

Frequently Asked Questions About the Peruvian Breed

What is a Peruvian Paso Horse?

A pure breed of naturally smooth-gaited riding horses whose ancestral home is Peru, South America. They have been established for five centuries. They have been selectively bred for their unique gait, stamina, beauty, and willing, cooperative energy called "*brio*".

What is the breed's origin?

The Spanish Conquistadors brought to the Americas their ambling riding horse breed called the Spanish Jennet. The horses were descended from the Barb from the Moorish invasion of Spain. These ancient Andalusian horses were called Cartujana and Sorraia horses, and most were smooth gaited. Peruvian noblemen used the horses for every purpose, from travel to crop checking and working with livestock. The Peruvian Paso Horse has been designated a "National Treasure" in Peru, and it has been established in many countries around the world. The Peruvian Paso is a very smooth and comfortable **non-trotting** riding horse. Unlike some other gaited breeds where the gait may or may not occur, the Peruvian Horse can guarantee that all purebreds will inherit the gait.

What can they be used for?

They are used for pleasure riding, trails, shows, parades, exhibitions, and handicapped riding programs. Some are being used very successfully in ranch work, cattle penning, competitive trail rides and endurance riding. Their good dispositions make them suitable for many types of riders.

Physical characteristics?

Height: 14.1 to 15.1 hands with some individuals over or under this average.

Weight: 900 to 1,100 pounds, on average. **Color:** Chestnut, bay, seal brown occur most, and also black. Grey or roan is also acceptable. All the dilutes are possible, such as palomino, buckskin and duns. White markings are allowed and not penalized. Sabino and overo pintos are possible but rare.

Appearance: Large eyes, long mane and tail, good solid body, strong, yet refined legs, high headset (proud) when in action, rounded croup and low tail set. A broad chest and deep body, about half body and half leg when viewed from the side. Well sprung ribs are important – a bigger circumference at the ribs than at the girth.

"Termino": The natural showy outward rolling of the front limbs when the horse is moving forward. Peruvian Horses are born with this characteristic. It is not "winging" or "paddling" which come from conformational faults. The foot is lifted off the ground, performs its arc in the air and then returns to square position before hitting the ground again. Peruvian horses may have abundant or minimal *termino* (or even none). It is a typical characteristic but it is not part of the gait – it is an added flourish and up to the individual breeder's taste.

What gaits do they do?

First, a flat-footed walk. Then the middle gait – called the **Paso Llano**, (pronounced *paw'-so yawn'-o*). The third gait is usually faster, and it is called the **Sobreandando**. (pronounced *sew-bree-awn-dawn'-doe*), In the *Paso Llano* the four beats evenly spaced. In the *Sobreandando* the lateral footfalls are slightly closer a pace in timing, but the gait still flows without the characteristic side-to-side motion of a pacing horse. The horses do their gaits ranging to the speed of a fast trot or slow canter.

Can they gallop?

Yes, out in the field you will see Peruvian horses gallop, trot, pace, and do all the gaits in between. However, the Peruvian horse is a specialist in having a very "locked-in" gait under saddle, and this gait is highly prized by the owners. So, most owners only do the walk, paso llano and sobreandando under saddle. The horses do these gaits at speed up to that of a fast trot or canter.

Are they trained to do the gaits?

No, the foals are born gaiting. As weanlings, yearlings and two year olds they will do many gaits, but when they start under saddle they will naturally do their four-beat gait. If they are ridden at a slow to moderate speed and the right type of exercises, they will refine their gaits to the best they can be. To understand that the gait is natural is not to say that training is unimportant. The traditional training emphasizes lightness, flexibility and self-carriage, with turns done on the forehand so as to not break the natural timing.

Do they need special tack?

No. A Peruvian horse can be ridden in any saddle and they are wonderful bareback. To interfere the least with the horse, a deep seat is recommended, and not a forward seat. The Peruvian saddle puts the rider's weight exactly where it should be, to not throw the horse off his timing. It is also beautiful, hand-made and extremely comfortable. But in some disciplines such as endurance riding, the Peruvian will be seen in a variety of saddles.

What kind of bit do they use?

The Peruvian is trained first in a bozal, or bitless headgear, and the horse is taught everything he needs to know about being ridden without having a bit in his mouth. The bozal, in the hands of an expert, is an excellent tool to teach doubling and flexing. It encourages high head carriage while still allowing the horse to develop a long stride. Later, the mild curb is added and the horse works in *four reins* until he is secure with the bit. Peruvian Horses always wears a halter and rope when ridden and handled, and they are never led by the reins, which keeps the mouth soft and responsive. The final head carriage is high, the rein soft, and the stride long.

Are they the same as Paso Finos?

No, the Paso Fino is a separate breed. The Paso Fino has a similar footfall pattern in its four-beat gait, but the execution of the gait is completely different. The Paso Fino seeks a short stride and a tight manner of going. The Paso Fino was developed primarily among the Caribbean islands where covering vast distances would not be a factor. The Peruvian developed as a "travel horse" – providing transportation in a large country with few roads. It is meant to cover the most ground possible with the fewest strides, drive from the rear, and move with great looseness in the shoulders.

Is the equitation easy to learn?

Yes. A newcomer can be riding a trained Peruvian horse in mere minutes. The basics are simple. There is no posting, no strong use of leg with every stride as in some breeds. The horse has a built-in "motor" and is amenable to the rider's wishes. The equitation is subtle, and the rider needs to be quiet in the hands and seat and let the horse carry him along. Although the newcomer can enjoy riding immediately, the equitation enthusiast will find that he can spend a lifetime learning about the subtleties of the precise nature of advanced Peruvian riding.

What is *Brio*?

Brio is the unique energy of the Peruvian breed. It is as genetically predetermined as the gait. The trait that many breeds refer to as "spirit" is an aspect of *brio*, but the inner motivation of the horse is profound. At the same time, the deep reserve of energy is available to its rider in a productive way. It is not nervousness or a headstrong quality. A horse with *brio* is easier to ride than a horse lacking in *brio*. The extent and type of *brio* varies in individuals. Some horses are outwardly docile and their *brio* only is brought out when asked. Other horses have *brio* popping from every pore, and appear electric in their presence and pride. Then, at the rider's cue, they drop to a head-down walk as if someone hit the "off" switch. This shows an excellent communication, as horses with the highest amount of *brio* are very sensitive and need clear, consistent cues.

For more information on the Peruvian Horse, Call Dale or Mimi Downey at Crescent Moon Ranch or email Soberano31@gmail.com

