

Endurance or Competitive for the Peruvian Paso?

By Lyn Slocum - Thundergalt Ranch
Bostwick, Florida

The Peruvian Paso, first and foremost, is a riding horse. He has a history steeped in the tradition of work: we envision soft white haciendas, sunrise, rows of sugar cane, tidy orange groves . . . a horse . . . paca-paca-paca-paca . . . carrying his rider to work, with elegance. We read of 50 horses a day being saddled at Hacienda Casa Grande before the agricultural reform. The horses spent long hours under saddle at a smooth, steady, easy-keeping four beat gait, with the average speed between five and seven miles per hour. For generations past, the Peruvian Paso has been bred as an easy gaited plantation walker. He has been bred for endurance, rather than speed.

The fact that a good Peruvian Paso has excellent endurance has possibly been confused with the term "endurance ride" by some well meaning individuals who are interested in seeing the breed on the trail, doing the miles and competing with other Peruvians as well as other breeds for their endurance ability.

There are two styles of long distance competitions available to riding horses in this country. They are the "endurance" rides and the "competitive" rides. The endurance competition is judged for speed over distance: the first horse to finish wins. There are other categories for awards in the endurance rides. One of them is for the best in condition. But first prize goes to the horse who got over the line first. There are a number of 100 mile in 24 hours endurance rides in North America.

The "competitive" rides are quite different. They are a challenge for enduring stamina. The horse's condition is monitored along the way. The horse to finish within the time frame (normally an average of seven miles per hour + or -) in the best condition, is the winner. There are several 100 mile competitive rides in North America. The 100 mile competitive ride will be held over a period of three days, dividing the riding time evenly for each day.

The horse is carefully monitored as he goes into, during and at the finish of each days event. He is compared day to day. At the end of the 100 miles and the third day, the horse with the best condition and "staying power" wins. Face it: Most riding horses could go 35 miles the first day. It is the second day that begins to show the horses which have been properly conditioned and have the natural athletic ability to go to work every day. By the time the third day rolls around, only the best

can finish . . . in excellent condition . . . suggesting they have the endurance, are ready, willing and able to go back to work the next day.

North American Trail Ride Conference (NATRC) judging is based upon each horse starting the ride with a score of 100 points, and evaluated as follows: Soundness-40%; Condition-40%; Manners-15%; Way of Going-5%. While primary judging is on the horse, the riders also compete for horsemanship awards and are judged on the care and handling of their mounts throughout the entire weekend.

The horses are observed several times during the day, when the pulse and respiration (P & R) of each horse are taken by a team of veterinarians and assistants. The results of these P & R checks are used by the judges as an aid in determining the condition of the horse. After the mandatory lunch stop the riders continue. Upon reaching the two mile point, rules require that forward motion be maintained until the finish line is reached. This assures that all horses arrive at the finish in approximately the same state of physical exertion.

The main objective is to work all the horses over an identical trail in the length of time; thereby, having a basis of fair comparison for determining the horse's soundness, condition, and manners. While this is NOT a race, judgment in timing and pacing is important; the winner being the one who rode his horse at a consistent pace throughout the ride, enabling the horse to finish in best over-all condition.

The point is that Peruvian Pasos, with their unique way of going, will most easily be put to NATRC rules. The Peruvian horse, in time, will excel in competitive rides. There have been Peruvians that have finished "best" in condition in endurance rides. No matter how well the Peruvian Paso does in endurance rides, he will never have the speed of the trotting horse. This in NO WAY implies that the Peruvian hasn't the ability to go the distance. HE DOES . . . but not at top speed: rather, with efficient, smooth, ground covering, easy in the saddle, easy to the horse's consistency, with his paca-paca-paca-paca. The Peruvian horse has been bred for generations as a plantation walker with phenomenal stamina. The Peruvian Paso is "ready made" to compete in NATRC competitive rides.