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Lusitano Horse Auction An Exciting Evening

Ellen Rosenberg 05.MAR.10

Diamonds glittered from wrists and earlobes. Bubbly flowed freely. Fur coats were more than just a fashion statement in the cold evening air (wind chills in the mid-30s) at the Jim Brandon Equestrian Center on the evening of Saturday, Feb. 27.

Approximately 250 people gathered in a tent erected under the covered arena to be wined and dined and entertained, and then invited to bid upon the 30 Lusitano horses, specially imported from Brazil for this event.

This year marked the fifth anniversary of the Lusitano Collection International Horse Auction, and the third time these horses were offered for sale in the U.S. Interested buyers were invited to test ride, preview and inspect the horses, their pedigrees and complete medical records, including X-rays, from Feb. 24-27.

Lusitanos are an Iberian breed, domesticated in approximately 5000 B.C. They're characterized as being noble and easy to ride, willing to work and highly intelligent. They excel in dressage, equitation and driving. Because they are relatively smaller horses, and are light and responsive, many women and amateurs find them easier to ride than the relatively larger Warmbloods.

These horses were bred at two exclusive Brazilian farms. Interagro Farms in Itapira, Brazil was founded by Dr. Paulo Gonzaga in 1975 and is the largest breeder and exporter of Lusitanos in the world. Coudelaria Rocas do Vouga, founded in 1994, is one of the most important breeders in Brazil, gaining worldwide respect for its horses' quality and outstanding competition results. The 25 stallions and five mares were carefully selected to be included in this year's auction.

There were drinks, hors d'oeuvres, a catered dinner at intimate tables set with maroon tablecloths and white rosebud centerpieces, tall gas heaters spaced throughout the tent, metal chandeliers, drummers and dancers a la Carnivale (how in the world did those five nearly naked women stay warm?), and many in the audience were persuaded to follow the dancers snaking through the tent in a conga line. The auction finally began about 8:30 p.m. As each horse was ridden into the arena, the lights dimmed and the horse's pedigree was read, along with some notes about its age and disposition. The riders were identically attired in white breeches, black boots, white long-sleeved shirts, maroon quilted vests and black helmets. Each horse had his hip (auction) number on his saddle pad. The horses, all lovely and for the most part calm but lively, gave an occasional start or small dip and hop as they were trotted and cantered about. The guests watched, consulted their catalogs and bid.

The first four stallions went for between \$30,000 and \$42,000 each. Then



Tales from the Trails by Ellen Rosenberg

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came hip No. 22, Beato Interagro, a five-year-old bay stallion, and everyone seemed to sit up straighter. Bids came fast and furious, and when it was over, he had been sold for \$145,000.

The rest of the horses sold for between \$18,000 and \$61,000, and nine horses didn't reach their (unstated) reserve and were passed over, even though one was bid as high as \$32,000.

The auctioneer was having a good time with the crowd, cajoling them into bidding just another thousand here or there.

"Don't stop at \$30,000," he said. "Someone's going to steal this horse here tonight, go home with an absolute bargain." In the background, music played: the William Tell Overture, Bolero, a disco beat. The auctioneer looked around and smiled. "For this kind of money, we're practically giving these horses away. Don't forget that it costs \$10,000 to import each horse and put it through quarantine. All you have to do is buy him and take him home. Everything else has already been done for you."

The auction moved along, the four spotters signaling a pass with a low side-to-side hand movement or the next high bid with a raised fist pumped in the air. Waiters flitted about with refills, and plates arrived with delicious chocolate-dipped strawberries.

"Come on, folks, there aren't too many horses left," the auctioneer warned. "You've been looking at these horses and riding them for the past three days. You know their quality. If you end up going home without one, you're going to have to explain it to someone."

Of the last four horses, three were passed, and the last one sold for \$18,000, the lowest price paid for any horse. It was nearly 11 p.m. Some people had won their horse or horses, some hadn't. It was time to pay for your horse or go home.

Gary Lane of Boynton Beach attended with his sponsor. It was his first auction, and he was thrilled.

"We had a super time," he said. "It was quite well run, very exciting."

Lane's sponsor was one of the people bidding on Beato.

"We got involved in the bidding war," Lane said. "He was just a lovely, lovely horse. A larger size, which would really work well for me, and tons of presence. Your eye goes right to him. He had a lovely feel when you rode him, very responsive and uncomplicated. We had a figure in mind when we started bidding, and we even exceeded it, trying to stay in. In the end, the people from Canada wanted him more."

Lane wasn't too disappointed. He, his partner and his sponsor came away with three horses, all first, second or third choices, which they plan to show in dressage. He had only the highest praise for the auction, the horses and the farms involved.

"All of the people involved with Interagro are completely honest and upfront about everything," he said. "They are wonderful hosts, and they truly care about their horses. They stay in contact with the new owners to find out how the horses are doing. We visited their farm in Brazil this past November and bought three horses, and now we've bought three more. These are wonderful, genuine people, and it's a real pleasure knowing them."

For more about the horse auction, visit www.lusitanocollection.com.

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