

# DRESSAGE For the Love of a Lusitano

By Sarah Eakin

Swedish-born international dressage rider Pia Aragão's love affair with Lusitanos began when she was asked by Cecilia Gonzaga, the daughter of Dr Paulo Gavião Gonzaga, founder of Brazilian-based Interagro Lusitanos, to train Nirvana Interagro, in 2001. Since then her life has been inextricably linked with the breed. Based in Brazil as Director of the Picadeiro at Interagro Lusitanos just outside São Paulo, Pia prepares the young Lusitanos for their debut on the world stage, which for a carefully-selected group begins this month with their presentation at the 2009 Lusitano Collection in West Palm Beach, Florida.

"I know every horse very well," said Pia. "They are all willing and have wonderful temperaments. I try not to get too attached to them at home, but when we bring these horses to auction we are saying goodbye to a close and dear friend."

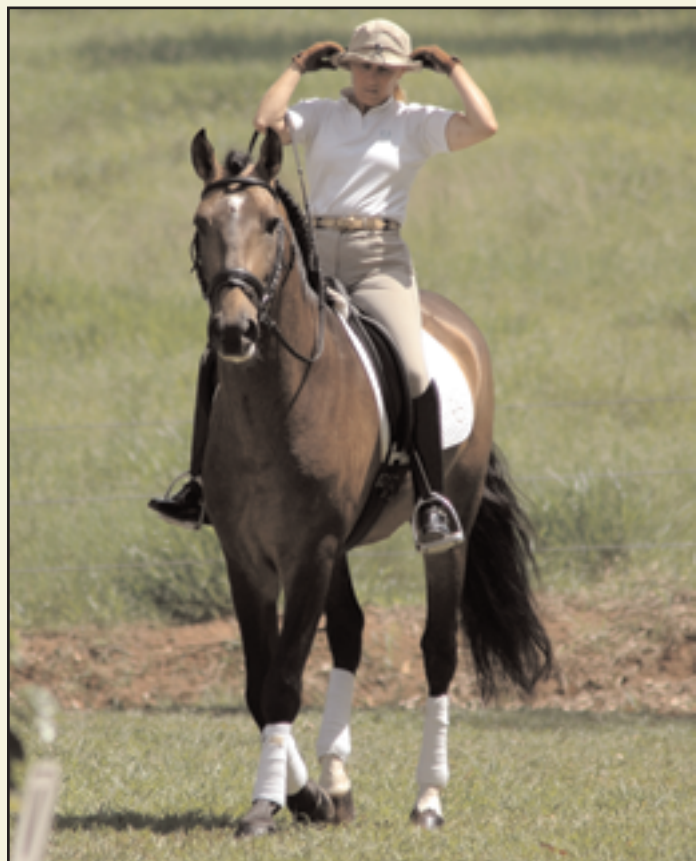
Pia remains very attached to Nirvana Interagro after nearly losing him forever. Pia and Nirvana Interagro won the 2004 South American Vice-champion individual and team FEI in Argentina, the 2006 freestyle at the Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington, Florida, was the 2006 and 2007 Brazilian champion and the winner of the 2007 CDI\*\*\* Amil Dressage Cup.

The pair was ready to set the world alight and were due to represent Brazil at the Pan-American Games before an acute case of bacterial colitis struck down the grey stallion ten days before the contest. Nirvana made a miraculous recovery thanks to the on-hand veterinary care at Interagro's headquarters only to suffer acute laminitis as a



*Alfacinha Interagro hopes to follow in his talented father's footsteps*

Photo by Tupa



*Pia Aragão finds a hat helps shade her face from the tropical sun as she rides five to 8 horses daily*

Julia Wentscher Germany

direct result of the illness. After further nurturing Nirvana became sound enough for turnout and light riding and is scheduled to cover some 40 mares as breeding season gets underway at Interagro. Recently Pia rode her beloved friend in the soft footing of the indoor arena. He was back in his element trotting soundly straight down centerline. All at Interagro are hopeful that he will compete again but as Pia says, Nirvana will dictate the outcome. "It's up to him to show us the way," she said. "He will tell me if he's ready."

Pia, an equestrian since the age of ten, trained with Swedish rider Bo Tibblin and with the famous rider Hans Rueben in Aachen, Germany, who guided her in national dressage competitions and in the CDI-W in Ksiaz, Poland. Pia became Brazilian dressage champion in 1991 and qualified for the World Cup finals the following year. But it was her relationship with Nirvana, and their rapid success which brought her to be the exclusive rider and trainer of Interagro Farms in 2005.

Pia trains and competes with the rising stars from the Interagro breeding program including Tufão Interagro who was Fourth Level Champion at the ABPSL championships and won fourth level at the Sao Paulo Dressage Cup in 2008. Pia is excited by many of the prospects she has been working on for The Collection, including some young stallions that she describes as "willing to go forward and with very special gaits." One in particular, Amintas, she says is "perfect conformation and with super gaits – well above average." The variety of Lusitanos in The Collection also includes the delightful palomino 'Alfacinha



*Nirvana Interagro launched Pia Aragão's love affair with the breed*

**Photo by Tupa**

Interagro' whose sire is Tufão Interagro. The Collection has several mares Pia views as serious dressage prospects. Pia says three of them have been under saddle for nine months and show

"incredible temperament."

Routinely Pia has some 20 of Interagro's horses under her in training and rides seven or eight herself each day. Though no one in her family was involved with horses, for Pia it is an all encompassing way of life. Married to Pedro, an amateur rider whom she met in Rio de Janeiro 22 years ago, she considers hobby and work the same thing and is involved with horses even when on vacation. "I call it Pia's lifestyle," she said simply.

At Interagro she has many friends. "The horses know when Pia's truck is approaching," said Cecilia, "and they whinny for her." Dr. Gonzaga adds: "We have around 600 of the finest Lusitanos on our farm at one time. We breed the horses, and after they are weaned, we turn them out to pasture in peer groups until they are old enough for initiation under saddle. They then progress to dressage competitions in Brazil with Pia and a small group of young riders under her tutelage. Pia is a gifted trainer and instructor."

In fall of last year the final selections were made at Interagro Farms with a small selection of Lusitanos picked out for their talent and examined under a stringent veterinary inspection before being declared suitable for The Collection and for export to the US market.

For Pia the event will always be emotional. "What I really like about The Collection is seeing the smile on the face of the new owner," she said.

*Susan Apple contributed to this article*

On February 19 and 20, 2009, The Lusitano Collection® is presenting 34 horses for auction at The Jim Brandon Equestrian Center in West Palm Beach, Florida.

The Lusitano Collection® is a trademark established by five of the most important Lusitano horse breeders in Brazil and Portugal. Their combined experience represents more than 300 years of excellence in the selection of the best animals and genealogies in the breed. Horses from The Lusitano Collection® have gone to new homes in many countries including the USA, Australia, Canada and throughout Europe. During the 2009 Auction, attendees may examine the horses' veterinarian records, including x-rays and tests. Also, interested buyers may view, examine and test-ride any of these horses which are already trained in novice level dressage

"The auction gives clients the advantage of acquiring horses that are not available elsewhere in the world without the necessity of importing them either from Portugal or Brazil," said Peter Van Borst, Interagro Lusitanos' US representative who will be among a team of Lusitano experts willing to give guidance and advice to buyers and their trainers at The 2009 Lusitano Collection®. "It provides a chance for clients to meet the breeders of their horses and be secure in the knowledge that the horses have come directly from the breeder – not from an agent. Clients are also able to learn about the horse's background and history and to experience firsthand the great international relationship that comes from buying a horse from The Lusitano Collection®."

In order to ensure each guest is given proper attention, the 2009 Lusitano Collection® has elected to limit the event capacity to 400 attendees. At the end of the testing period, guests will enjoy festivities in the course of the Auction that include a cocktail party followed by the Showcase Parade of Horses into a hacienda-like atmosphere complete with hanging chandeliers, water fountain and lush tropical trees. Youngest-ever Olympian equestrian, seventeen-year-old Brazilian Luiza Tavares de Almeida, who rode a Lusitano in the 2008 Olympics, will be fea-



*Amintas Interagro – a star of the forthcoming 2009 Lusitano Collection*

**Photo by Tupa**

tured. Her father Manuel Tavares de Almeida is the founder of Coudelaria Rocas do Vouga – one of the partners of the Lusitano Collection. Guests will also be treated to musical entertainment and a sit-down dinner. A portion of the proceeds from the auction will benefit the American Cancer Society and the Jim Brandon Equestrian Center.

For tickets and more information, visit [www.lusitanocollection.com](http://www.lusitanocollection.com)