

From time immemorial, the horses of the Iberian Peninsula—the Andalusian from Spain and the Lusitano from Portugal—have been inextricably linked to mankind. Known and chronicled by the ancients as the greatest war and riding horse of all time, it was on their backs that the empires of Greece, Rome, and later, Europe were carved into history.

The Iberian horses reached their zenith during the Baroque Age of Revival when warfare suddenly changed because of the invention of firearms. At that point, a horse with great agility, courage, intelligence and maneuverability become essential on the battlefield. A rider needed to become like a centaur, and his horse needed to respond unconditionally to the lightest of aids.

It was during this period that the art of military riding developed to its highest degree and became the precursor to our modern day dressage. The Spanish and Portuguese horses were the fountainhead of this training, which became known as

The Andalusian & Lusitano

By Tina Veder



Bob Langrish

classical dressage, and the extreme movements, such as the “airs above the ground,” that were developed during this time, are a testimony to the strength, ability and willingness of the Iberian horses.

So what has happened over the past two millennia to these ancient breeds? Have they changed through time? Is there a place for them in the 21st Century, or are they a relic of an archaic past?

Amazingly, the Andalusian and Lusitano horse, as if by some miracle, has come down through the ages almost unchanged, offering modern day horse enthusiasts the attributes that were so revered by the early “Fathers of Equestrian.” Loved for their uncanny understanding of the rider’s wishes and then generously offering it to them, they were considered by many to be the finest horses of all time. Equally suited to be enjoyed by a master or used as a teacher for the novice student, they have not lost their place in the hearts of today’s equestrian. More and more people are



Rick Olsen

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discovering the joy of owning an Andalusian or Lusitano.

For centuries, they have been used in their native countries of Spain and Portugal for riding and driving. They are keen ranch horses and especially suited to herding and working the aggressive Iberian bulls. Mounted bullfighting is one of the favorite activities in Spain and Portugal, and the Andalusian and Lusitano horses are the best at it. The agility, courage and intelligence which served them on the battlefield of a previous era has been put to the test in the bull ring, where the horses of Iberia demonstrate their amazing functionality and loyalty to their rider.

In the past 10 years, these illustrious breeds have made a major mark in international competition, both in driving and dressage. In 1996, at the Olympics in Atlanta, GA, the Spanish dressage team turned heads when Ignacio Rambla competed the purebred Spanish Andalusian stallion, Evento, to high scores, placing them seventh. Evento’s piaffes and passages were remarkable, and the ease and beauty with which he executed the movements and transitions inspired dressage riders from around the world. This was a turning point for the Andalusian and Lusitano horse in international competition. Tasting success, the Spanish team then set their mark for a medal in the next Olympic Games. In 2002, they won the Bronze at the World Equestrian Games in Jerez, with two Pure Spanish Andalusians, one Lusitano and one Warmblood. As intended four years earlier, they went on to capture the Silver medal at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

The Lusitanos have also been proving themselves in international competition in the discipline of driving. In 1995, the four-in-hand Lusitanos driven for Belgium by Felix Brasseur dominated FEI driving competition by winning the World Cup and then going on to win the World Championships in 1996. According to Brasseur, he only had six months to train this team of horses before their World Cup competition, which they won. He commented in interviews that the speed at which his Lusitanos responded to their training was amazing. It has been proven that in both disciplines of driving and dressage on an international level, Iberian horses can quickly rise to the top and triumph against the other breeds.

On the national scene in 1999, the International Andalusian and Lusitano Horse Association (IALHA), mainly through the efforts of Gareth A. Selwood, was welcomed as a member association into the USEF. This was a giant step for the pure Andalusian, pure Lusitano, pure Spanish-Lusitano and Half-Andalusian breeds in America, all of which are registered under the umbrella of the IALHA.

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Above: The Andalusian stallion Enrico gained two national championship titles and two Region 5 championship titles in Andalusian/Lusitano Performance and Andalusian/Lusitano High Point Amateur Horse in the 2004 USEF Horse of the Year program.

The Breeds of the USEF

Paul Belasik

Paul Belasik is a scientist, scholar, painter, poet, philosopher and avowed proponent of classical equitation. His articles on horses and horsemanship have appeared in many publications in the United States. His highly regarded trilogy of *Riding Towards the Light*, *Exploring Dressage Techniques* and *The Songs of Horses* have been enthusiastically received by the equestrian world. Following these books, he wrote the remarkable illustrated work on the art of dressage, *Dressage for the 21st Century*. This was a major work that covered all aspects of riding and training.

Belasik has trained a variety of horses. Excelso is Belasik's 16-hand Andalusian stallion who he trained and who is the current USDF/IALHA Champion at grand prix and grand prix freestyle. Belasik said, "Although I have an involvement in competitive dressage, my real focus is the *art* of dressage."

"I started with the Northern European breeds, and my first introduction to the Andalusian and Lusitano was 25 years ago when I went to study with Nuno Oliveira in Portugal. One of the things that impressed me most about these horses was how fast their reflexes were, while at the same time being very docile and cooperative."

Belasik gives clinics, lectures and demonstrations both nationally and internationally, and trains a wide cross section of clients at his Lost Hollow Farm in Dillsburg, PA. When asked if he uses the Andalusian and Lusitano in his teaching programs, he enthusiastically said, "As a teacher, I have found that the Iberian horse is my first choice. They are gentle in their nature; very intelligent; have smaller, more comfortable gaits; and give the student confidence, which helps them to excel in their progress. They are by nature so trustworthy."

Becoming members of USEF opened the door to a variety of benefits, including membership in the governing body that is recognized both nationally and internationally for competitions. Horses and membership registered with the IALHA were given the opportunity to participate in the extensive awards programs offered by USEF, including national championships, regional and zone Horse of the Year awards.

Another gateway was opened to the IALHA members when they joined the family of USEF, which is America's largest multi-breed equestrian organization. The membership received a multitude of benefits offered through the USEF, including automatic liability insurance coverage, and discounts on products and services through the MemberPerks program.

Featured articles on the Andalusian and Lusitano in **EQUESTRIAN** magazine went far in establishing awareness and credibility in a number of disciplines and reaching the most diverse American equestrian market available through one publication.

Although the numbers of Andalusian and Lusitanos are relatively small in comparison to other breeds in the United States (9,000-plus purebreds and 5,000-plus Half-Andalusians), they seem undaunted at participating in shows across the country.

There are 25 IALHA shows held throughout the United States; three regional championships, all with qualifying shows held before, with 17 of these recognized by USEF. The show season culminates in October each year with the IALHA National Championship Show held in Ft. Worth, TX, at the Will Rogers Equestrian Center. Hundreds of owners and enthusiasts gather together from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, South America and Europe to reconnect with friends and show their horses. A list of the 2004 USEF Horse of the Year and Silver Stirrup champions, which included Andalusian/Lusitano divisions, was published in the March 2005 issue of **EQUESTRIAN** magazine. Selwood with Selwood Park Illuminario and Davido MC, Roberta Josephs with Estrella de la Manana and Enrico, Dorothy Elfers with Tiara, Gail Nichols with Millenium and Shana West with Kreatiw Jewel were some of the happy recipients of USEF national championships.

Besides halter, Andalusians and Lusitanos are shown in all disciplines of riding and driving. There are some new activities that are being used to show off the talents of Iberian horses. One of them is working equitation, which is a three-day-long event. It incorporates dressage on the first day, the navigation of an obstacle course on the second day and an exciting timed event employing the obstacle course on the final day. Working equitation is a new sport that has already held its world championship in Europe with teams from Brazil, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Italy, France and England.

Another burgeoning activity coming on the scene for Iberians is Baroque dressage. Baroque dressage competitions are patterned after the training and movements used during the Baroque era. The tests are usually ridden in period-style costume and reflect the glory and extravagance of a bygone era. With a focus on the art of riding, rather than rewarding the expansive, ground-covering gaits as in standard dressage competitions, these competitions offer the rider/trainer a different venue—one in which the spotlight is on the uphill balance and roundness at collection, which is more natural for these breeds. The competitors are encouraged to create a lovely picture of harmony and lightness: to dance with their horses. A number of these shows have already taken place in Germany, France and other parts of Europe with great success. Spectators love them and attend in great numbers. A handful of classical Baroque competitions, like Trophaeum Mundi, have already been launched, and competitions of this type are slated to be held in the future.

The majestic Horse of Kings, the Andalusians and Lusitanos, who throughout history have been at the pinnacle of great horsemanship since its beginnings, stand as ready today as they did then to share the ultimate expression of their essence: kindness, generosity, gentleness, devotion, loyalty, courage and intelligence. They await you. ■

International Andalusian and Lusitano Horse Association

101 Carnoustie N. Box 200
Birmingham, AL 35242
(205) 995-8900
fax (205) 995-8966
www.ialha.org

Tina Veder comes from a fifth generation European equestrian circus family. She has been breeding, training, importing and selling Andalusian and Lusitano horses for two decades at her farms in Saratoga, NY, and Ocala, FL.