

# WHO BUYS PERUVIAN HORSES?

by Verne R. Albright

***What sort of person buys a Peruvian Paso?  
This unusual breed attracts people who march  
to their own music. However Peruvian owners  
are in step when it comes to their values.***

Many of them, such as Tammy Rimes, dreamed of horses when they were young and, like Tammy, waited a long time to finally indulge their fantasies.

"My dad was a cattle rancher, and I always thought I'd raise horses," Tammy says. "The way things worked out, I rode less than a dozen times in the first fifteen years after I left home."

As time passes, people become less willing to overlook the fact that horseback riding can be strenuous and painful.

"On a trail ride, I rode my first 'gaited' horse," Tammy remembers. "It was so comfortable that I decided to look a little closer at the gaited breeds. My search led me to the Peruvian Paso. They were the smoothest of all, but what sold me was the spirit – or *brio*, as it's called – combined with a sweet temperament."

Tammy knew that a lifetime with Peruvian Pasos would mean a lifetime with Peruvian Paso owners, so she decided to take in a Peruvian show.

"I found that not only were the horses everything I'd hoped for, but the people are very helpful and eager to share information, something I hadn't experienced in other competitive show atmospheres."

A Texas cowboy named Glenn Cochran also saw Peruvians as a connection with the past, a past he thought had died.

"Just before I got into horses," Glenn remembers, "most working horses around here had a blend of cowhorse, or Quarter Horse, and gaited saddle horse blood. These smooth-gaited "single-footers" were highly valued. As late as the 70's, a few of these crossbred – but registered – Quarter Horses could still be found. Occasionally they could be taught a running walk or a single-foot. For decades I tried to teach every horse I rode, with almost no success."

One day, Glenn's wife, Sallie, came home full of enthusiasm after riding her first Peruvian Horse. Sallie succeeded in overcoming Glenn's doubts and got him to try Peruvians while working their cattle. Glenn was astounded at how good they were.

"The Peruvians have good cow sense," Glenn reports. They'll never replace Quarter Horses, but in some ways they're better: comfort, for example."

Dave Leeway agrees that Peruvians will never put Quarter Horses out of work. Nonetheless, he and his fifteen-year-old Peruvian Paso compete successfully in team penning. Five years ago, neither Dave nor his horse had worked a single cow. Since then, they've climbed up to the top third of their classification in the year-end, county-wide standings. That isn't bad considering that Dave is a retired teacher – not a cowboy.

Colleen Cates uses Peruvians to follow her dogs during field trials.

"Most of our friends thought they wouldn't be able to keep up," she recalls. "I'm happy to say that not only do my Peruvians keep up, but I have to hold them back! They perform beautifully. The field conditions don't faze them at all, and what style they have! They've gained everyone's respect."

Others buy Peruvians to extend their riding days. Among these are people like Jeannie Sullivan, who have painful diseases or injuries and were told by doctors that their riding days were over. Jeannie changed to another doctor and bought a Peruvian Paso.

"You can believe it or not," she insists with fierce conviction, "but now my back feels much better on days when I ride, not to mention my new outlook on life."

The smooth ride of the Peruvian horse was a revelation to Rose Walker even though she's ridden gaited horses most of her life. At 79 years of age, she rides nothing but Peruvians, often on all-day outings. When people tell her how remarkable she is, Mrs. Walker is embarrassed. After all, her 100-year-old mother often comes along on her own Peruvian.

There are many who buy Peruvians for their grace, style and beauty. For them, these horses are living art or – as a Canadian once described them – "the tablet on which the Peruvians have chiseled their culture."

Dianne Bickford was intrigued by the beauty and mystique of Peruvians and now breeds them for the show arena. However, she has never forgotten that they are horses, and she doesn't baby them. She has ridden her Champion of Champions stallion in the wilds of Colorado and Montana and once deep into Yellowstone Park.

"We were way back in Yellowstone," she remembers, "where we could hear elk bugling. You don't usually see stallions in places like that. People are always astounded that mine behaves so well. Absolutely nothing fazes him."

Diane also has a very successful show mare that she loaned to another rider for an NATRC ride.

"She did great for her first time out," Dianne reports, "and finished a very difficult ride when some veteran horses didn't."

Others see Peruvians only as athletes. Peruvians compete successfully in a number of tough sports, and they take the *bruising* part out of these activities. Furthermore, these smooth-riding, levelheaded horses are noted for an uncanny ability to make inexperienced people look good.

Canadians Marian Taylor and Joyce Wallbridge were so green that they finished dead last on their first competitive trail ride. Determined not to let *that* happen again, Marion won the Lightweight and Joyce the Heavyweight Division in both of their next two rides. Following that, the two ladies reported a lot of phone calls from competitive trail riders interested in Peruvians.

In *their* first endurance race, a fifty-miler, Joan Box and Tempie Butler were so obviously inexperienced that the ride manager approached them just before the start. Concerned, he asked them to hold their horses to one side and let the other 40 riders go ahead.

As the race went along, Tempie caught and passed all but five of those riders, and Joan caught her share, too, finishing 12th. Not only that, but Tempie's horse was judged the 4<sup>th</sup> best-conditioned horse of all that started the ride.

After that one competitor good-naturedly grouched: "I think the Peruvians and their riders should have to go back out and ride at least another hour. It's only fair. The horses aren't tired, and neither are the riders!"

"The amazing thing was the competitive spirit of the Peruvians," Joan recalls. "They knew it was a contest, and they wanted to win!"

Renee Been moved her Peruvian ahead of a grateful lady whose horse was panicked by passing semis where an NATRC trail briefly followed a highway shoulder. Renee's calmer horse steadied the other until the trail veered away from the highway.

"You're lucky to have such a seasoned horse," the lady said afterwards, with a sigh of relief.

"I didn't bother to tell her that my horse had been under saddle for all of seven months and that this was only her second NATRC ride," Renee recalls. "If she'd never been around Peruvians, she wouldn't have believed it anyhow!"

After the ride, it was announced that Renee's mare had won second place.

In BC, Dolores Scott was having trouble keeping her Peruvian gelding in shape, so she loaned him to a friend. That friend conditioned the horse and then competed in the horse's first Competitive Trail Ride, finishing the full 25 miles. The gelding named Su Jacinto, was 24 at the time!

Canadian competitive trail enthusiasts Cyndi and Brent Rowat, of Alberta, took their Peruvian gelding Poncho Negro on many 25 mile rides, with numerous finishes in the top 10. Then, when Poncho was 17, he completed his first 50 mile endurance ride, and finished with flying colors. Poncho competed for two more years and won the High Point Trail Horse a total of five times.

Peruvian horses mean many different things to many different people. But there are few who would disagree that this is a natural breed, unspoiled by too much tampering by man. That's the way they want to keep it. That tells us something about North American values, something very different from what we hear on the news.

**For more information on Peruvian horses,  
visit the Website of the Peruvian Horse Association of Canada at:  
<http://www.phac.ca>**

