

The Contribution of the Andalusian Horse to Modern Sport Horse Breeds

By Rebecca Olmstead

Afficionados of the Andalusian horse may be aware of its contributions to other breeds, but to many horse lovers, this heritage is an obscure footnote. Recent years have brought a resurgence of interest in the part this noble, athletic breed has played in the breeding of the modern sport horse, which originates in three breeds: the Thoroughbred, the Hanoverian, and the Trakehner. Although the modern warm blood and Thoroughbred are very different from the Andalusian, there is a strong case for their Andalusian heritage.

Breeds not discussed

There are many breeds which have Andalusian heritage, however, discussion of all these breeds is beyond the scope of this short article, and indeed is worthy of a whole book. Breeds not discussed in this article include the other baroque breeds, many breeds native to the British isles, as well as numerous breeds of North and South America.

Before beginning, we must state that for our purposes, we will regard historical references to the Spanish horse, the Iberian horse, the Lusitano, or the Peninsular horse, to be references to the Andalusian.

Ancient and medieval evidence

As early as Roman times, we find coins and statuettes picturing horses with Iberian features. These artifacts show that by ancient times the Andalusian type was already established. It is likely that the Andalusian horse was dispersed by the Romans throughout their empire, and this early dispersal was probably the first influence on other breeds.

Throughout medieval times we see Iberian horses depicted in art, as can be seen in this detail from a painting by the 15th century Italian painter Brancacci. Examples of Andalusian horses in art work establish its presence throughout Europe.

The influence of the Andalusian in the 17th and 18th centuries

The foundations of European classical riding were established in this period. The history of the Andalusian horse is a thread that is interwoven with the histories of classical riding and the royal courts of Europe. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, riding schools enhanced the prestige of the royal courts, and to be the royal riding master was to hold an influential position at court.

In France, Francois Robichon de la Gueriniere (1688-1751) was the riding master of Louis XIV at the School of Versailles. He wrote: "*All authors have given preference to the horses of Spain and have regarded them as the best of all horses for the manege, by reason of their agility, their strength and the natural cadence of their gait...*The Duke of Newcastle finds only one fault with it, which is that of having too good a memory; because it uses this to govern itself and to anticipate the will of the rider... *The stallions of Andalusia produce the best horses.*" William

Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle, was Master of Horse to Charles II of England. His book, A General System of Horsemanship, is still in print today.

Because the Andalusian horse was regarded as the finest horse for the art of riding, it was used to improve local breeds. It was also during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the stud books of many modern breeds were established. Andalusian horses given as gifts from one royal family to another were found in many royal stables. Particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth century we see many Andalusian horses depicted in paintings by famous artists such as Velazquez, Goya, Rubens and van Dyke, as well as lesser known artists.

Another famous riding master and advocate of the Andalusian horse, was the Marquis of Marialva, who is sometimes called the Guerinier of Portugal because the book he wrote on the principles of classical riding is to this day quoted by Portuguese riders. Horses and horsemanship conforming to the classical ideal have been preserved in Portugal in an unbroken line from the time of Marialva to this day.

The Thoroughbred and the Cleveland Bay

There are several ways we can infer the influence of the Andalusian on other breeds. An obvious way is through written records - books and stud records. Another way is to recognize "The Old Iberian Factor", by looking at the horses themselves, as Sylvia Loch points out in The Royal Horse of Europe (p.152). Many breeds display Iberian characteristics, such as high set necks, strong withers, a short coupled back with powerful loins, strong hindquarters, an almond shaped eye, a sub-convex profile of the head, good bone, abundant mane and tail, a generally round appearance, high intelligence, and kind temperament. When a breed shows many of these characteristics we may speculate that there is some Andalusian background. Where written records are lacking, the educated eye can often discern the Iberian factor.

Two important breeds with Andalusian origins are from England: *the Thoroughbred and the Cleveland Bay*.

The Thoroughbred

Lady Sylvia Loch, in The Royal Horse of Europe, writes that Spanish horses were imported to England as early as the time of the reign of King Edward III (1327-77). To show that Spanish horses were foundation mares of the Thoroughbred, she reproduces the breeding records from the royal stud book from the year 1576, and also from 1620-1624. At the time, Spanish horses were called "Jennet" or "Spanish Ginnet". Many of the mares covered are Jennets.

Another Iberian influence on the Thoroughbred was the Barb. Many of the early foundation mares of the Thoroughbred are described as Barbs. Both Juan Llamas and Sylvia Loch state that the Barb originated from Andalusian horses which were exported to North Africa, and interbred with native horses.

Sylvia Loch further describes the transition between the older style of race horse and the modern horse, which can be seen in the paintings of George Stubbs (1724-1806), one of the premier horse painters of all time. Stubbs' famous portrait of "Whistlejacket", which hangs in

London's National Gallery, shows this beautiful chestnut doing a levade. This horse, while clearly not pure Iberian, with his high set neck, and weight shifted onto his powerful hindquarters certainly looks like a horse with Iberian lineage.

The Cleveland Bay

Though the [Cleveland Bay](#) is a rare breed today, it was one of the most predominant breeds of 19th century England. Its Spanish roots originate from Barb foundation mares. The "Iberian factor" is evident in the modern Cleveland Bay. The Cleveland Bay was also known as the Chapman Coach Horse and it was crossed with the Thoroughbred to create the Yorkshire Coach horse. Its importance to our story is its role as one of the foundation breeds of the Hanoverian. About 100 English coach horses stood at the Celle, the Hanoverian stud, between 1830 and 1880.

The Hanoverian

In the region of Lower Saxony, the home of the Hanoverian, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, "most of the horses bred [at Bucken, near Hoya] were sired by Spanish stallions...and had a good reputation throughout the country" (von Stenglin, [The Hanoverian](#)). Spanish stallions, among others, were used to refine the rather coarse local horses. The high quality horses that resulted were renowned as cavalry horses. In 1735, George II, Elector of Hanover, established the Landgestut, the state stud. As late as 1770 Spanish horses were imported to the state stud at Celle to replace the losses of the Seven Years War. Later, in the 1800's, Thoroughbreds were imported for refining influence.

The Trakehner

The Trakehner is another breed with an illustrious past, going back to the foundation of the state stud in 1732. Dr. Eberhard von Velsen-Zerweck writes: "The first horses based at Trakehnen represented various European breeds. The main breeds were Neapolitan, Danish, Andalusian, and Oriental." The Neapolitan horse, a breed which is now extinct, was based on Andalusian blood, going back to the period when Naples was a Spanish possession. The Danish tradition of Spanish horses continues today, as can be seen by the preservation of the [Knabstrupper](#), which has preserved the rare leopard spotted coloring that was so fashionable in baroque times, but has been bred out of the modern Andalusian.

A change in fashion: the 19th century

In the aftermath of the English Reformation and French Revolution, the esthetic ideal changed from a horse that was upright and collected, to a horse that raced across the open fields. Racing became known as the sport of kings, and hunting over fences became a popular equestrian sport. The classical riding that had been the hallmark of the aristocracy went out of fashion, but it was preserved on the Iberian peninsula, within the great riding schools and the circus, and by some military riders. In the changing esthetics of the nineteenth century the Andalusian horse was no longer the breed used to improve other breeds. It slipped into obscurity, even as it was preserved on the Iberian peninsula.

Today's sport horses

The Hanoverian and Trakehner are the foundation breeds of the other warm blood registries. We have shown that both these breeds were based in part on Andalusian blood. Additionally, an investigation of Thoroughbred history shows that the Andalusian was a foundation horse for that breed. Later on, the Cleveland Bay, which also had Andalusian blood, was used to create the Hanoverian. All this shows that the Andalusian has had multiple influences on the modern sport horse.

Anyone who has followed the progress of modern sport horse breeding knows that in the aftermath of World War II horse breeding took a dramatic turn. Modern warmbloods have been lightened and refined by the addition of selected Thoroughbreds to warmblood stud books. Indeed, it is not uncommon for the very best warmblood stallions to be registered in multiple studbooks. Doing so has facilitated the creation of the modern super horse.

Today's warmbloods, with their enormous ground covering gaits far exceed the athleticism of prewar horses. These horses take a spectator's breath away. Yet there are those who point out that collection, the very soul of dressage, is downplayed in the competitive arena. Typically, the horses of Spain and Portugal which compete on the world stage have high scores in the collected movements. At the same time, many people pursue classical riding as an art, and never enter the competitive arena. Who is to say what the sport horse of the future will look like?

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