, the evil Lord of Darkness, and of course the unicorns.

The horses working on LEGEND were trained by a Spanish and an English stuntman. They worked with fire and with wind machines, in deep "snow" and in streams and rivers, in forests and in dungeons - and all within the huge artificial set built for LEGEND at Pinewood Studios. It cannot have been easy to have loose stallions galloping around amongst all that multi-million dollar equipment! Principe's special abilities of rearing and lying down at the spoken command were used to the full, and as his natural mane is pure white and falls to just two inches above his knee he did not need any special adornments - except his magic unicorn's horn of course. He is totally people-orientated, loves his work, and always tries terribly hard to please. He has a charisma that comes across well on film, and particularly well on stills. I have worked as assistant to the American author and photographer Robert Vavra for several years, and I knew instantly that he would be perfect for our photographic books and videss. However, more important was the fact that when I first saw Principe working on the set at Pinewood I promptly fell in love with him, and despite his age and some obvious unsoundness I checked with my colleagues in Spain and established that the horse is from Terry bloodlines and is beautifully bred, and in everyone's opinion a magnificent example of the classic Andalusian. As I was at that time only back from Spain on a temporary basis and hoping to soon return and continue working with Mercedes Gonzalez and her horses, buying a Spanish stallion here in England was something I had not included in my plans. But I was also fully aware that to own Principe was the sort of opportunity one only gets once, and so when the filming was completed I took a deep breath and bought him. I believe two of the younger stallions were bought by the Chipperfield family, and the others kept by the stuntman who had worked with them on the film.

We brought Principe home in March 1985, far from sound, and very much on his best behaviour. I have not regretted it for a minute. Principe is indeed a marvellous example of the breed. He is gentle, forgiving and kind, courageous and willing, and above all immensely noble. As the weeks went by he relaxed, and demonstrated more and more strongly his incredible character, great personality, and a definite sense of humour.

Acquiring a "trick-trained" horse when you do not know the commands he answers to, (both stuntmen had by this time gone to work in South America), cannot be without incident in the early days. Attempt to lunge Principe at first only resulted in his folding up like a pack of cards on the ground because he thought that was what I wanted, and on one occasion I stood horror-struck as I saw his white bottom bustling out of the yard gate and off down the lane after he had removed his headcollar and opened his own stable door. However, a shriek of "Whoa" resulted in a screeching halt, and he promptly turned round and trotted right back to me! Luckily we soon learnt to understand each other, in both English and Spanish. But Principe is no ordinary horse.....

After consultations with both vet and blacksmith, we worked out a system of feeding, work, shoeing and care to try and get the stallion's laminitis-damaged feet back into shape and to ease his tired old joints and muscles. I was not at all hopeful that we would be able to achieve very much with an obviously very overworked fourteen year old horse, but as the year went on he did steadily improve and the very careful programme that we had worked out for him has certainly paid off. He is now virtually sound, and very well and happy. He hacks out regularly and is very well mannered in either his Spanish vaquera saddle and bridle, or a dressage saddle and pelham bit, and he also has the occasional "training session" when I work him loose and put him through all his party-pieces to make sure he stays in practice, but not often enough to overstrain him all over again. It has been a joy to watch him steadily improve, and now only the horrendous spur scars along his belly and flanks remain as reminders of the hard life that he has obviously had. However, they also serve as reminders of the extreme generosity and nobility of his nature, that he is still so trusting and kind, a marvellous example of the best qualities of his breed.

I spent some time at my home in Spain in the autumn, and with the help of friends there I was able to trace the last owner of Principe, in Sanlucar de Barrameda, and I also visited the cortijo where he was bred and talked at length with the mayoral who helped me to trace most of his life. I am so grateful to a very good friend, Javier Garcia Romero, who is the lead rider at the Escuela Andaluza de Arte Equestre in Jerez, and whose ranch adjoins that of Camara. He provided me with the most valuable of introductions and so much practical help. There are still about four years I have not been able to trace, but matador and rancher friends near Jerez are working on this for me and I hope to complete the picture when I return in the Spring. The plan is to then produce a book about Principe's life, and he will also be used for forthcoming photographic books by Robert Vavra, for paintings by John Fulton, and you may see him on BBC TV later in 1986.

The Andalusian horse has been my great passion and consuming interest since I first lived in Spain in 1973, and I had known when I first saw Principe that he is a good horse of the now

considered old-fashioned but classical type that I particularly admire. I feel very privileged to own him, and though I now plan to bring other Andalusian horses over to England in the future, for me there will never be another Principe. A true product of the harsh but beautiful land of Andalucia that I know and love so well, and one of the few horses in England that were fully vaquera trained and actually worked for many years in the bullrings and f  rias of southern Spain, Principe is now enjoying the semi-retirement he so much deserves here in the English countryside, and I will never part with him.

Please go and see him and the other lovely Andalusians in LEGEND, and look out for Principe's books in the future. I hope that by his appearances, and his contributions to photography and art, he will help to bring the breed even more publicity and recognition, and that he will long continue to bring beauty and pleasure to as many people as possible.

Marilyn Tennent

Footnote:

As members are probably aware, there are several Spanish breeders who - though members of the Breed Association - do not show their stock nor feel it necessary to advertise them. Camara horses are in this group, and so you will not find examples listed in the show results from Jerez and Sevilla. However, the family has for many generations bred fighting bulls and excellent horses from pure and uncrossed Terry and Osborne bloodlines that are held in high regard in Andalucia. It is rare and very interesting to see a Camara horse outside Spain.

