

## September 2009 Beyond the Basics

### *Spanish Traditions of the Doma Vaquera-Part I*

Over the past several years I have had the great blessing to become acquainted with the Andalusian horse. His amazing grace, combined with a willing attitude and loyalty that endears the horse with its' human. I have learned a bit about the tradition of the Spanish cowboy...The Doma Vaquera, and the equipment and regalia employed for function and artistry. And I have been enamored by the beautiful dance of a *la garrochista* with his beautiful Pure Raza Espanol horse, a 13-foot long pole called a 'garrocha' (*ga-roach-a*) accompanied by Spanish guitar music, as they accomplished effortless canter pirouettes. This is an art form and a compliment to true horsemanship universally.

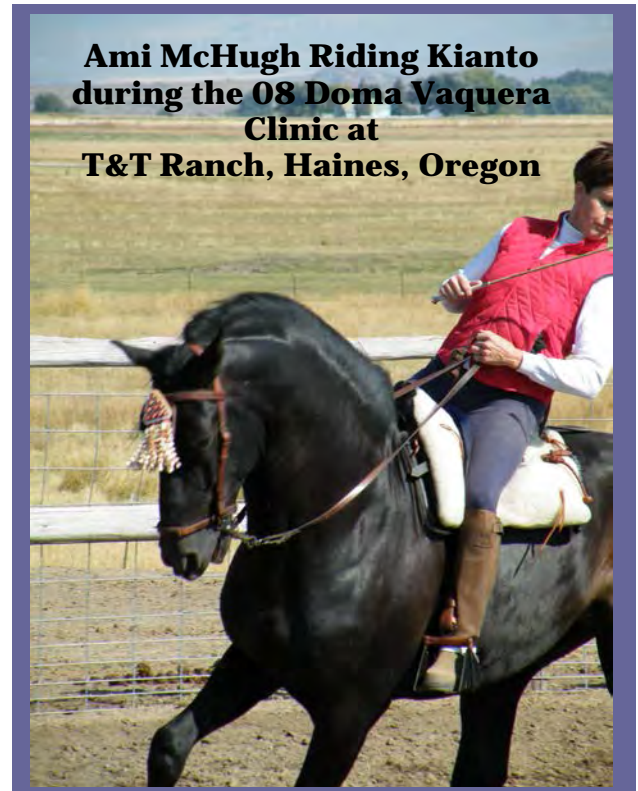
In this next series of articles within *Northwest Horse Source*, we will examine these Spanish and Portuguese traditions of the Doma Vaquera, and look at suggestions for using these ancient traditions to help us with our horsemanship. From the trail rider to the dressage arena, there are many things we can learn from our Iberian friends! Let's start by examining the uniqueness of the Andalusian and Lusitano horse, move on to looking at the type of equipment used, and finally consider some exercises to put these traditions to use in our personal pursuit of true horsemanship.

The Horses - As I have researched the history of the Andalusian horse, it appears as with many great histories, there is some controversy! In general, it is thought that the Andalusian originated in the Spanish Province of Andalusia, and that its ancestors were the Iberian (Spanish) horse, mixed with the Barb horse brought to Spain by the Moors. The Carthusian Monks played a principle role in the late Middle Ages of breeding this Andalusian horse, and in the 1500's it was selected by the King of Spain to become, 'The Horse of Kings'. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century European warfare, combined in 1832 with a major epidemic to nearly devastated Spain's horse population. As a result, exportation of the breed became illegal until 1962.

The physical and attitude characteristics of the Andalusian horse place it in a very distinguished class, even as many of our equestrian bloodlines can trace portions of their heritage to this noble breed. They are usually grey, turning white and stand about 15 to 16.2 hands. On occasion you will see a beautiful bay or stunning black, as with the stallion Kianto from Jackass Mountain Ranch in Tri-Cities, Washington. [www.jackassmtranch.com](http://www.jackassmtranch.com) Their ears are small, with a rather flat or convex nose, and a substantial neck often hidden by the abundant mane! The more Baroque-style PRE (Pure Raza Espanola) tends to have a bit shorter back and is proportioned well for the quick movements needed to maneuver around the very aggressive Spanish cattle. While their heritage was a combination of assertiveness in the battle and in the field, the Andalusian was also so easy-going that even the King could ride this horse! With a kind eye and a loyal heart, the Andalusian's temperament places it as a lovely horse to have the pleasure to train and ride.

The Equipment – The trappings of the true Spanish vaquero, a working horseman, that rides on the ranches, and those participating in competitions similar to dressage, is quite different, but not less beautiful in its traditions. In actuality, I find many adaptations of the Spanish vaquero equipment that have morphed into our western tack and traditions. From saddles that have a pommel and cantle, to the rolled up pant legs, to the flat hats of the Southeastern Oregon cowboy, we have adopted equipment that was influenced first by the Spanish. I recently read an interesting article by Sue List regarding *How to be correct in selecting tack and costume for Spanish ridden classes*

([www.thejoyofhorses.com/oct06/how-to-be-correct](http://www.thejoyofhorses.com/oct06/how-to-be-correct)) There certainly is a 'dress code', and it is important to try adhere to these traditions, as many stem from thousands of years of experience.



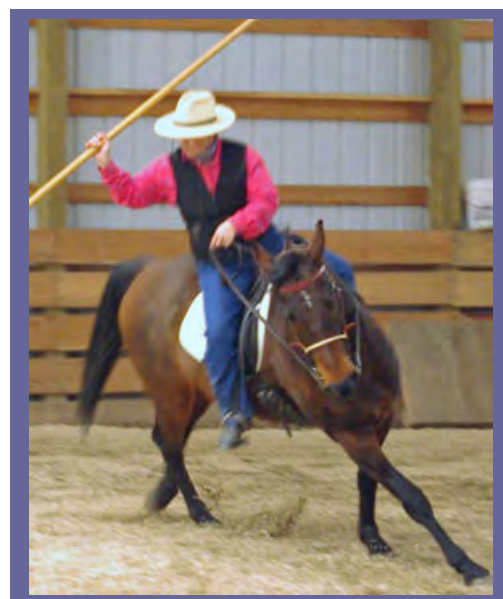
The 'working cowboy' or vaquera-style of equipment includes a saddle that fits close to the horse, allows for great movement in shoulders and back, and places the rider deep in a very comfortable seat. The rolled blanket on the front of the saddle is called a "Manta Estribera", and a crupper runs from the front and through the saddle to be attached around the tail. Stirrups are black metal and run the length of your foot, and were originally made to protect the rider and horse from angry horns. The bit for the vaquero, after training with a covered metal bosal called a 'sereta', was a simple curb. The bridle brow band had a 'mosquera' which is made of leather 'strips', silk, or horsehair. The purpose of the 'mosquera' is two-fold: One to keep flies away, and second to show off the rhythm of the horse's movements.



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The 'garrocha' is a wooden pole, approximately 13-feet long used by the Spanish cowboy to fend-off and trip the bulls. Today, it is part of a beautiful dance with the horse, rider, Spanish guitar music, and the instrument of the garrocha. In Spain, the honor of being called a "Garrachista" is a life-long, and life-style pursuit limited to a few who seek the true traditions. This artistic dance is accomplished at the highest levels with the reins attached to the belt of the rider, the garrocha is carried always in the right hand, and all movements are accomplished at either the walk or canter...no trotting! Imagine lyrical Spanish guitar music playing while the rider dressed in traditional Doma Vaquera trappings, guides her horse in lightness in a canter pirouette, under the garrocha! Amazing...Artistic...Awe Inspiring!



(If you have not seen a performance with the garrocha, try these searches:

- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIXX5lMhEw4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIXX5lMhEw4)
- [www.andalusiandressagehorse.com/andalusian\\_horse\\_traditions\\_garrocha.htm](http://www.andalusiandressagehorse.com/andalusian_horse_traditions_garrocha.htm)
- [www.vaquerogold.com/dvlist.html](http://www.vaquerogold.com/dvlist.html)
- [www.johnsaintryan.com](http://www.johnsaintryan.com)
- [www.tnthorsemanship.com/articles](http://www.tnthorsemanship.com/articles)
- <http://horsemanshipjourney.blogspot.com/>