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Andalusian

International Andalusian & Lusitano Horse Association

The Lusitano – A Versatile Breed

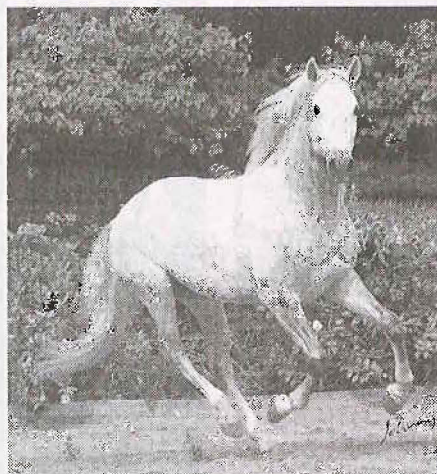
The Lusitano is a breed of horse native to Portugal, steeped in the tradition of its historical links to the military, bullfighting and the classical training methods of the "Alter Real," the traditional riding school of Portugal. Today Lusitanos are also recognized for their ability to perform well in a variety of modern-day equestrian disciplines and for their generous temperament, making them popular with owners who like to ride for fun.



"Recently rediscovered, the Lusitano horse has re-acquired the prestige it enjoyed in the past centuries as one of the best saddle horses in the world," said Paulo Gavião Gonzaga, founder of Interagro Lusitanos of Brazil, the world's largest breeder of the Lusitano horse. "The growing demand, however, cannot be fully satisfied by the still small numbers of horses and breeders around the world and this scarcity, combined with its high performance in competition, turned the Lusitano into one of the most desired sought after horses of the moment, explaining its standing as a symbol of status and prestige for its owners and trainers."

Lusitanos in Brazil and the USA are also being trained for competition driving based on a proven track record. In 1996, a team of five purebred Lusitanos won the four-in-hand class at the 1996 World Driving Championships in Belgium driven by Felix Brasseur, a team owned by Jose Manuel de Mello, the former President of the Portuguese Lusitano Association.

One of the most famous examples of Lusitanos excelling in modern-day international competition is the career of the legendary gray stallion Novilheiro. While he was brother to two of the best bullfighting horses of the 20th century, Opus and Neptuno, Novilheiro's talents took him



Xairel, a Lusitano stallion bred by Interagro Farms in Brazil, demonstrates the Iberian horses grace and beauty.

down a different path. Trained in France, the horse went to England where he reached Grand Prix level in dressage. After a spell at three-day eventing, he was 'discovered' by British Grand Prix show jumper John Whitaker. A highly successful partnership was formed, and after representing Britain in international competition among other achievements, Novilheiro was the champion prize-winner in English show jumping in 1983.

Their boldness and adaptability also translates to the hunt field. Georgann Koenig lives in San Diego and has five Lusitanos – four in jumping and dressage training. In the past, she hunted an older Lusitano that she owned. "He knew what was going on better than I did when I first started hunting," she said. "He would watch every move the hounds made. He taught me how to hunt. Lusitanos are very athletic horses. They are very versatile and so stoic. They appear to have no fear."

In addition to bullfighting, the Lusitano breed is well-known for classical equitation. The Coudelaria de Alter Real was founded in 1748 by King D. Joao V. Since the beginning, the now government-backed stud in Portugal has adopted a rigorous selection program in its breeding



Versatile Iberian horses, including Lusitanos and Andalusians, excel at driving.

operation.

"[It places] strong emphasis on the preservation of the purity of the breed, which is today considered as a national

patrimony, a true race within the Lusitano race, so concentrated and consanguineous that it is very difficult to use in cross breedings with the other main lineages," writes Paulo Gavião Gonzaga in his book *The Lusitano Horse – Basic Lineages*. These horses continue to perform the classical equitation of the Portuguese Riding School, a government-sponsored program that "is an extension of the 'Pícaria Real' (The Royal Riding School), an equestrian academy of the Portuguese Court, whose teach-



Pia Avagão, a rider for Interagro Lusitanos, demonstrates Xuvisco's ability to easily clear a jump.

ing and traditions have always influenced horse riding in Portugal," said Guilherme Borba in Arsenio Raposo Cordeiro's book *Lusitano Horse – Son of the Wind*.

Such classical equitation performed throughout Europe formed the basis for dressage as performed at Grand Prix level. Today, the Lusitano is well represented at international competition level. Seven Lusitanos entered for the dressage competition at the 2008 Beijing Olympics represented Brazil, Portugal and Australia. They are also widely acclaimed as great partners for amateur dressage riders.

Lusitanos in the United States are registered with International Andalusian and Lusitano Horse Association (IALHA). For more information on how to find your own Lusitano, log onto www.ialha.org.

Submitted by IALHA Marketing