

**ALTA
ESCUELA
AND THE
PASO
HORSE**



A Day's Lesson with Ramon and Reverendo

BY RAMON BECERRA

Above: Ramon bowing with Don de Mando, owned by Audrey Haisfield of Rancho Que Sabe.

Of the Peruvian Paso Horses I have worked with, I have had the opportunity to experiment with the characteristics of a good horse. They were all able to execute the Spanish walk, half pass, piaffe and other movements. While we must not forget that patience and persistence are vital in the process, the natural flexibility and physical ability of the Peruvian Horse enable them to execute “aires” with ease. For example, one horse I trained, ERB Huaral, could execute an incredible piaffe with both cadence and balance. The horse also benefits from these movements, increasing their balance, collection and muscle tone. The Peruvian’s good temperament (brio) also facilitates the learning process, making them a joy (and fun) to work with.

I have a new project, ERB Reverendo, a seven year old Peruvian Paso gelding. He’s proving to be a good student that’s very responsive to his lessons. His intelligence and solid base training are allowing him to go far in just a few sessions. I’m very enthusiastic that we’ll have fun playing.

As you will see, Reverendo is in the process of learning some maneuvers. We will walk you through half pass, shoulders in, haunches in and Spanish walk.

HAUNCHES IN

Haunches in is a very important exercise that is the base of many other aires. It's also very practical because it helps develop good muscle tone both in the front end and hind quarters. Like its relative the Andalusian, the Peruvian Paso has a natural ability to collect which is very helpful in this movement, as well as shoulders in and half pass.

In the exercise itself, the horse moves forward, with its hind end tipped toward the inside of the arena and the body arching toward the direction it's moving. Typically, it's executed with an angle of approximately 45 degrees. What I have found with the Peruvian Horse is that by executing haunches in at only 35 degrees, the horse is able to remain in a lateral gait. If the degree of angle is exaggerated beyond that, the horse will move to a pasitrote.

In the picture, Reverendo is working in-hand, learning haunches in. I typically teach the first lessons on the ground before moving to the saddle so that the horse has more freedom and understands better. You can see that he is moving to the right in a lateral gait, arching to the right.



Reverendo learning haunches in in-hand.

SHOULDER IN

Shoulder in is executed by the horse moving forward at an angle, with their nose toward the inside of the arena, arching away from the direction they're moving. This exercise, combined with haunches in as part of the horse's regular routine, facilitates balance. The principles of shoulder in are the same as haunches in, but the horse's body is arched in the opposite direction. Again, as with haunches in, the ideal angle is 45 degrees with most horses but to keep the Peruvian Horse in a lateral gait, it's better to maintain an angle of only 35 degrees.

Here, Reverendo is performing shoulder in under saddle. You can see that he is moving to the right with his body arching to the left, staying in a lateral gait. He is new to this so the bend in his body isn't very pronounced but as he practices, the arch will improve.



Reverendo is performing shoulder in to the right, bending his body to the left while remaining lateral in his movements.

HALF PASS

Half pass is a variation of haunches in; the horse is moving diagonally across the arena, bending its body toward the direction of movement and leading with the shoulder. Once again, the Peruvian can perform this aire with ease but it's much better at a 35-degree instead of the standard 45-degree angle, to enable the horse to continue in a lateral movement.

In this photo, we are just about to complete the half pass to the left. The horse is moving laterally and keeping a 35-degree angle. The arch in his body is very slight; ideally the arch would be more pronounced to the left than what you see in this photo. With practice, he will become more flexible and execute the half pass better.



Reverendo completing a half pass to the left.

SPANISH WALK

Spanish walk is an exaggerated but controlled movement of the front legs. With the natural ability, flexibility and front-end action that the Paso Horse possesses, it's easier for them to execute some aires such as this, than other breeds. This, of course, combined with a good temperament, makes possible the execution of a good Spanish walk. This is a concentrated movement so patience, persistence and repetition are all essential to make this happen.

One way to keep the Paso Horse in a lateral gait and still execute the Spanish walk is to do it only every other step, instead of every step. If the horse does it every step, they will move on the diagonal. This is due to the increased amount of time needed for the front legs to complete a step and still keep three feet on the ground the majority of the time.

In this photo, Reverendo is learning the first stages of Spanish walk on the board. This helps him understand the movement and learn to balance his body accordingly. As you can see, he's very flexible and should be able to perform this well. I will continue working with him in-hand and eventually he will execute this without the aid of the board.

The experience I have had with the Peruvian Paso is a positive one. It's a strong horse with a lot of spirit. When preparing the Horse to execute any aire, they have proven to be vibrant yet willing, and have good endurance and athleticism. In time, they have consistently developed into very talented horses for high school movements.



Reverendo learning the very early stages of Spanish walk. Ramon uses a slanted board to help the horse better understand the movement.