

AWARENESS IN BREEDING PERUVIAN PASO HORSES

By Raul Risso

The need for foundation stock based on a better structure of a Peruvian Paso Horse must become a priority in breeding programs. In North America in particular, where throughout the region areas for riding horses are available, it competes in a wide market of many gaited breeds. Our PPH has captured the attention of a very particular sort of rider. This is, generally speaking, a middle age person who at that stage in their lives can afford a valuable horse but, is no longer looking for the trotting breeds and prefers a "passive equitation" with a bounce free trail riding kind of an animal. At the same time we have to continue to supply the market with the unquestionably smoothest, most elegant and refined gaited horse in the world, but one with a longer productive riding life span. To achieve this strength without losing the IDENTITY of the breed with it's wide thread of gait including termino and arrogance, is the subject I am addressing in this article.

Our breed has long ago transcended the limits of Peru and become internationally recognized. This horse was a traveler's horse in between valleys of the semi-deserted coastline of Peru. It was also a Plantation Horse, a rugged horse used by landowners and overseers of laborers in the agriculture practices in the coastal land of Peru. Large estates of property owned by rich and prosperous families, were confiscated since 1968, when for a long period of time; Land Reform was decreed by the government. This event changed the scenario and the Peruvian Horse owners and or new aficionados out of their love for the breed, rescued it and had their horses moved into small plots of land. At the same time mechanized vehicles mostly substituted the horse. The horses bred during the 70's and 80's, when large amounts of PPH came to the US; were predominantly bred with the show ring mentality giving preference to the adornments, such as collection, lift and termino. The same has happened in the promotion of this breed here in North America where horse shows have been the main attraction for the established breeders. As a consequence Peruvian Horses today are not as strong as we would like them to be in order to fit the immense market of trail riding people.

Unfortunately, for reasons beyond their control; most people in Peru continue until today to raise their horses in confinement. And horse shows, as is here in NA; are the predominant goal in the minds of most aficionados. Furthermore, there is only a Breeding Division. No Pleasure or Performance classes that demand a horse able for a lot more mileage. Consider that the ANPCPP owns a fantastic show facility in Lima that could hold a lot more events and open up the market for a plain riding horse. In the "good old boys mentality" that still prevails in Peru; women are only now timidly starting to participate in activities related to the Peruvian Horse. On a positive note "*Cabalgatas*" as Trail Rides are known in Peru, are becoming frequent among new aficionados and many participate including whole family members. Also, well known judges and breeders such as Mariano Cabrera in his excellent article "Breeders and the Destiny of our Horse", published in the ANPCPP's 2002 Annual Report; writes about going back to breed a more rugged horse.

True breeders understand that such an activity is oriented by humans for their own particular goals. In any case whether we are speaking of horses or any breed of any other species, CULLING is the first step and forever the primary tool for the improvement of any breeding program. Therefore we must continue to do so, eliminating and by that I mean to "put down" any, not only weak but; also defective foals that give us any of those signs. All breeders, LARGE AND SMALL must be prepared to do the "big nasty". It is our responsibility if we choose to fool with nature. The rule of "three days, three weeks, three months" is a pretty accurate one for observing and deciding. Additionally weak broken down horses of any age, with few exceptions; should be culled without hesitation.

The second most important tool we need to apply in our relatively small gene pool is to OUTCROSS the available important bloodlines that we have. In fact I believe that presently we have a more diversified, wider genetic pool in the USA than Peru has. Not because now have the largest Registry in the world. It is because of an elite. Many outstanding horses, in particular stallions such as ***Piloto**, ***Laurel**, ***Hercules**, ***Mantequilla**, ***Palomo**, ***HNS Domingo**, ***AEV Cascabel**, ***FG Candela** and others; came from Peru and have left little or no descendants in that country. Others, born in the USA [or Canada] such as **Principe de la Solana**, **RDS Me Llamo Peru ++**, **Antares**, **Soberano++**, etc., have made a stamp in many breeding programs. This is the reason why we are now seeing a reversal and a few stallions are being imported back to Peru from the USA, Central and South American countries. Before I raise controversy on this subject, let me very clear: I have not said that North America has more and better show horses. I am expressing my opinion about the breeding options of our countries. Speaking for ourselves, the fortunate event of our marriage has brought two very different but important pools of blood together and both of our breeding programs at our ranch have benefited by exchanging blood. Nevertheless, due to our strong feelings and in order to preserve our individuality as breeders; my wife Lauren and I have chosen to maintain our RyR and WFP prefixes).

Which brings me to a third and most important consideration in breeding. It is HUMILITY, to be open minded and use other than your own bloodlines when it is beneficial for a particular mare. Thus we achieve a wider genetic base in our stock preventing degeneration, such as infertility and weaknesses. Many breeders proudly exhibit pedigrees of their horses ancestors carrying the same bloodlines intertwined with each other. As many of us have learned, this can be a double edged sword. Often, breeders that achieve notability become vain and refuse to use outside blood. We can tell you out of our own experience that the introduction of outside blood has improved our breeding programs considerably. First it was Principe de la Solana (*Hercules x *Ingrata) still going strong at the age of 29. Principe crossed excellently with our predominantly Northern Bred Cayalti x *AV Sol de Paijan mares who present only a touch of Sol de Oro V. blood. Presently we have WFP El Joven Peru, (RDS Me Llamo Peru++ x Pacifica by *Palomo) a very strong 8 year old National Ch. of Ch. breeding stallion and Oro

Blanco. A 21 year old, the last living actively breeding son of *Piloto. Each of these three excellent stallions is out crossed and only remotely related to each other. Nevertheless, we also breed a few mares to prominent stallions other than ours.

Alongside with culling, out crossing, and humility we need the other essential tool: FOUNDATION STOCK. Quality begets quality. Have the best possible mare one can afford instead of a herd of lesser individuals. A mare is a precious investment. You can upgrade by breeding her to the right stallion and get an improved offspring, but you are going to be behind the overall better horses if you did not start at the top. The stallion, who is so much what people want to have; is the least important to own. You can breed to most stallions as they are available for breeding if you choose to.

Now, having all these tools to continue to improve our breed, where do we go? Make it more attractive to the equine world, as we have in the last 50+ years since the creation of the ANPCPP Peru's National Breed Organization, but also stronger in order to cover our deserved portion of the market.

First lets analyze the individuals. We have come a long way but there is still a lot of improvement to be made in particular in the conformation of the REAR END of our Peruvian Paso Horse. Despite it's lift and termino, it is not surprising that DSLD (Degenerative Suspensory Ligament Desmitis) manifests itself much more dramatically in the branches of the suspensory ligaments of the hind limbs as Dr.s Mero and Poole's recent report to the AAEP (American Association of Equine Practitioners) confirms. The rear end is the crucial portion to improve in our breed at the present. There are only a few stallions that can really help in this area. We must use them!

We need stallions and mares that are able to stand plumb and decisively under their body mass. When viewed from the side they must have a rather short muscular loin area, an inclined croup and proper correlative angulations, at the hoof, (no coon foot) pasterns, (shorter and not too flexible) hock, (slightly sickled) and least but not last a correct angulation at the stifle. Their profile must show a front end with the legs vertically under their shoulder blades. When viewed from the rear or the front, the horse's limbs should be perpendicular to the ground. Whether standing or in movement, the hooves in the rear should touch the ground and be closer in between than the hooves in the front thus forming the figure of a trapezoid. This last quality provides our breed of more impulsion from behind. You will see that horses in our breed that are square, or better said, rectangular in their footfall have less power and when in motion "waddle like a duck". We have lots of horses that reach far under their body mass while in gait, but lack the DRIVE that the described above rear end should provide.

In the present "chat lines" over the Internet we find opinions of long established and successful breeders coinciding that (until and if we find a genetic marker for the detection of DSLD) this disease can be identified very early on mainly by conformational defects and or weaknesses. There are other people who say that their horses broke down even though, they claim; the horse had correct conformation. The case is that these defects show up soon after birth (a good reason to cull them) and then, as they grow up and until they reach adulthood at 6 or 7 years of age; those weaknesses are "hidden" or covered to the eye of most viewers. Such is the case especially with the post-legged ones. We need to breed for improved angulation, not too much not too little, more bone that generally speaks of stronger well-wrapped joints, and well-proportioned hooves.

We must also continue to produce individuals that stay "close to the ground" with deep bodies that provide a lower center of gravity allowing our horses to move in a GLIDING MODE. There are more factors that help the horse propel itself elegantly in a natural manner such as a long, arched, firm, lean neck (while staying away from the fallen crests) with a correct insertion to the head and to the body at the withers. Now, when collection is excessive like in an Azteca horse; this extreme leads to individuals that are tight at the shoulders. We need the looseness (at the shoulders) in the front as much as in the rear end of the horse. An innate gait with impulsion from the rear and conformation as described allows a natural collection. This makes training so much easier as the horse requires no assistance from tack devices or the rider's ability in order to travel elegantly with the head up.

Other than CONFORMATION that has been the main subject I wanted to deal with at this time, lets not forget that along with GENTLE DISPOSITION and GAIT, these like in a TRIPOD; are the basic requirements of a good horse. As is with other characteristics, these are all inheritable and CULLING should be considered out of kindness to the horse as well as the human. Consider how many people we know and compare this to how many we choose to befriend. There is no difference with horses. Not everybody is nice to us and we don't have to like them all. In as far as gait, there is one "rule of thumb" that I learned from the old master breeder Jorge Juan Pinillos in Peru. He used to say and repeat again and again: "*Pisos mas Pisos = Pisos*". [Fine Gait Plus Fine Gait = Fine Gait]. This is very true as *pisos* are recessive to *paso*, a *paso* is recessive to an ambler, and an ambler is recessive to a trotter.

In the past I have written sustaining that "*Pisos*" is the most important characteristic in the breeding of the Peruvian Paso Horse. I have not changed that a bit. *Pisos* IDENTIFY our breed and makes a Peruvian different than any other gaited breed, being it the ancestrally related Paso Fino or the Walker, the Icelandic and many more variations in the growing appreciation for a gaited breed. Conformation, brio

"No horse has an excellent gait if it is not strong enough, or lacks the temperament or character to sustain the *paso llano* over a lengthy distance"

Louisiana USA, January, 2003

Note: Raul Risso is a long-time judge and breeder of Peruvian horses who has judged in Canada many times.

