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Cheer-Pull Photo

Photo of 10/17/2010 by Jennifer Hill

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By Pamela Robinson, President, WPHS

"Paso Elegante" is a Florida drill team that was formed in August of 2005 by a group of men and women who enjoyed riding their spirited Paso Fino horses. This group wanted to share their enthusiasm and understanding of the Paso Fino breed with others.

I recently had the pleasure of interviewing Pauline Piazza, one of the founding members. This is a gal with the original foresight to perform precision maneuvers with her Paso to music. Pauline loved to drill so much that she encouraged a group of men and women that shared her passion to come along for the ride. These drill team riders were determined to enjoy the thrill of the drill, while keeping the fun and excitement of riding. The drill team members decided early on that they just wanted to do it for the fun of performing at events, not competition. This way they could showcase their talented Paso Fino horses in more relaxed settings. They have performed at hospitals, camps, nursing homes, Christmas parades - all types of venues all over Florida. Pauline says they are all memorable, but highlights a time performing for the VFW nursing home event. She felt it was for a great cause and the crowd was more than enthusiastic!

The "Paso Elegante" drill team is comprised of all Paso Fino Horses and is coached by Diego Bravo of the Ocala School of Equestrian Art. Diego is the author of the most comprehensive work published to date about Paso Fino horses called, "Science and Art of the Paso Fino horse." The drill team tries to practice weekly with Diego. Before a performance they will practice one extra time and will run through the drill at the location of a performance. This helps to get the horses desensitized to the arena where they will be performing. The all-amateur riders range in age from 12 to 60+ years young. The team was formed to showcase the beauty and amazing smooth gait of the Paso Fino horse and to have the opportunity to ride with other Paso Fino enthusiasts.

The drill team has a routine that is approximately 7 minutes long, performed to a mixture of patriotic music and music with a Spanish flair. They have changed up their costumes several times since their early beginnings. They now wear black pants, boots, shirt with a gold sequined vest and a black hat that even sports a gold sequined hat band. The horses match, wearing black bridles with gold accents, black saddles with black pads and the name of the team "Paso Elegante" embroidered in gold.

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The drill team wears mostly black in this last costume arrangement, with only gold accenting their traditional, understated clothing and tack. They do this so the horse is the focus of attention at every event.

The Bonding Effect

Paso Elegante gets together to promote the Paso Fino breed while enhancing their own riding skills, develop friendships among members, but most of all to entertain the audiences that they perform for.

They have performed with a maximum of 12 riders to a minimum of 6 and they have alternates who step in if needed. Pauline believes that a good age to start a Paso in drill is about age 4. The qualities they are looking for in a good drill team horse are one that gets along with other horses, shows no aggressive behavior, and can work in close proximity with other horses without fear, one that is nicely gaited, and can change speeds easily.

Pauline feels the drill team and their horses are bonded because they are more invested with each other. They have more communication between the horse and the rider because of the intricate maneuvers they are now performing together. The most fascinating thing is to watch how some of the horses learn the drill and can do it without even cues from their rider. Pauline said she has times when she doesn't use her reins at all in practice. She says her horse, a 12 year old gelding named Raveno del Rapido, is the "uncle" of all the horses. When a new member joins they pair him with her horse. He literally has a calming effect on other horses. Pauline believes he talks to them and calms them down. During the practice she says, Raveno makes sure he goes around and greets and spends time with each of his teammates. They all seem to look forward to seeing each other and eagerly come into the arena for practices, get into formation, and when the music begins; they get into "show mode" and do the drill. If the drill is changed, it may take a few times before it is perfected.

She says it is very gratifying to see a new horse join the team and at first be quite hesitant and anxious and in a short while they are just "one of the team". Pauline stated that doesn't happen all the time, though. Some horses do not take to the discipline of drilling and can act out and be rebellious. These horses are given a probationary period and if they do not acclimate to the sport, they are not accepted as team members.

Pauline says that drilling is a sport that some people get hooked on. She noted that some member's belong to two drill teams. The other is a competitive drill team called "Drill Fever". It is one of the few opportunities for teamwork in riding sports. She quickly notes that her team has elected not to

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A little about the breed: The gait of the Paso Fino horse is totally natural and normally exhibited from birth. It is an evenly-spaced four-beat lateral gait with each foot contacting the ground independently in a regular sequence at precise intervals creating a rapid, unbroken rhythm. Executed perfectly, the four hoof beats are absolutely even in both cadence and impact, resulting in unequaled smoothness and comfort for the rider. The Paso Finos are known as "The Rolls Royce of Horses".

The traits that people cherish in the Paso Fino today have been a part of its heritage for over 500 years. Although the Paso Fino has been bred in Latin America since the days of the Conquistadors, this unique horse was virtually unknown in the United States until the late 1940's. A mixture of three European breeds—the Andalusian, the Barb, and the now extinct Spanish Jennet – the ancestors of today's Paso Fino were transported to the New World on the second voyage of Christopher Columbus. They were used by the Conquistador's to carry riders for days over mountains, open ranges, and dense jungles and came to be known as Los Caballos de Paso Fino, "the horse with the fine step", when translated into English.

Today the Paso Fino reflects its Spanish heritage through its proud carriage, elegance, and natural four-beat gait. Paso Finos can walk, canter, and gallop like other horses, but their preferred way of going is their own natural four beat lateral gait. This gait will produce a wonderfully smooth ride at the three primary speeds: The Classic Fino, Paso Corto, and Paso Largo. During the Classic Fino, the horse holds itself fully collected and balanced. Leg motion is smooth and extravagant, and each hoof hits the ground in rapid succession. It is performed with the same forward impulsion as a slow walk, yet it has rapid footfall. The Paso Corto is the average trail gait and is comparable in speed to a trot. Forward speed is moderate, ground covering, but unhurried, executed with a medium extension and stride. The Paso Largo is the fastest speed, executed with a longer extension, stride and varying degrees of collection. In Paso Fino shows, sounding boards are used so that judges and spectators can hear and see more closely the clarity of the gait.

The Paso Fino horses are originally from Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, but the breed is spreading rapidly throughout the world, including the United States where there are over 46,000 registered horses with the Paso Fino Horse Association.

own opportunities for treatment in training openers. She quickly notes that her team has elected not to go to competitions, but there are competitions all across the country for drill teams. The Paso Elegante drill team does it more for fun! See video here: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8139804488016091749&hl=en#>

Paso Fino Excitement

Pasos and Drill Teams have long been a partnership. These horses love to show off, and that may go for the riders too. When many Paso Finos perform for an audience, they get more and more excited as they hear their music filling the air, the applause and excitement causing the Paso Fino give more of themselves.

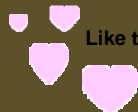
The Pasos are natural born showmen with their long flowing manes, proud carriage and smooth gait. They have tremendous heart and are people pleasers as well as audience pleasers.

I heard a member state, "The best times of my life have been spent on horseback, the rest I have just wasted". You and your horse can be a part of this sport and are invited to check out you local drill team and see if you and your horse can be a part of the excitement too. They are always looking for a few good horses and riders to be a part of the excitement.

Riding on a drill team is colorful, exciting and all involved give a great performance. They have a unique camaraderie between them like no other. They watch out for and take care of the unit of riders and their horses.

When you join a drill team and make contact with other riders of the same mindset, the team now shares a special bond. They have a shared attitude of one for all and all for the good of the drill team. Training techniques, drill maneuvers, and much, much more can be shared through joining a drill team.

There are drill teams in every state, their mission and purpose formed with the intent to create and encourage the sport of drill within the horse industry. All drill teams must promote participation, provide education and communicate the advantages of drill teams to horse owning and the non-horse owning public. Additionally, they should promote equine drill for its entertainment value and as a wholesome family sport. You don't have to own a Paso! Get The Pride in the Ride and join a drill team near you!



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