

## Paso Finos - "smoothest riding horses in the world"

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Hooves beating an almost musical rhythm, "Bonito de Colombia" gaited gracefully past the stable and training barn, his mane and tail fluttering in the light breeze that wafted over Fieldstone Meadows rolling hills.

Colombia is a Paso Fino, one of a breed of horses that move so smoothly on their feet that they almost seem to be dancing, but with the style and spirit of a prima donna. In fact, Paso Fino means "fine step or fine gait."

Paso Finos originated in Spain and share common ancestry roots with the Arabians, tracing back to parentage from the Spanish Barbs, Jennets and Andalusians. It is believed that Columbus brought the first Paso Finos to the Western hemisphere on his second voyage to explore the New World.

What makes the Paso Fino's gait so unique is the lateral movement of the left and right pairs of legs. Both legs on one side of the animal move ahead at the same time. However, the hind foot strikes the ground just a fraction of a second ahead of the front foot, creating a smooth, one-two-three-four rhythm. Because of the smoothness of this gaiting, the rider of a Paso Fino feels neither a forward or backward pitch, or a rolling movement to either side.

"Paso Finos are the smoothest riding horses in the world," attests Lee Glatfelter.

Lee first heart of the relatively rare breed in 1971, when she spotted a picture in a newspaper of a Paso Fino on display at a show in Harrisburg.

She, and husband, Art, a York insurance firm owner, enjoyed horseback riding on their 40-acre

Fieldstone Meadows farm near New Bridgeville. (Art was the purchaser of this year's Farm Show champion steer.)

Though plagued with arthritis, Lee refused to give up riding, but had purchased a smooth riding Tennessee Walker mount. Reports of the Paso Fino's unique gaiting immediately captured her interest, and she began researching the unfamiliar breed.

But it wasn't until six years later, in 1976, that the Glatfelters traveled to Puerto Rico to take their first look at the Paso Finos being bred there.

"We rode them there for the first time, along the ocean," she recalls. "It was just beautiful."

Conformed enthusiasts after that introduction, the Glatfelters imported their first Paso Fino the following year. At that time, there were a mere 2,000 individuals of the breed in the United States. Although that figure has now tripled, barely a dozen breeders across the country maintain a breeding herd of over 30 head.

Sixty of the beautiful horses now roam the neatly fenced pastures around the beautifully-landscaped Glatfelter home and stables, including the stallions, mares, yearlings and the spring crop of colts and fillies.

An almost constant stream of visitors flow through Field Stone Meadows, including owners of mares arriving for breeding services.

Senior herd sire is "Sonrio de Verde," Art's personal riding favorite and a former reserve national Paso Fino trail class winner. Purchased from a breeder in Georgia, the stylish and spirited dark stallion is known more affectionately as "George."



"Dona Francesca" is Lee Glatfelter's riding mount, and a favorite of the brood mares. This six-year-old now has a colt sired by a reserve national champion performance class winner.

"Colombia," the 30-month-old youngster and junior herd sire, is presently in schooling under the farm's top-notch trainer, Bob Kilgore. Imported last summer from Colombia, South America, the young stallion is being readied for his initial appearance in the conformation classes on this year's show circuit.

Because the breeding season in his native home runs opposite ours, "Colombia" must face competitors several months older in the classes.

Eight major shows are included on the circuit, each requiring several days of travel. The five to seven head in the show contingent are entered in the range of classes, covering physical conformation, performance, pleasure, trail and the "classic Fino," scored on the most correct form or gait, the epitome of the desirable Paso Fino on the move.

The Spanish use the word "brios" to sum up the character of the classic Paso Fino. "Brios" encompasses the striking spirit and fireiness of the breed, but with the sense of control that enabled these horses to work long hours in the fields, as many still do in parts of South and Central America.

Within just a few hours of birth, a Paso Fino breeder knows if a foal has gaiting ability.

"It's a natural gift of God," Lee explains. "They're born doing it, and babies just hours old will gait beside their mothers. We can refine it, but not teach it. Gaiting is inbred."

Some individuals require just a few weeks for the refining schooling, while others perfect



Field Stone Meadows in southeastern York County is one of mere handful of Paso Fino breeding operations with more than 30 in the herd. The farm, outside of New Bridgeville, will host York County's 4-H horse and pony club's field day next Saturday.



Like all youngsters, these yearlings show endless curiosity about what's happening outside the fence around their own backyard.



It's school time at the Glatfelter Paso Fino breeding farm for junior herd sire "Bonito de Colombia." Trainer Bob Kilgore, left, and his assistant Rodney Miller work the double lead lines used in training and exhibiting Paso Finos in the lead classes. Imported last summer from Colombia, South America, the young stallion will compete in his first conformation classes in just a few weeks.

## Homestead Notes

their gaiting finish more slowly. Some simply can never do the classic gait.

In the training and showing of lead classes, animals are handled with two leads lines, one held out each side of the trainers.

In some countries, it has been common for Paso Fino trainers to use artificial devices to aid in refining the gaiting technique. Jagged pieces of metal are sometimes fit across the nose, causing the horse to hold its head in a position that aids the overall gaiting form. Sometimes hooves have been rimmed to excess to cause a horse to move its feet more desirably.

Domestic show judges are extremely strict in checking for even the slightest hint of scars, or evidence that such artificial devices have been used on horses. In fact, if a breeder shows a horse that carries such marks, it must be proved beyond doubt to the judges that the scars were incurred before the horse crossing through U.S. customs.

"I like that rule," says Lee, lavish in her praise for the strict judging ethics enforced on the U.S. showing circuit.

Everything about Paso Fino exhibiting focuses on the natural

beauty of the horse.

Only very simple leather halters are permitted, and never any ornate haltering or saddle equipment. Riders, however, dress with the Spanish flavor, in costuming of the Flamenco style black pants, ruffled skirts and flat-topped black hats.

Most of the horses are exhibited "barefooted," although show rules do permit a light, ten-ounce racing plate to be used on the hoof.

About five or six years elapse before a new breeder begins to see the results of the selection program and the ability of the offspring to perform in exhibition. Last year, the Glatfelters exhibited four of their own-bred yearlings, but only in the conformation classes. This year those maturing hroses will be entered in their first saddled classes.

"We will not ruin a horse by showing it too young just to win a ribbon," Lee stresses. "No horse goes into saddle training until it has reached at least 22 months of age."

With a practiced eye for trait selection, Lee looks for a horse with width and depth of chest, and with straight, properly set legs up