

## **THE PURE BRED SPANISH HORSE**

### **A Guide to the Definitive Literature of Juan Carlos Altamirano**

The first issue of this magazine includes the beginning of a series of articles concerning the Iberian breeds – and focuses in Part One upon the pure bred Spanish horse – the "Pura Raza Española". The foremost world authority on the breed, its history, development and morphology is the Spanish author Juan Carlos Altamirano who has published a series of informative, (and sometimes controversial) fascinating and beautifully illustrated works. The reader need look no further than these volumes in conjunction with Sylvia Loch's classical work "The Royal Horse of Europe" for the foundation literature on the subject.

Juan Carlos Altamirano has published his works privately from Malaga in volumes which contain both English and Spanish text.

The starting point for any reader is his publication in 2000:

"El Caballo Español: la evolución de su morfología"

"The Spanish Horse: the evolution of its morphology"

This classical work deals with the evolution and morphology of the breed including a detailed summary of all aspects of the breed's characteristics from conformation to coat colours. The reader will find a beautifully illustrated volume with a finely detailed account of even such matters as the reasons why

chestnut horses were at one time not accepted by the Rules of the Breed and the decline in chestnut coat colours by selective breeding from the 16th century. Who would have known that in the efforts to breed a noble animal those responsible believed that, according to ancient Greek doctrine, any living being – including horses – in whose nature the element of fire predominated (evidenced by a reddish coat colour) would be bad-tempered? Where else would we find information such as that in 1914 68% of registered stallions were bay, decreasing by 1928 to 41% and by 1974 to 28%, due to the spectacular increase in grey horses – a coat colour with which we automatically associate the breed, unaware that this trend is more recent than we may have imagined. Equally interesting is the more recent beginnings of a reversal in the trend as a result of the rise in demand for bay and black horses in the breed. Fascinating too is the section on fronto-nasal profiles and the debate over whether the prevalence of the convex profile demonstrated the influence of cross-bred or inferior breeding. In truth the "Roman" profile was quite unconnected with inferior breeding and the breed has traditionally contained both straight and convex profiles. By the first half of the 20th century the author explains that a decline in Roman-nosed horses arose due to selective breeding leading to the current tendency for sub-convex profiles. The author points out that both types of profile should be permitted in the breed and neither can be considered more or less pure – however:

"If the Spanish horse had not evolved and if we wished to return to the type of horse that existed just after its creation in the 16th century, we would have to accept that the Roman-nosed profile is the one that has the greatest degree of "pureness"."

This is the sort of detail that the reader will find in this fascinating work.

The volume also reminds us of the author's earlier publication (1998):

"Historia y origen del caballo español"

"History and Origin of the Spanish Horse"

which in turn should be read with the author's specialised work:

“Las Caballerizas Reales de Cordoba”

"The Royal Stables of Cordoba"

The author has conclusively demonstrated that the origins of the pure bred Spanish horse stem from the actions of Phillip II of Spain who, in 1567, issued a royal decree in which he ordered that a breed of horses was to be created in Cordoba. In order to create the perfect breed, Phillip II ordered that 1,200 mares should be purchased and that public land be set aside for royal pasture. Diego Lōpez de Haro became the Royal Stablemaster and developed the breed while Phillip II ordered the construction of one of the finest sets of stables in the world. The author's meticulous historical research led to the conclusion that the pure bred Spanish horse had not simply evolved to the animal we know today, as was popularly believed, but was the creation of line breeding at the instigation of Phillip II of Spain. Diego Lōpez de Haro remained in charge of the project for over 30 years from 1567 to 1599 during which time the criteria selection for the new breed was not altered, making one of Spain's greatest achievements possible – the Spanish horse. As the author points out, from then on there was not a king or nobleman who did not want to own one of the spectacular horses created in Cordoba or to be portrayed on one (as the

frontispiece of Sylvia Loch's classical work demonstrates in Van Dyck's portrait of Charles I on his Iberian charger).

In 2003 the author claimed to have exploded the myth of the Carthusian horses and dealt with the history of the "bocado" line in his publication:

"The History of the Carthusian Horses"

which was followed in 2005 by a beautifully illustrated work on the history of the Bocado brand or lineage:

"La Yequeda del Bocado"

"The Bocado Stud Farm"

This detailed (and again beautifully illustrated volume) deals in detail not only with the debates concerning the Carthusian Monastery and the claims that their line breeding has produced the current Bocado lineage but concentrates on the families who were responsible for the line breeding of the "bocado" brand and some of the finest pure bred Spanish horses, with detailed information on the historical families responsible. The author explains how, after the fall of the predominance of Cordoba in terms of stockbreeding, the purity of the lines was dominated from Arcos de la Frontera and Jerez de la Frontera. This is a fascinating history for all those interested in the history of the pure bred Spanish horse. It is a controversial one to the extent that the author has triggered an enormous debate in demonstrating that although the Carthusian monastery produced high quality mares and stallions and that the sale of the Carthusian stud took place in 1809-1810 the alleged purchase of the Carthusian horses by the Zapata family is an error – with the result that

the Bocado lineage is not drawn from the Carthusian line. These conclusions are based on historical research and the records required by law in Spain from the 16<sup>th</sup> century for all breeders to register their horses. This rigorous control permits us to know two centuries later the history of such horses and who bought them. The author's ultimate conclusion is that the Bocado line originates from the union of stock of the Vidal and Coronado families at the beginning of the eighteenth century, subsequently coming into the hands of the Zapata family and being popularly known as "Zapatero" horses – later to be purchased by Vicente Romero Garcia and from there developed by dedicated breeders such as the Terry family; in 1990 the Spanish State acquired the Bocado stud farm and named it "The Carthusian Stud Farm of the Bocado Brand" – from then on the stock became known, interchangeably by two names: "Bocado" (because of the shape of the brand – a traditional curb bit) and "Carthusians". From that moment also concludes the author the Spanish State turned the Carthusian fantasy into a purported historical fact. Launching his attack on the State Farm (Expasa) from this platform the author asserts that the balance of the last decade of activity of this stud moves from the position of the one used to improve others to that of having to be improved upon. It is not the purpose of this review to comment on the accuracy or otherwise of that conclusion or to do other than to demonstrate the fascinating nature of the debate contained in these two particular volumes. Whatever the ultimate conclusions to be drawn from the debate the author's research is impressive indeed. One also learns that breeding standards were laid down in October 1492 in Spain in order to ensure obligatory grading at all studs – by Royal decree. The breeding of pure Spanish horses with other horses in the peninsula including those of Jerez resulted in an increase in the overall quality and the benefits created at Cordoba spread in the hands of Jesuits and noblemen.

Finally, a new treasure recently arrived in my library. A gift to me from my close friends who have developed a new stud in Andalucia utilising “cartujano” mares of the purest blood lines. This is Altamirano's newest publication:

"The Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art"

This is a truly beautiful publication detailing the history of this wonderful building at Jerez, its associated school and the dedicated work that takes place there to promote classical equitation with the pure bred Spanish horse. It is open to visitors who would be well advised to watch the training and practice sessions in the mornings at the school.

These books are expensive and are not easily obtained but some of them can conveniently be acquired through the British Association for the Pure Bred Spanish Horse. Another source is through ABE Books and their internet search system. I recommend them to all those who have an interest in the breed. For the specialist the author has produced in the Spanish language “The Book of Brands” – now in its second edition and detailing the full list and history of the registered breeders’ brands and a Spanish Equestrian Dictionary. The Spanish/English series described in detail above fulfil two functions: books for those who want the sheer pleasure of looking at the beautiful and numerous illustrations and those who also want the detail of the breed's history and its characteristics. In both ways these volumes excel.

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