

owned by Jose Manuel de Mello, president of the Portuguese Lusitano Association. Peter Van Borst, is working with a team and a pair of Lusitanos, stemming from the Interagro bloodlines and owned by William Robinson of Robinson Lusitanos, Idaho.

"We have high aspirations for them," said Van Borst, who recently moved the Lusitanos to Aiken, South Carolina – traditional driving country that has taken interest in the recent arrival of the breed. "The Lusitano has a huge heart, great stamina, wonderful reflexes and impulsion because while you can play with the external appearance you can't breed heart and intelligence so easily into a horse. That said, Interagro has the luxury of being able to put together a chemistry of bloodlines.

"Interagro are also using the wonderfully diverse gene pool that they have to produce driving horses. We are hoping these horses we are working with now will bear witness to the fact that the Lusitano has the ideal characteristics for a competitive driving horse."

As the largest breeder of the Lusitano horse worldwide, Dr Gonzaga's passion for the breed is clear, and his vision for their wider role as horses under saddle for both competition and amateur fulfillment is emerging.

"You have a universe of amateurs and very few professionals," he said. "This mass market is the amateur. They have difficulty mastering the Warmblood as they don't have the character that the Lusitano has..."

Still it has taken time for the breed to become recognized on the world stage. While in many ways the deep-rooted history of Lusitano breeding has fuelled its emergence as a universally talented horse, it has also dictated a conservative approach to its evolution.

"The Lusitano is a very interesting breed," said Dr Gonzaga. "It has a fascinating history and the breeders are proud of their lines. The first time the Lusitano appeared in dressage – it seemed almost culturally inadmissible because it was widely thought that Baroque was the only way that was valid."

Times have changed and doors are opening to the Lusitano horse. "The Lusitano can go to the Olympics but they can also be ridden by children," explained Dr Gonzaga. "It is the best horse on which to learn to ride. Training with a Lusitano is much easier, much safer. It is a horse that can do everything a Warmblood can do but it's easier to ride and cheaper too. They are very clever horses and they don't forget. It takes much less time to teach them than other breeds. Lusitanos like people and they try to please you, which make them enjoyable for amateurs and

professionals alike."

Dr Gonzaga sums up the breed most adeptly in his book, *O Cavalo Lusitano*. "They are strong, vigorous horses, obedient, generous of character, agile, and articulate, elegant, distinct and arrogant, proud, lordly and noble of spirit; they are also docile, intelligent and submissive, easy to teach for every horse activity," he wrote. "Such characteristics make the Lusitano the best saddle horse in the world."
