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PHR News

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Lusitano Horses Make Their Way from Brazil to Florida for Annual Horse Auction

By Susan Apple

When it's time to import or export a horse, even the most seasoned riders, trainers and breeders seek the guidance of experienced professionals. So, when it came time for The 2009 Lusitano Collection® horses to be transported from their breeding farms outside São Paulo, Brazil, to Florida for their second annual Showcase and Auction being held on February 19-20, 2009, at the Jim Brandon Equestrian Center in West Palm Beach, they contacted Lazcar International.

Started in 1982 by Celia Assessandrini, the firm has handled all of the logistics involving flight arrangements for these Lusitanos for the past 15 years. "Whether it's international or national, we take over the headache of filing the paperwork, including all of the USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] health requirements, in transporting livestock from one destination to another," insisted Diana Berdote, Celia's niece who handles the European and Brazilian horse departments of this family-owned business.

The four- and five-year-old horses, trained in classical dressage, began their trip by being carefully led up the ramps of eight- and 14-horse trailers by their grooms. Trained to load from an early age, each walked aboard easily. "Only Bonanca seemed to stand a moment at the foot of the ramp as though to give a final farewell to her home," surmised Cecilia Gonzaga, head of the Interagro Farm stud barn and daughter of the mastermind of the auction, Dr. Paulo Pompéia Gavião Gonzaga.

Another Collection partner, Manuel Tavares de Almeida, who is also founder of Coudelaria Rocas do Vouga Lusitanos, is sending 12 of his finest young horses. After traveling by truck for one-and-a-half hours to the Viracopos Airport in the city of Campinas State of São Paulo, Brazil, the horses were transferred to specially-made, fully-covered aluminum jet stalls, three to a pallet, padded on the sides and airy in front and back.

"When the horses travel in groups, we don't need to give them tranquilizers as, being herd animals, they are more relaxed and feel safer being next to one another," Gonzaga continued. "And our long experience with Lazcar gives us confidence that our dear horses will be treated well upon arrival."

On each flight to Florida, the horses were given hay and water and were accompanied by Dr. Alexander Bloem, Interagro Farm's in-house veterinarian, and at least one groom for every five horses. Several flights were made due to the large cargo weight of the multiple trunks holding tack equipment (saddle, bridle, brushes), which weigh approximately 100 pounds each and the horses, which weigh approximately 1,000 pounds each.

Upon arrival at Miami International Airport, the horses were met by Roland Duran, a representative from Lazcar International, and a representative from Worldwide Livestock Services (WLS), an animal handling company, founded by Tony Alessandrini and his brother, Alexander Alessandrini, both of whom are AATA-certified professional grooms. Mr. Duran meets every shipment, greets the handlers aboard the plane, phones the horses' owners to provide them with the horses' vitals and behavior upon arrival and provides owners with daily updates. The Alessandrini brothers who total over 50 years of experience in handling, shipping, loading and flying horses, pride themselves on only hiring experienced horse people who understand equine temperament and in using safe, well-maintained equipment and trucks. Tony Assessandrini explained, "Our people understand the differences inherent among breeds and disciplines. We've shipped horses to the Pan American Games and the World Games. We meet the jets right there on the tarmac, feel personally responsible so we physically handle the horses getting in and out of the jet stalls. Safety of the horse is our number one priority."

At the airport, WLS employees under the supervision of a USDA veterinarian and assisted by the Lusitano Collection staff transported the horses in their three-pack jet stalls to the Miami Animal Import Center, located at the airport facility. The horses were stabled in this new state-of-the-art,

self-contained import center, built in 2004 and containing 104 stalls, while they underwent the Florida government-mandated seven-day quarantine. After passing required health tests, the horses were transported by a private equine carrier to Martin Downs Equestrian Center in Palm City to rest up before the Showcase and Auction.

The 2009 Lusitano Collection® Auction will bring members of the equestrian community and South Florida social scene to West Palm Beach to preview and bid on the Lusitanos, which are not available outside Portugal or Brazil. During the week prior, guests may preview, examine and test ride the horses by appointment.

Cecilia Gonzaga noted, "These noble horses have been specially selected; they have an eager-to-please temperament, and best of all, they are not pre-owned. Buyers benefit by buying directly from the breeder. Plus, the buyers will bypass the normal bureaucracy that accompanies importing our Lusitanos."

The festivities during the auction will include a cocktail party followed by the Showcase Parade of Horses into a hacienda-like atmosphere complete with hanging chandeliers, water fountains and lush tropical trees. Making a special appearance is the 17-year-old daughter of Collection partner Manuel Tavares de Almeida, Luiza Almeida, who rode a Lusitano in the 2008 Olympics. Guests will also be treated to musical entertainment and a sit-down dinner. The event is open to the public for a fee. A portion of the proceeds from the Auction will benefit the American Cancer Society and the Jim Brandon Equestrian Center. For more information about the 2009 Lusitano Collection®, visit www.lusitanocollection.com or call (866) 540-8809.