



Visitor Interagro, trained by Peter Van Borst and ridden by his nephew, Matthew.

The Lusitano Horse

The Lusitano – an ancient breed of horse native to Portugal – is increasingly popular in the United States. Historically these majestic horses have strong ties to the military, bullfighting and the classical training methods of the Alter Real, which is 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 temperaments, making them popular with owners who like to ride for fun.

Although the roots of the Lusitano can be traced back over many centuries, the official stud book was founded only quite recently, in 1967. Before that, registration was private, logged by individual breeders according to their own methods. Today the International Andalusian and Lusitano Association represents the breed in the United States. However, horses that are proven to be pureblooded Lusitanos are entitled to registration in the Portuguese Stud Book. The stud book recognizes four basic lineages of the Lusitano horse: Alter Real (AR), Coudelaria Nacional (CN), Veiga (MV) and Andrade (RA) or (SA).

From the beginning, the Portuguese adopted a rigorous selection program in their breeding 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 it in cross breedings with the other main lineages,” writes Paulo Gaviao 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 equestrian academy of the Portuguese court.

The Lusitano plays an important role in equestrian history, having survived as a pure breed over centuries of political and social change in its native land. Lusitano breeders take the mission of ensuring the future of the Portuguese horse very seriously. “Pure Lusitano blood breeding,” writes Alfredo Baptista Coelho in his book on the Lusitano, “is like entering into the magic world of intuition where the breeder, driven by passion creates a horse that is the image of his dreams.”