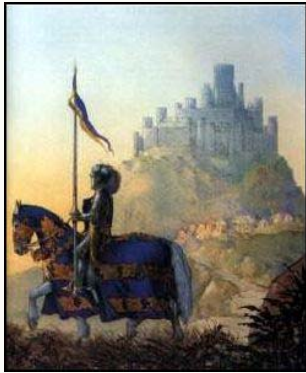




FEATURING: **The Mangalarga Archador** September, 2010

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Jousting with gaited horses!

by Pamela Schroeder, freelance writer

Column Archive **a**

Running of the Rings

Days of Yesteryear – Watching old movies we can conjure up images we saw of knights fighting in battles. We think back to movies like *Robin Hood* or *King Arthur* and the *Knight's of the Roundtable*. We associate jousting with of suits of armour, ladies in waiting, and huge draft horses. In modern times, some popular versions of jousting do not require stocky horse breeds and, in fact, are participated in by lighter boned breeds, even gaited breeds! First, let me give you some history in the evolution of jousting. In the beginning, the Europeans bred and used draft-type horses because of their size and strength to carry the ever increasing weight of an armor-bearing knight. The words "tournament" and "joust" were often used interchangeably. A "joust" referred to a single combat between two horsemen, whereas a "Tournament" referred to mounted combat between parties of knights, as well as to the entire proceeding. Man to man combats ended in the middle of the 1500's when gunpowder was introduced.

Jousting originated between the 10th and 13th centuries, the rules being believed to have been written by a Frenchman named Geoffroi de Pruelli, who died at the very first recorded jousting tournament in history, occurring in the year 1066. From France, jousting slowly spread to Germany, England, and southern Europe. Jousting tournaments began as organized battles between knights who had had experienced some sort of disagreement. Two or more knights on horseback would fight, usually with lances as their weapons. Other weapons used may have included battle axes, daggers, and swords. Although the first recorded tournament occurred in the year 1066, jousting did not gain much popularity until after the 12th century. The sport then became very popular in Europe and remained so up until the 16th century.

Jousting tournaments became a great way for knights not only to show off their skills, but to win large sums of money. However, these knights also risked losing their lives. Henry II of France was one of the first men who lost his life to a jousting tournament. This brutal way of settling conflicts slowly evolved into a more civilized sport with a complex set of rules. Along with these new rules, the idea of chivalry evolved and became an essential part of jousting.

A knight would select a beautiful lady, most commonly a married lady, whose husband was ideally of higher rank than the knight. The knight would then fight in her "honor". In exchange for this "service" the knight expected the lady to spend the night with him. It was considered

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unacceptable, even down right disgraceful for a lady to refuse a knight who had fought for her "honor", even though she had no say in the matter to begin with.

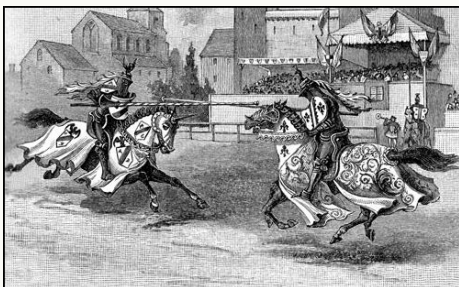
As you can see, "Chivalry" wasn't quite as romantic during the medieval period as it has been portrayed in modern times. The French were far more involved with "chivalry" than the English, who mainly saw tournaments as a means of military training for their knights. For this reason, tournaments in England were terribly brutal, very often resulting in death. It was for this reason that in 1292 The Statute of Arms for Tournaments was established. These tournaments dubbed all Knights as gentlemen and required them to abide by the rules of fair play.

As the thirteenth Century came to a close, jousting took a new turn. Tournaments became less like brutal death matches and more like civilized entertainment. Tournaments were now fought with blunted weapons. Death was rare and considered very unfortunate, where as previously it was something to be expected. Killing a horse, however, had always been considered an absolutely inexcusable and horrific act.

The knight's objective was no longer to kill the other knight, but to knock him off his horse. The knights also tried to destroy their lances as this won them more respect and prestige. The amount of lances a knight broke was an indication of the force of his charge, and therefore, of his horsemanship skills.



There were three types of tournaments prior to the 17th century: The Melee' or Tourney Proper - was the most brutal and many lives were lost. All the participants, upon hearing the charge, promptly crashed onto the tournament field and proceeded to unhorse all others by any method at hand until a winner was determined. This was the most popular in the twelfth and thirteenth century.



The Individual Joust was an encounter with lances between two knights. Here if a combatant struck either rider or horse he was disqualified. A clean hit to the center or "boss" of the shield shattering the lance, or unseating the opponent scored points. There was a low partition wall separating the contestants that was introduced in the 1400's. This was to reduce the injuries to the horses. Even with all the armor, the horses were injured as well as the riders with a blow from the opposing lances.




A Practice Tournament didn't have many rules and less ceremony surrounding it. This is when either a quintain or rings were used as the practice target. The quintain was a wooden target mounted on a horizontal pole at which the knight aimed his lance. If the target was struck accurately, it would swing harmlessly aside; if struck off center, the weighted arm swung around to unseat the knight. The other form of jousting in the practice tournament was "riding of the rings". A ring was suspended on a cord, which was

to be carried off on the tip of the knight's lance. Both the quintain and the ring joust were exercises that developed accuracy skills.

These skills became increasingly important as individual jousts gained popularity. This is a sport where the correct physical coordination of horse and rider resulted in an extreme skill acquired only with patient practice to hit the quintain or capture the ring with one's lance.

The pageantry, competition and participation of the past are not celebrated in all today's jousting events, at least at the level they were in medieval times. Although there are some groups which pride themselves in their realistic portrayals, the customs and traditions are not required nor enforced in many of today's tournaments, The tournament evolved, influenced by other sporting events such as tennis, golf and other games, and many are grouped into a series of contests.



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The evolution and refinement of most of the modern customs of the ring tournament are all-American. Actually, in 1962 Maryland became the first state to recognize an official state sport--they choose Jousting.

Jousting Today

In the spirit of tradition, jousting today is no longer regarded solely as a pastime for aristocratic gentlemen. Today it is considered to be more of a recreational sport, where casual dress can be worn as to not impede the rider, or distract the horse. It is now enjoyed by men, women and children from all walks of life, as yes even gaited horses are getting in the act and getting involved. This form of jousting or tilting at the rings is where the galloping rider attempts to insert his lance through small metal or wooden rings. The upper body becomes virtually motionless as the horse gallops toward the rings. Holding this position, combined with a steady hand, greatly increases the rider's likelihood of spearing the rings with his lance. These three small rings, mounted in a straight line, must be pierced while cantering at top speed! What a thrill!

Gaited horses are coming on the scene at these competitions and finding this equestrian sport to be a lot of fun for the whole family. This is ideal for many a backyard horse and family to come together, as all can participate.

But, be aware that if you have a high headed horse, this is not a good choice for a mount, as the precision needed to collect the rings would be hindered. On other words, his head would be in the way... In past traditions one thought a big, strong draft horse was needed, but this was to carry a knight with heavy armour. Today if you have a trustworthy and steady mount, you can use them for this sport, you are not limited in your choice or breed of horse. Jousting horses come in many breeds, sizes and colors. Years of training go into the making of a great tournament horse. Time spent in the saddle and practicing is the key to excellence in this sport. Knowing your horse and trusting him is another.

All types of horses are used in jousting, Shetland ponies, American gaited, and walking ponies for the smallest children to Quarter Horses, Arabians, Paints, Missouri Fox Trotters, Tennessee Walking Horses, Paso's, Peruvian's. It matters only that your equine has a good head on his shoulder's and can carry you confidently down the track to capture the rings.

Jousting requires a great deal of concentration to catch rings from the back of a galloping horse. Training and trust go hand in hand when it comes to the jousting horse. The tournament track can provide many distractions to the horse--flags waving, bands playing, children, dogs and balloons all add an element of surprise to the event. If your horse has been trained not to fear these distractions, you have the opportunity to concentrate on the rings and be victorious for the day.

The desired characteristics for a great jousting mount are a level-headed, mid-size to small horse with an extremely smooth canter work best. A smooth gait allows riders to feel comfortable so if they wanted to raise their stirrups and assume a position similar to that of a jockey they could. This allows the motion of the horse to be absorbed by the riders' knees and lower leg. The upper body becomes virtually motionless. This position, combined with a steady hand greatly increases the rider's likelihood of spearing the rings with his lance.

It is fascinating to see how jousting has adapted over the years to fit in with the culture of its time. Even though it no longer has any practical applications today, jousting is still enjoyed by many horse enthusiasts. Below are two of these exceptional jousting horses and their owners from the beginning.

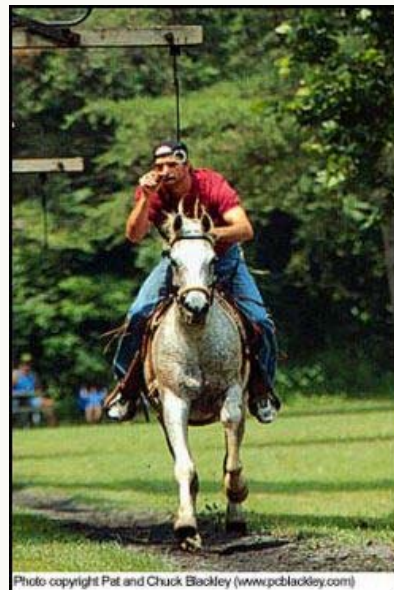


Photo copyright Pat and Chuck Blackley (www.pcbblackley.com)



Misty and Comet were Quarter Horse/TWH crosses, (pictured at left) Misty and Comet belonged to the Enfield family of Frederick County, Maryland. This photo was taken back in 1969 from the National Jousting Championships in Washington, DC. Leon and Shirley led the Grand Parade this day as the defending National Champion and his Queen. Leon purchased Misty in 1966 so that his children could begin to joust. The following year she had a foal named Comet. Both horses remained with the family their whole lives. They competed on the jousting circuit until their retirement in 1986. Four members of the Enfield family listed below jousted on these two horses winning many titles during this time. Leon alone won four National Championships on Misty. Comet carried Leon's son, Bob to a Maryland State Championship title. Son, Ken, and daughter, Linda, also competed on these two steady, and extremely talented jousting horses.

The statistics on Misty said she was a small horse and stood barely 14.2hh, had the most consistent canter of any horse on the tournament track, and was known for her quick starts. Comet was a determined horse that thundered down the track oblivious to any outside distractions such as balloons, flags or dogs darting into the track. Comet knew the track belonged to him and he consistently put his rider under the rings. Misty and Comet were tournament horses, 4-H projects, pets, and members of the family. The Enfield family spent a sad Thanksgiving in 1996 when Comet died of

old age. Misty and Comet were never to be parted for long; she died within 6 weeks of Comet. These two horses were an inspiration to all competitors becoming involved in the sport, then and now. Riders are without restriction as to the type of horse they may use.

Have a gaited horse? Want to step up to the plate? There are some rules...

Attire & Rules - All riding members today have to just be neat in appearance during competition. The proper riding attire is a shirt, long pants, proper foot wear, and the use of a riding helmet is strongly recommended. Usually tournaments are divided into four classes; Novice, Amateur, Semi-Professional and Professional, as the four recognized levels of competition. Most tournaments permit each rider three "charges" at a specified size ring to determine the winner. If two or more riders have a tie score, the ring size is reduced until a winner is determined. Most states have a standardized set of riding rules with a few technical variations between the states. Tournaments have few rules other than those that govern the scoring.

A tournament course consists of three arches positioned over a straight track. The official distance is 80 yards. There is a time limit of 8 seconds to complete the course, except for a novice class. A marker is placed 20 yards before the first arch, where timing begins, and there are 30 yards between each arch. Timing stops as the horse and rider pass through the third arch. Adequate space for starting and stopping the horses is also needed. Usually about 160 yards will be sufficient. When selecting a location, choose level ground, or a slight incline (horses run smoother uphill than down).

This photo below shows you the three arches (these are portable ones) and the electronic timers used at most tournaments. You will also notice that the rider is extending his arm. Doing so at the end of the ride indicates that the rider did, indeed, capture all three rings for that ride.



Jousting equipment has never been standardized. It is impossible to purchase these items from any store. You must either make them yourself or find someone to make them for you. As a result you will find that equipment is quite individualized. The following information is merely a guide which was found to help get you started. Adjustments must be made to suit your needs and preferences.

Arches & Lances - Jousting arches may be made from a variety of materials. Some are just boards nailed to convenient trees so the iron may be suspended over the track. Some arches have a supporting post on each side of the track, while others are half arches with only one post and an arm out to hold the iron. Some arches are cemented permanently into the ground while others are portable. Some people prefer the portable type of arches as they may be moved from one site to another with very little

trouble. Detailed drawings showing the construction of portable arches may be found on the Maryland Jousting Association website.

There is however, no place known where you may purchase a jousting lance. All the lances used are homemade. They average anywhere between five and seven feet in length and weigh anywhere between one and fifteen pounds depending on the materials used and the rider's choice. The point of the lance is, on the average, two feet long and made of metal, aluminum, or stainless steel.

The stock is usually made of wood, and its length depends largely on how long and how heavy the point is—the main concern in making your lance should be your balancing point. The lance is held at the balance point.

If you feel you and your gaited equine partner want to learn a new skill and meet some like minded horse owners, then visit a competition near you! Built an arch obstacle and lance to see if you have the skills to compete... For more information, visit www.nationaljousting.com for a full set of rules to compete!



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