

PRINCIPE - The Odyssey continues

Seville - October 1986. An extraordinary day. Having received word from a past owner of my stallion Principe that he had two sons of the horse for me to see, I set off from Sevilla on a bright autumn morning and drove via Jerez towards Cadiz, branching out towards Chiclana de la Frontera across the flat and sultry marshlands reaching inland from the bay of Algeciras, where the salt diggers are working. Mountains of sea salt are piled between the pools and small rivers that run to the sea.

Chiclana is not one of Andalucia's most attractive pueblos, but out towards Vejer de la Frontera, which is surely one of the most attractive of all the white towns, at a picadero set amongst the bare scrubwoods and sandtracks, it seemed strange to see two horses bearing a strong resemblance to the father currently contentedly munching his way across a green English meadow! One horse was a strong eight year old with flowing mane and lots of presence, whose dam was of the blood of Romero Benitez, and the other a five year old palomino with mother of South American blood, light of substance but with very much the bearing and personality of dear Principe - and even trained to do the same "tricks" and now beginning alta escuela movements which he demonstrated for me while his mother slumbered in a nearby pasture. Neither young stallion with papers, but both attractive horses and for sentiment's sake both very much with the stamp of the father. Not least attractive were their names - the grey Ben-d-Allah (son of Allah), and the palomino Deseo (Desire). How strange to think that for five years Principe lived at this outpost, with sorties to various bullrings and ferias, suffering intermittent laminitis caused by a whole grain diet unrelieved by any form of bulk that is in part responsible for his unsoundness today. However, it was in my interests to refrain from comment, and learn still more of 'how things are' in Spain. Pé has suffered much maltreatment, but he is free from it now.

Food for thought - and much did I ponder whilst lunching on a bocadillo of local ham and cheese beneath a sand dune on the nearby beach..... I have now retraced most of the stallion's life, starting backwards with his last Spanish owner in Sanlucar de Barrameda from where he left to come to England in 1984, now through Chiclana, and also to his first owners in Jerez. And today I was also going to visit the daughter of his breeder, at the Cortijo de la Sierra where Principe was born.

This very well respected Stud of caballos cartujanos y toros bravos near Jerez is now being run by Rocio de la Camara - a remarkable young woman who inherited her father's estate upon his death a few years ago. Rocio is just now beginning to present and sell her father's horses once again after several quiet years, and this year was the first that they had been shown at the Campeonato de España in Seville. It was there that I had spotted the 3 year old colt 'Jerezano' who I was now going to see. The cortijo itself is superb - a wonderful house set in the hills, the stables immaculate, and the small bullring typical as if in a dream of exactly how these breeding ranches should be. Que suerte! On arrival I found that there was a testing of "brave cows" in progress in the ring adjacent to the stables - men dashing up and down on strong and sure-footed cross-bred horses with long lances to bring the vacas in for testing meant that the occupants of the stable block were in uproar. One must admit that the Spanish horse's ability to adapt to any situation is long inbred from this exposure to all the activities of a working ranch. It must be admitted that having spent much time living and working in the house of Robert Vavra and John Fulton, the American matador, I did hasten to watch the testing, for there are fewer more interesting and folkloric sights in Southern Spain and my life there is totally immersed in all that this involves.

Later to the horses - and 'Jerezano' continues to enchant. Just in from 3 years at pasture he is still timid and unsure, but a lovely little horse who was thought highly enough to have been awarded a Mencion Honorifico at the Championships. Sadly (for me) it has been decided to keep Jerezano at Stud next year, but I have gained first refusal on the horse for late 1986 and hope that I may eventually own him as he is a marvellous classic example of Salvatierra and Concha y Sierra blood, and will clearly have the same marvellous neck and head as my boy back home.

The other purpose of my visit to the Cortijo de la Sierra was to discover the results of investigations finally being made for me as to the parentage of Principe, so hard to ascertain as it was claimed that his papers were "stolen" several years ago. It has now been agreed that he is probably a horse named 'Salinero', born in 1968, by Hacendoso IV (Terry) out of a mare Salinera IV (Osborne), Much purer cartujano you cannot get, but as he was sold by Fernando de la Camara as a colt and was probably never graded or entered in the Stud Book I can never now verify it in writing but must be content that my searchings and many enquiries have at last provided me personally with the information I was looking for. How much I have enjoyed all the adventures along the way! Tracing the story of an animal of which you are fond is fascinating, and I would urge anyone to try and do the same. How interesting it was also to talk to the mayoral of Camara and learn from him so much about how their stock is bred and raised. He showed me the mares at pasture, this year's foals tied in lines in the big barns, the working cross-bred horses, and all the young stallions, explaining feeding and training programmes. From him, as I have from the mayorales of Romero Benitez, Guardiola and Lazo Diaz, the knowledge I have gained explaining the background from where these horses come has been invaluable.

As evening descended and sherry was offered, there was much talk of horses and discussions of great interest to me regarding veterinary procedures in Spain. How glad I am that I have at last seemed to master enough of this language to be able to talk with these horse people and learn! As I drove home later to Sevilla I again - as I have a thousand times since my own personal Spanish odyssey began so many years ago - thanked good friends and good fortune for my Spanish life. Knowing that there would be talk that night around the table of bulls and horses and work on the new book as we exchanged our news of the day, and planning to visit my dear friend Francisco (Paco) Lazo the next day to see again a lovely young bay stallion of his that would be just right to bring to England, I reflected on yet another unforgettable day. And thank you Principe, (for though you may really be Salinero - man from the salt marshes - you will always be the Spanish Prince to me), for adding yet again another memory and another dimension to the happiness I have experienced thanks to all the wonderful horses of Spain.

Marilyn Tennent

