

## *Doma Vaquera* *My Journey in Understanding* *Spanish Traditions*

It all started with a horse! Juandero was a beautiful bay Azteca gelding. He didn't just appear at my place...He arrived! His presence was unmistakably alive, somewhat full of himself, but aware of everything around him and quite prepared to play. As I had the honor to begin to work with Juandero I soon discovered there was more to this picture than a beautiful horse, with a willing and playful attitude, that carried himself in a natural balance that was light and suspended. There was a tradition – a heritage – that was exhibiting itself in every movement of this horse and I wanted to know more about it.



Juandero, showing a shoulder-in, at the T&T Ranch  
Haines, Oregon

From that beginning only three years ago, I have been introduced, in small part, to the world of the Andalusian Pure Spanish horse, and the traditions of the Doma Vaquero. Coming from a ranching background in the mountains and across the sagebrush ranges of eastern Oregon, I have become fascinated by the adaptations we have used from the Spanish and Mexican cowboys. Starting with the types of horses we enjoy riding that will have the endurance to carry us all day, be enthusiastic and agile with the cow work, and a willingness to want to be with us. That is the perfect description of the Spanish horse. In fact, it could very well be that the similar qualities we

*By Alice Trindle*

appreciate in the Quarter Horse were originally placed in the gene pool by the Spanish Andalusian. The conquistadors brought the Spanish blood horses into Mexico during the Aztec era, and later on they brought them into what became the continental United States with Spanish missionaries, and the Spanish army. These horses were very agile and athletic, as their heritage was to fight the bulls of Spain. Even today, these bulls are not your average polled Hereford with a docile temperament! The Spanish bull is bred for attitude with horns, and therefore your horse must be able to leg-yield or half-pass, canter and counter-canter, in balance and at various speeds. In Spain, the Doma Vaquera uses a 13-foot long wood pole called the garrocha for working the bulls, as well as a partner in an elegant dance and artistic display between horse, rider, and pole, set to beautiful Spanish guitar music. The honor of being called a “Garrachista” is a life-long, and life-style pursuit limited to a few who seek the true traditions. Sounds very much like our true American cowboys, who earn their living and pursue the traditions and honor of being called a “Vaquero” – a “Cowboy”.



Encantador in more traditional SE Oregon or California  
Vaquero tack – Two-rien bridle set-up

There are a number of other similarities I see we have adapted from the Spanish traditions, particularly with the Southeast Oregon cowboy

down through the Californios. The saddle has a very deep seat, similar to the design of the Wade saddle-tree we use today, except with soft padding! They have a pommel and cantle, but no horn. The saddle horn was probably developed by the Mexican vaquero, as they adapted a shorter garrocha, and also the grass or rawhide riata. (I was told by my friend Jose Campos from Idaho, who grew up on ranches in Mexico, that because of the greater distances cattle could run in Mexico, as compared to Spain, the Mexican vaquero had to develop a tool to catch the cattle, rather than just to trip him or fend him off by use of the garrocha. They used the materials at hand, such as cactus, or rawhide to make the lariat. Then of course, the saddle had to be changed so the vaquero could dally up and the horn was added.)



Encantador and Alice in more traditional Spanish regalia.

Our flat-hat costume, along with high-topped boots, chaps, and half-chaps also came from the Spanish traditions of Doma Vaquera. Even the old John Wayne tradition of rolling up the bottom of your jeans perhaps started with the Calzona pants of the Spaniards! The bridle progression was typically rather severe, moving from a hackamore-type setup, with a metal serreta as the noise piece, to a stiff bit with a slight port. A leather or horse hair mosquera is attached to the brow-brand, to exhibit the perfect rhythms of the horse's gaits, and I suspect it also helps keep the flies away. Traditionally, both men and women wear short jackets, usually over white shirts with short stand-up collars. The traditional costume and correct presentation is very important to the

Doma Vaquera, as it is with traditions of our true cowboys.

As I have progressed with my understandings of the PRE (Pure Raza Espanol) horse, I have had the great fortune to work with several other Azteca and Andalusian stallions, mares, and geldings. My best teacher has been Encantador, a PRE stallion owned by Betsy May Crawford of Halfway, Oregon. This wonderful stallion gives credit to every aspect of the Andalusian breed, and to the exceptional training he has previously experience. Encantador was brought along by Hank Young from Colorado, who is known world-wide for his appreciation of the Andalusian horse and his understandings of the Doma Vaquera traditions. As I have had the honor of riding Enca, I have been able to apply many of the feelings of lightness, and the practical applications of specific exercises, to my work with my own horses.



Note the lightness in the rein, self-carriage, and knee action. Qualities of the Spanish horse!

Developing Lightness: "When the time comes for a human to shed off earth's gravity, I, for one, wish not to be carried to the heavens by winged angels nor through tunnels of bright light, but I aspire to ascend riding in lightness upon my favorite white stallion, as I believe all good horsemen before me have done." (Quote by Hank Young from *Doma Vaquera & Spanish Equestrian Training Disciplines*) To watch the Andalusian horse move at liberty is the start of visualizing - picturing lightness. These horses come from behind, carrying their poll as the highest point, with a softness of natural suspension. It has



helped me a great deal in my liberty work, to watch this natural self-carriage, envision how I could ride that without interference, and then to apply that picture to whatever horse I am riding. Somehow seeing yourself as a proud Spanish person, pursuing the traditions of the Doma Vaquera, helps you to develop better posture, correct balance, and clear focus lest you be gored by that angry bull!

Practical Applications: The competitions for Doma Vaquera in Spain are intense, colorful, artistic, and a wonderful display of horsemanship. They require such elements as rollbacks, gallop – working, collected, and extended, flying lead changes, canter and counter-canter on the circle, fast stop to fast back-up, and fast stop to back-up to slow walk out. Leg-yields and half-pass are also demonstrated in some of the Doma Vaquera patterns. The reins are always held in the left hand, with the right hand available to adjust reins, or to hold the garrocha in the artistic performance. All of these elements are used by most of us in our everyday ranch work, and some elements in training for dressage tests.

The Spanish horse helped me to further refine these exercises, so that as I applied the request while doing ranch jobs with my Quarter Horses, I found myself at the right place, with the correct shape and balance, more consistently. Playing with the garrocha was extremely beneficial and fun! Yes there were a few times that I ran my horse into the pole, dropped it, and generally wondered where the “artistic” quality had departed to! But as I watched video tapes of beautiful “Garrachista” performing with their reins attached to their belts, using only seat, leg, and focus to effortlessly canter their horse under and around the garrocha, I began to see how they were using the canter pirouette, or the half-pass, to accomplish this dance. As I practiced with my good ‘ol Quarter Horse, we began to find the rhythm, the feel of an effortless leg-yield or half-pass, and I began to get better posture with a greater ability to multi-task. The dance started to happen, at least at the walk\*, and with a little Spanish guitar music both the horse and I came to life. (\*Note: The work with the garrocha in performance is always done either at the walk or

the canter, and the garrocha is only held in the right hand.)

My journey with the Andalusian horse is just beginning, and I am by no means an expert on the subject of Doma Vaquera. But I have enjoyed meeting these incredible animals, which are so gifted in their movements and loyal with their attitudes. Equally so, it has been rewarding to learn about the traditions of the Spanish vaquero, and apply a little of that pride to my own riding. In addition, the play with the garrocha has expanded my horizons to yet another dance we can develop with our horse. My relationship with the Andalusian horse has helped me to search for the dream of lightness, willingness, and true harmony. What a wonderful life we have with horses!

“It may well be that man, while upon this earth, will never achieve lightness to gallop the horse across billowing white clouds above, but it is that dream which has inspired our inner spirit to ride in lightness, and a man who does not dream is a man without a future.” (Hank Young)



Reference:

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- The Azteca Horse Registry of America, Inc. – History of the American Azteca Breed; [www.azteca-horse.com/history](http://www.azteca-horse.com/history)

- The Iberian Connection – Spanish & Portuguese Equestrian Equipment; Bill Calderon 623-465-7276; [www.idberianconnection.com](http://www.idberianconnection.com)
- Garrocha & Vaquero Exhibitions – Video Tapes at: [www.skyhorsekingdom.com](http://www.skyhorsekingdom.com)
- Encantador PRE Stallion, Owned by Betsy May Crawford at: [www.spiritranchandalusions.com](http://www.spiritranchandalusions.com)

