

You've fallen in love with the Spanish horse and you want to go to Spain to get one... you were captivated by a video or have ridden a P.R.E. at your trainer's barn, or perhaps have traveled to Spain and seen them first hand. So what's the next step? How do you bring one home from Spain – what does it take and what are some of the issues?

The P.R.E. was first introduced to North America in the 1970s by a handful of adventurous trail blazers and many fine horses are produced in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Yet for some buyers, the allure of “treasure hunting” is worth defying the risks to import directly from the mother country where the P.R.E. has been declared a national treasure.

National Treasure of Spain

Importing Your Pure Spanish Horse

By Susan Ambrose

Why Import?

There are arguments against importing horses, as opposed to supporting the North American breeders with a ready supply of stock. Some feel that buying abroad hurts the domestic market. But one could argue that if not for imported stock, there wouldn't be a foundation for a domestic breeding program to draw from. The two go hand-in-hand, as newly imported stock is critical to infusing the gene pool with diversity.

Importing a horse from abroad is a complex undertaking and not unlike a relay race in which the responsibilities change hands, making it difficult to track each step. Your first decision to ponder is whether to make the journey to Spain or purchase from afar. Regardless of how you go about it, most people find that working with an agent in Spain makes the process much easier. In fact, many experts recommend you enlist the help of an agent.

If you already speak the language and have established contacts with breeders in Spain, you are well on your way. An independent agent is your advocate and can be the essential key to a smooth progression from start to finish. Many breeders, however well intended, are not familiar with the complexities of exporting. Also, regulations, documentation and testing requirements may change without notice.

For instance, a knowledgeable agent can orchestrate the details from start to finish...from the initial search, to obtaining insights from trainers into a horse's character, ability and potential. Your agent can

provide a more objective appraisal when contrasting and comparing candidates.

Your success is greatly enhanced by selecting an agent with references, integrity and breed expertise— a trainer, judge, or breeder—one who understands bloodlines, conformation and proper training with access to reputable partners. This expertise is invaluable in accomplishing your goal.

In the past decade, Spanish breeders have become more accessible, and although many were



Guardadamas, an example of an imported stallion, Prix St. George 2011 SICAB Champion of Spain

Photo: Delisa de Cabeza Rulida

slow to embrace the internet, some actively promote their horses online to international buyers. The increased demand for FEI dressage horses has spawned a plethora of new breeders in Spain, many of whom have obtained foundation stock from old recognized bloodlines, and others that specialize in rare colors.

Many nouveau breeders seeking to establish themselves will offer attractive prices on their produce. Generally, the price of horses in the vicinity of Jerez and Seville is at a premium, where the greatest concentration of breeders is found, many of international acclaim. The majority of the “old school”, multi-generation breeding families in Spain do not take the commercial approach. They follow earlier traditions of selling horses face-to-face, and many of them are not internet savvy. They prefer to know the person who buys their horses. They

have a genuine concern about safeguarding the centuries of breeding to keep the horse true to its heritage. The experience is very personal, therefore they shy away from working with foreign brokers and can be difficult to access.

A knowledgeable insider will also be able to reveal a broader palette of boutique breeders. You may be surprised to learn that they come from all levels of society, from gypsies to families of nobility, and are otherwise unapproachable, generally inclined to avoid working with outsiders. There are true gems frolicking their pastures and sometimes at a fraction of the cost of horses found in Jerez or Sevilla.

The selection of talented young prospects is wonderful, if you know how to find them. By stepping off the beaten path and venturing into the countryside, you will experience the richness of the culture on a more intimate level. You will delight in discovering exceptional quality horses produced with enormous passion, grace and pride.

You can experience and celebrate this rich tradition by actually riding Spanish horses the way they were meant to be ridden. A proper introduction cannot omit the experience of classical lessons on a schoolmaster, to truly understand what it means to connect to this horse in the way he is accustomed. To experience this for the first time is a life-changing moment. An old saying in Spain, “una bola de fuego en un hilo de seda” which means, “a ball of fire on a silken thread”. You may have seen photos of five year old children sitting atop a mature stallion in a parade setting...where else in the world would you find such decorum?

The Process

Susana Rodriguez of Granada has been involved with the P.R.E. for 50 years, and has been importing/exporting them for 25 years. Susana states, “A very important element not to overlook: a horse may look gentle, well behaved and seem very well trained, both in videos and even in person, but the horse may behave completely different under another rider, and only be compliant for the trainer presenting him. This is another benefit of working with an agent who is familiar with the trainers, owners and the horses themselves, and can honestly represent the horse as being suitable for anybody.”

You've defined your search parameters, scrutinized a field of choices and narrowed it down to your favorites. You have reviewed videos and photos of the horse, verified registry, health records, general condition, soundness, temperament, training, work ethic, interaction with people and the actual price quoted by the owner.

Essentially, when importing livestock from abroad, you must comply with the established Federal regulations concerning testing for contagious disease and meet all import and customs requirements. Failure to do so will result in having the animals restricted to the

entrance port quarantine, where you will not be able to obtain their release.

The initial step is to request the owner to provide an updated Piroplasmosis blood test. The Piro test checks for an infectious tick-born illness, since Piro-positive livestock are prohibited entry into the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Upon receiving negative results from a reference lab, you'll proceed with scheduling a pre-purchase veterinary exam. Digital x-ray equipment is recommended for cleaner x-rays that can be emailed to your vet for a secondary evaluation.

Most horses in work have some changes on the x-rays. Rarely will you find perfect x-rays, but finding changes doesn't automatically equate with an unusable horse for the purpose intended. Many times, the vet might tell you that “this could possibly lead to a problem in the future,” but he cannot predict to what extent, if at all. Perfection is rare, and so much is subjective in evaluating x-rays. Fortunately this breed is generally known for his soundness and longevity under saddle.

The Players

In a nutshell, the participants in this theatre and the basic steps involved are the horse owner (seller), his agent (if applicable), your representative agent, the veterinarian, the initial testing lab, the quarantine facility in Spain staffed with veterinarians and onsite laboratory, the sealed ground transport to Amsterdam, the quarantine facility in Amsterdam, air transport to the U.S., U.S. Customs department, your designated customs agent, a U.S.D.F. quarantine facility, which may be at the port of call or you may select from a list of authorized quarantine facilities in the U.S., the official USDA laboratory, and final ground transport from quarantine to your door.

Quarantine and Testing

Your agent will organize your horse's transfer from the seller's property and take him to the designated quarantine facility or coor-



The isolation pastures of Crece Quarantine facility, Toledo, Spain

dinate with them to handle the pick up. In order to commence with testing, the horse should have had all necessary updated vaccinations required by the country of entry before going into quarantine. Your agent will coordinate this with the seller, otherwise the administration of vaccines in quarantine can adversely affect the test results and delay the stay in quarantine by weeks. Although the facility should handle the documentation and stay current on all regulatory policies, your

agent should be in contact to verify that the documentation is in order, and keep updated on the status. The quarantine facility maintains an onsite compliant lab and will ship the specimens out for testing to the U.S.D.A. official designated laboratory, which serves to eliminate any questions on the viability of test results.

If you have purchased young stock, a gelding or an unbred horse, quarantine takes only a few days in Spain, approximately two to three days in Amsterdam, and three days in U.S. quarantine. Breeding animals must go through CEM testing which is explained below.

Ground Transportation

Upon completion of quarantine and documentation in Spain, the horse will be shipped via ground transport in a climate-controlled (air-conditioned) sealed van to Amsterdam. The accompanying documents will include an official international health certificate, validated by a national veterinary officer from the export country, which certifies the horse is free of all known contagious diseases and complies with U.S.D.A. regulations.

Once in Amsterdam, there is a two-day hold for verification of the animal's health, testing and authentication of the documentation provided. An important benefit of this temporary stay is the horse receives rest in preparation for the second leg of

travel. In the Amsterdam quarantine, the horses are provided a three-by-three meter (almost 10 feet square) box stall.

Transatlantic Flights

The horses are loaded into the three-stall pallet, which is their sealed container. Depending on the equipment, the container is either lifted inside the airplane, or the pallet may be rolled to fit the container which is already inside the plane. The process takes about fifteen minutes. A professional groom is provided by the airline for every pallet of three horses. The cost is included in the export fee. The horse is headed to one of three U.S. ports of entry, New York, Miami, Florida or Los Angeles, CA.

Cost Saving Tips

It is entirely possible to enter into this venture on a budget for cost-conscious dreamers. Here are a few tips to help you conserve on your expenditures.

If you are looking for a solid competition horse and are not planning to do any breeding, you may consider purchasing a young unbred stallion and gelding him after the conclusion of the sale. It is not customary to geld stallions in Spain and you may find unbred stallions up to age 8 that you can geld before exporting, which will reduce the time in quarantine up to seven weeks.

The international shipping container has three compartments and has a flat rate fee. If you purchase one horse to ship alone, you pay for the empty slots as well, tripling your cost. Your shipping agent should be able to coordinate the shipment with other horses departing at the same time, which will save approximately two thirds of your shipping cost.

If you are bringing a horse into Canada, you will save a considerable sum by importing through the U.S., and after release from quarantine, then shipping on to Canada.

C.E.M. Testing

Contagious Equine Metritis, or C.E.M., is a venereal disease caused by the bacteria *Taylorella equigenitalis* and is spread through breeding. Ultimately, C.E.M. results in a mare's inability to conceive. Stallions can carry the bacteria, but do not show clinical signs. Federal law requires all breeding horses over the age of two traveling to the United States must undergo rigorous testing at a certified facility. C.E.M. testing will generally extend the time in quarantine to two to three weeks in Spain and an additional two to three weeks in the U.S. Of course, by acquiring young, unbred stock you will avoid C.E.M. testing, shorten quarantine by six to seven weeks and save thousands.

If a horse tests positive for C.E.M., there are advances in treatment which is easy to administer, and s/he can travel afterwards. The cost involved is more about the additional time in quarantine (in Spain) than the actual cost of treatment itself. After treatment and re-testing, the horse can be ready to export.

Affects Upon the Horse

Studies have documented that prolonged periods of travel (six to eight hours) can cause an increase in cortisol levels, a stress hormone, although the horse may not show any outward signs of stress. Some experts say that horses travel by air better than people, as they regard their container stalls in the same way as a horse trailer. Yet it is recommended that the buyer obtain shipping insurance prior to departing Spain in the event of any problems arising.

If anything does go wrong in flight, there is an isolated enclosure of open space around the pallet, so if necessary the horse can be removed from his stall for additional space to move around and maneuver.

Arrival in the USA Port of Entry and Selection of a Quarantine Facility

Upon arrival, the sealed container goes directly into U.S. quarantine. Tests for dourine, glanders, equine piroplasmosis, and EIA are conducted by U.S.D.A. during quarantine. Test results from National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) are generally available three days after the arrival of the horse. Horses that test positive for any of these diseases will be refused entry into the United States.

You can elect to use the port of entry facility in New York, Los Angeles or Miami, or choose from one of approximately 60 approved U.S.D.A. quarantine facilities in the U.S. The latter alternative could be advantageous if you wish to visit the horse or have him near your trainer while in isolation.

It is recommended that you perform a thorough investigation of the facilities and obtain references if possible, as each site is unique and usually a privately owned farm or ranch. The U.S.D.A. requires that quarantined horses remain a distance of at least 30 feet from other horses, but there are no absolute standards regarding type of fencing or other facilities, so you will want to ensure the site meets your standards.

The horse will leave the port of entry in a U.S.D.A. sealed van that cannot be opened until arrival at the quarantine facility. Many facilities offer direct shuttles as an optional service. Once your horse has completed quarantine, you can have your transport company deliver

him/her to you. A more complete snapshot of the requirements is available at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov>.

Avoiding the Pitfalls

This complex process can flow smoothly without a hitch, yet many things can go awry. For instance, we have heard of buyers who experienced the following nightmares. The seller...increased the price once the horse was picked out, switched x-rays, switched lab results, switched horses; extended costs for so-called prolonged treatment and boarding; used narcotics to hide behavior problems; sold buckskin horses at premium prices that later turned grey; never provided registry papers; falsified pre-purchase veterinary exams resulting in horses arriving with undisclosed health issues such as unsoundness, founder, bowed tendons, etc. Most or all of these events arise when working with unscrupulous parties.

Susana Rodriguez explains another valid point: "A good agent will not sell you a horse and vanish. He or she will visit and take photographs of your horse in quarantine, will help with the health records and paperwork, will keep you informed of any changes, supervise the loading of the horse from the farm to the quarantine and from the quarantine to Amsterdam, will make sure that the horse travels with recent proper shoeing and that he is exercised during quarantine; will verify that your documents are properly executed for arrival in the U.S. to clear U.S. Customs and enter quarantine. Some quarantines do not exercise the horse due to the risks and you can make arrangements for your horse to have sufficient exercise."

The journey upon which you will embark is an unforgettable quest and you may find it habit-forming. After becoming comfortable with the process, many P.R.E. breed aficionados regularly import their stock. And it is not uncommon for trainers and judges in the U.S. to purchase youngsters, complete their training and offer them to the dressage market. Once more, the Spanish horse reclaims days of past glory, not only considered a National Treasure of Spain, but celebrated throughout the world.

Susan Ambrose is a breeder of P.R.E. horses and owner of Andalusians de Mythos. Susana Rodriguez of Granada, is a native of Spain with 25 years of import/export experience. Together they offer P.R.E. and P.S.L. horses in Spain for international export. Visit their website at <http://andalusianimports.com>. Contact Susan Ambrose 720.296.4524 and Susana Rodriguez at 34 608.507.489.

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Loading horses into the container



Loading the container



Positioning the container inside the aircraft



On board!

