

Positively Paso



ON HORSEBACK, RIDE A PERUVIAN

BY RAUL RISSO

I am now in my late sixties and can still enjoy a journey riding a Peruvian Horse. There is no breed in the world that can carry you like a good Peruvian can. These horses have an incomparable combination of smoothness, elegance and nobility. I was born and raised into this breed in Peru where our father raised cotton and rotated that crop with corn to provide our large Holstein dairy cattle herd. From my childhood, I remember Mr. Bezada who was the mayordomo or supervisor. Everyday, he would saddle his horse for a days work checking the labor being done at the many fields. Every once in a while he would allow me to ride along his side.

The Peruvian coast is 2,000 miles of rather flat desert

along the rich Pacific Ocean with in between valleys irrigated by rivers that flow from the Andes Mountains. Here, Spanish settlers and their descendants followed by other European immigrants harvested mainly cotton in the south-central region and sugarcane and rice in the north, among other crops. It's a rich fertile land and most important, located in the southern hemisphere which provides mild weather where it never freezes and the summers rarely go past 85 degrees Fahrenheit. You can plant all year round with great potential to export goods and produce to the northern hemisphere. Then there are the highlands with snowy peaks and high plateaus full of alpacas and vicuñas such as Puno where Lake Titicaca, the

A watercolor depicting a group of travelers in between valleys of the Coastland as they pay tribute to a Cross typifying the Passion of Christ, in a typical scene found along many trails in Peru.



highest lake in the world, is located. Also are the fertile valleys at lower altitudes such as the Urubamba Sacred Valley of Cuzco, the capitol of the Inca Empire. And in the north lies Cajamarca, where the last Inca Atahualpa, was caught prisoner and executed by the conquering Spaniards. And on the eastern side of the Andes, rivers descend. On one of those slopes lie the famous ruins of Macchu Pichu, located a few hours ride by train away from Cuzco. And then rivers merge and flow into the huge, hardly populated jungle region where the great Amazon River originates.

In this rugged, beautiful, diverse land, the Peruvian Horse developed in the coastland haciendas and from there, spread out to a huge country which during the Spanish rule was known as the Viceroyship of Peru and covered the land of Ecuador, Bolivia and northern tips of Argentina and Chile. Thus our breed became famous and people from those states continue to cherish this unique horse. In the highlands of Peru, the breed has evolved into other smaller, tough mountain horses known as Morochucos but in the lower valleys such as Arequipa and Cajamarca in particular, they have been kept pure to their original intent as a plantation horse.

Today the horse is no longer the traveler's or plantation horse; it is a treasure of the Peruvian people and part of their heritage, a unique riding animal bred only for pleasure. There are several organizations that provide cabalgatas or trail rides in Peru, often organized by members of the Asociacion Nacional de Criadores y Propietarios de Caballos Peruanos de Paso, (ANCPCPP). Tourists can also enjoy and



TOP: Pictured from behind, a group of riders crossing the desert in the outskirts of the Valley of Lurin, near Lima on author's 50th birthday. **ABOVE:** Three giants of the breed (1962) from L to R: Alfredo Elias riding his Champion of Champions stallion Caramelo, Fernando Graña on Maharaja and Fernando Peschiera on his Laureado gelding Caporal when leaving the Club Hipico for a trail ride in downtown Lima.

ride them in diverse regions including in the Urubamba Sacred Valley of the Incas, near Cuzco. All you have to do is go to the Internet and find out. Other than that, the Peruvian Horse is used as a traveler's horse in between small villages but more and more, it is being replaced by motorized

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tricycles popularly called mototaxis. And finally, there are the show horses that have increased in a great number. There are no less than 22 shows per year throughout Peru with its National Show held in Lima for a whole week every April with about 750 horses competing in Breeding and Luxury geldings classes alone.

Why is this breed so unique? Because it can perform one thing like no other breed can. And when age catches up with you, this is when you appreciate it the most. It is special in carrying you comfortably on a long journey. It is far smoother to ride than any of the gaited breeds. The Paso Fino, its close relative, developed in countries along the Caribbean Sea, descends from the same horses the Spanish brought to America but it does not cover as much ground in the same number of beats as the Peruvian. No other breed has the finesse of the pisos and termino, traits that Peruvian people cherished and imprinted on their stock. On a long journey, the Peruvian will get you there but don't try to get there first. There are other breeds that are better at that.

Taking a break when climbing a steep cliff on the long journey between Santiago Queirolo's Hacienda in the Valley of Canete and the creeks of Topara in the Valley of Chincha. The author's mount, *RyR Galileo is looking back as others slowly ascend on foot or on horseback. All images courtesy of RyR USA and Criadero Perol Chico.

The same goes for herding cattle, or running and of course, jumping. Now, there are a few that do herd cattle nicely but those are exceptions and not the rule.

Back in the old days when the ANCP CPP was located in the center of Lima, the founders would leave the fairgrounds and ride along the Avenida Salaverry, a beautiful, ample, street designed for horse back riding in the grassy, ornate area dividing the highway. There was little traffic in Lima in those days. Ordinary city folks who knew nothing about horses would come out of their houses and watch the group of riders, applauding them. Here and



there someone would say out loud, “VIVA EL PERU!”

I have fond memories of many trail rides in my native country. The most memorable was in 1988 on my 50th birthday. I invited a group of aficionados and we rode for hours, on each of three days along the beach and into the valley of Lurin, just south of Lima where I lived at a small farm and kept my dairy cows and horses. I rode *RyR Galileo, a stallion that the following year gave me the National Champion Stallion title. He was a powerful, gentle, magnificent horse that gallantly carried me on many more unforgettable journeys.

We now live in southeastern Louisiana. A few miles away from our ranch we have more than 3,500 acres protected by the Forestry Service where my wife Lauren and I enjoy the quiet beauty of wooded trails riding our favorite horses. In the USA, technology allows more and more people to be able to work at home and live in places where they can afford to raise horses. There are many areas in this country where you have large plots of land dedicated to the purpose of riding your horse and enjoying nature. Our breed is perfect for the baby boomers and elders like me, who are starting to feel back pain. That does not mean that they are unable to enjoy many more years of satisfaction of riding a Peruvian Horse. One piece of advice though, if you are going to invest in a companion for life, look for the better bred, strong in body, mind and training. As with everything in life quality does not come cheap.



Photos courtesy of Eduard van Brunschot of Criadero Perol Chico.

Some people mistakenly believe that we should breed two types of Peruvian Horses, one for the show ring and another for the trail with not so much lift and termino. They ignore that a good horse produces both types. I understand that termino can be a bit of a nuisance when trail riding but this trait is not always inherited to its highest degree and therefore only found in the best of the breed, which are the horses that produce the showy ones. There will also be plenty of the kind that is also strong and well gaited but not as flashy: those that will suit the trail rider.

Now go ride and enjoy the smoothest horse on earth!