

## **The Andalusian Horse**

by Sarah Gately-Wilson

He is as graceful as he is beautiful; he is noble, strong and brave. He is the Horse of Kings.

The Andalusian is one of the oldest breeds of horse. The Andalusian is the foundation sire of many of today's modern horses, including the Lipizzaner, Thoroughbred, American Quarter Horse, and even the Warmbloods. He is named for where he originated: Andalusia on the Iberian Peninsula. Engravings and wall paintings found in parts of the Iberian Peninsula date between 17,000 and 13,000 BC and are the oldest known reference to the Spanish horse. The Andalusian horse we are familiar with today dates back to the Moorish invasion of Spain. The Moors were fine horsemen and brought their Berber horses into the conquered territory where they crossed them with the native horses of the Iberian Peninsula. The Berbers were noble horses, esteemed for their stamina and courage. The resulting cross was an unparalleled war horse. The horse they developed was sturdy, with a long sloping shoulder, short back, rounded strong hind-quarters, wide chest, deep girth, with a well-crested, naturally arched neck and very sturdy legs. This horse was all presence and action and coveted by royalty from all over the world.



*Andalusian stallion showing classic Spanish conformation. A strong head on an arched neck, well-defined withers preceding a short back and broad, strong hindquarters. The mane is thick and abundant, the tail set low and hung tightly against the body.*

The Andalusian carried the noble into the battle and onto victory. For centuries it was raised alongside the fierce fighting bulls on the plains of Andalusia. The horses were quick and agile and during times of peace the men took to fighting the bulls on horseback to keep themselves and the horses in training, and so was born the sport of Rejoneo (bullfighting on horseback). The Andalusian is still the Spanish “cow horse” of the Spanish “cowboy”, chasing down and herding cattle in much the same fashion as his famous grandson, the American Quarter Horse. When Christopher Columbus sailed to the New World on his second voyage in 1493, he brought Andalusians to the Americas. These original Spanish horses were the foundation stock for all American breeds of horses, including the Mustang and the Pasos, as well as the Morgan, Saddlebred, Walking Horses and Foxtrotters, and of course, the American Quarter Horse.

The Andalusian exhibited natural ability to collect and the agility and animation essential for high school movements and the airs above the ground. Their abilities made them a favorite for Dressage, which became the preferred discipline of riding among nobility. During the Renaissance horsemanship became a highly polished art. The Iberian horse was no longer a vehicle of war. In 1603 King James I observed, “the honourablest and most commendable games that ye can use are on horseback, for it becommeth a Prince better than any other man to be a fair and good horseman.” Previously, the Andalusian had been carefully bred and schooled to reflect military might. Kings and nobleman preferred a magnificent mount and with the monarch in the lead, fortunes were spent to build beautiful royal stables and stud farms and provide the court with these mighty chargers. Military riding academies were built for the purpose of training horse and rider for warfare. The airs above the ground, such as the capriole are used for evasion; the levade for firing at a vantage point, and the piaffe for keeping the horse awake and ready. Haute Ecole (high school) training and movements came to be revered by it participants and the Spanish horse’s unparalleled capabilities made him the heart of the discipline. The best-known school was, of course, the Spanish Riding School. It originated in Italy but was later moved to Vienna. Andalusians were imported into Austria for the school and were bred to local horses. Their descendants, the Lipizzans, are still used in the school today.



*George Hamilton’s (1672-1737) portrayal of the Spanish horse shows his short back, arched neck, and strong sturdy body.*

By the twentieth century war and famine had brought great strains to the Andalusian Horse in Spain. Some of the best bloodlines became extinct. To protect their national treasure, the Spanish governments placed an embargo on the Spanish breeders, prohibiting them from exporting their horses. It took years of careful breeding to reestablish the herd and finally in the mid 1960's the Spanish horses again were brought to America. Since then the breed has remained rare compared to others, but is flourishing again. The Iberian Horse has also undergone changes in Europe. Native to both Spain and Portugal, the two countries have split, Spain calling their horse the Andalusian or Pura Raza Espanola (PRE) and Portugal, the Lusitano or Puro-Sangue Lusitano (PSL). Originally the same horse, they are developing differences, making them distinct from one another. In the United States, both the Spanish Andalusian and the Portuguese Lusitano can be registered with the International Andalusian and Lusitano Horse Association (IALHA). There are also an increasing number of supporters for the Spanish-Portuguese (SP) horse, which embodies some of the best qualities of both. For the most part, in the US, we generalize all of the above as the Andalusian Horse.



*An Andalusian stallion with one of his mares.*

The Andalusian horse is still very rare. Today in the U.S. there are less than 5000 registered purebreds making them very valuable treasures. The classic Andalusian stands between 15 and 16 hands, however, some are being bred as sporthorses and can reach up to 17 hands. The Andalusian is a very sound horse, well-proportioned and they are of straight or sub-convex profile, of balanced conformation and general harmony. They display brilliant airs, are energetic, cadenced and elastic with appreciable elevation and great ability for collection. The neck is arched and of medium length; the mane and tail, thick and abundant. Andalusians are known for a long, luxurious mane and tail. The croup of medium length and width and is well rounded with the tail set low and hung close to the body. They are high-spirited in their movement, but docile in nature. Most Andalusians are grey, the foals are born black or bay, but grey out over time. Approximately 15% remain bay and 5% black. These are the only colors accepted by the Spanish registry.

After a long history of carrying royalty, fighting bulls, and marching through wars, the Andalusian is facing a new future. It's versatility, intelligence, agility, beauty and willing nature make it a wonderful partner for any discipline. In addition to competing in breed shows, Andalusians are competing successfully on the open circuit in dressage, eventing, jumping, driving, saddleseat, western reining, cutting, and anything else their owners can think to try. They are a natural for parades and exhibitions, and their willing, gentle dispositions make them ideal for everyone. There are no restrictions on what an Andalusian can do.



*Author with 7 yr. old stallion, Dichoso Uno, exhibiting the Spanish trot.*