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Brazilian Beauties at Home on a Western Ranch

BY SUSAN ROSE MARCUS

Glenn Stewart, wearing his cowboy hat, blue jeans, and boots, lounged in a shady spot to watch equestrians, dressed in breeches and high boots, test ride lively Lusitano horses during The 2009 Lusitano Collection™ International Horse Auction in West Palm Beach, Florida. The horseman from British Columbia studied the Brazilian imports, their movements and fluidity as they trotted and cantered on command. He learned more through informal chats with principals from the breeding farms, like Cecilia Gonzaga who had known the horses since they were born. A couple of times, he mounted a horse for a turn around the ring.

"I hadn't planned on buying any horses at all," Stewart said recently as he talked about the four stallions and two mares he bought at the auction. "I was just so impressed by the Lusitano's lateral movements and natural elevation in the canter. Plus, the prices were right. I just had to take some home."

Stewart and his wife, Dixie, live at The Horse Ranch along with 40 Quarter Horses, where Stewart trains and teaches Natural Horsemanship and runs clinics. In fact, it was a colt training clinic that landed him in Brazil and introduced him to Interagro Farm, whose owner, Dr. Paulo Gonzaga, is the founder of The Lusitano Collection™ International Horse Auction. The Lusitano Collection™ is a trademark established by five of the most important Lusitano horse breeders in Brazil, whose combined experience represents more than 300 years of excellence in the selection of the best animals and genealogies in the breed.

Stewart, who runs clinics in Natural Horsemanship all over the world, had been invited to Brazil by the Pure Bred Lusitano Breeding Association of Brazil (ABPSL) which organized a tour of top Lusitano ranches for him; among them were Interagro Farm and Coudelaria Rocas do Vouga, both contributors to The Lusitano Collection™.

When Glenn was invited back the following year, he brought a group of adult students, and took notice of the breed's temperament when they went hacking over the vast countryside on Lusitano stallions, whom they were riding for the first time; the stallions behaved beautifully and responded sensitively to the riders' aids, even when passing mares in neighbouring fields.

During Glenn's third visit to Brazil, he conducted a clinic for Brazilians and they encouraged him to ride in a working equitation competition, a three-phase riding sport that includes dressage plus two obstacle courses and tests obedience, agility, steadiness, and speed. Riding a Lusitano in a halter, Stewart earned first place in his division! He was captivated by the

The mare Bagaceira Do Vouga (left) and stallion Apache Interagro (right) were purchased by Glenn Stewart at the Lusitano Collection™.


Lusitano's natural ability and willingness to please.

With six Lusitano Collection horses of his own, Stewart bred two mares of Veiga lineage to Apache Interagro. Apache was also bred to Quarter Horses and a Thoroughbred, in hopes of the foals inheriting the Lusitano's elasticity, grace, and courage.

Az do Vouga, now a gelding, and Aveiro do Mito, both Collection Lusitanos, have appeared in Stewart's Natural Horsemanship clinics to demonstrate his training techniques. "Their ability to change leads, canter, or trot on the spot is far superior to any breed I have had the pleasure of riding," Stewart marvels.

Attendees at The 2010 Lusitano Collection™ International Horse Auction in West Palm Beach, Florida, from February 24 to 27, will be treated to exquisite dressage demonstrations. Next year's event marks the fifth anniversary of The Lusitano Collection™ and the third year in the US.

During the event, interested buyers can preview and test ride the horses, view their veterinarian records, and meet the breeders.

Asked if he'll return to the 2010 Auction, Stewart remarked, "The Lusitano has been the best kept secret in the world. They have an extremely athletic build, trainability, and a smooth ride. Now, it seems they are gaining widespread attention and popularity. Yes, I'll be back." 

The Lusitano Horse

Native to the Iberian Peninsula, the Lusitano breed is renowned for its willingness to please, high intelligence, and majestic appearance. The breed is well known for its exceptional performance in all disciplines, especially dressage, driving, and pleasure equitation. The Lusitano's generous temperament and ease under saddle make it an attractive prospect for both amateur and professional riders.

The Lusitano breed was domesticated around 5000 B.C. by the Lusitanians, a race of warriors who fought on horseback using "gine-ta," their own set of combat tactics. Gine-ta, the precursor to modern dressage, required a sophisticated degree of horsemanship and a swift, easy-to-handle, reliable horse.

While no longer used in combat, traces of the gine-ta discipline can still be seen in Portugal today where bullfighting still occurs on horseback. It is said that the practice was created solely for the purpose of preparing gine-ta horses for war.