

Chapter I-6

Revolutionary Changes for Chilean Horse Breeders

The Americas inherited a Spanish culture that gave horse breeding great importance. Moreover, the nearly eight centuries of Moorish occupation of the Iberian Peninsula prior to Columbus discovering the Americas gave an even greater impetus to an appreciation of the horse. Many parts of South America also strived for higher goals in horse production. By the mid 1700's, both Mexico and Peru were valued for producing horses of equal quality to those found in Spain. However, by 1780, Chile had surpassed the Peruvians and became known throughout the continent as the source of the best horses money could buy.

With some hesitation, I repeat these conclusions written by authors that would have reason for bias. Undoubtedly, a valid question is what exactly were the Chilean horses best at? Surely throughout Latin America horses developed different traits that were judged as virtues in accordance with the environment and function they were expected to confront in their native lands. Would the **Chilean Horses** compete with the pacing horses of Peru to traverse the long distances over deep sandy terrain? Would they outperform the hardy “trochadores” in the steaming hot tropical lands of the llanos of Colombia and Venezuela, where they experienced six months of flooding and six months of drought? Would the **Chilean Horse** be a better mount for the gauchos that had to cover long distances over never-ending plains? The answers to all these questions are debatable, yet most likely the horses that developed in the various regions of America that were selected for the environment and usage they were given in their homeland, would be hard to surpass. So why can Chileans make such assertive claims of their 18th century mounts?

Notwithstanding the fact that there are justifications for claiming the superiority of the Chilean stock horse in many regards, it is only fair to say that Chile's reputation as a horse breeding nation came from the demand for parade horses. The high-stepping paddlers (“de brazo”) or high-stepping spiking trotters (“trote de martillo”) of the day were the horses with the highest price tags. These were the animals that were revered in other countries and exported to the ruling classes around the continent and across the seas.

The multiple reasons I have given as to why Chile stood out as breeding grounds for warhorses and stock horses simply created an environment that nurtured the production of the elite in the horse world. It was this type of horse that can be credited for giving Chile its international fame. Until the parade horse totally disappeared from the Chilean scene in the 1880's, the most prestigious horse breeders of the country devoted a portion of their efforts to producing these more lucrative individuals.

The decline of the parade horse from its position of national hierarchy and its progressive replacement in this ranking by the most unexpected of equine candidates is closely tied to the political changes of the time. To truly understand how the trotting Chilean stock horse bloomed into the representative of a country, we first must comprehend how the independent country came about.

A Revolution Reshapes Chile into an Independent Republic

In touching upon the subject of **Chilean Horse** breeders, we really have to look at the men that were successful producers of prestigious stock horses once Chile became an independent country. The revolution was responsible for turning an equine pauper into a prince, and the human qualities that helped create a new nation were also the traits that helped shape the first breed of horse in Latin America. Thus, it is fitting that we touch on the historical significance of this revolution that created a totally new environment for Chilean citizens.

The end of the 18th century brought about a period of weak leadership for Spain. A man of limited intellectual capacity, Charles IV, became king in 1788. His mother Queen Mary Louise took over most of the decision-making until she named her lover, Manuel Godoy, the Prime Minister in 1801. Godoy's failures in battle and his constant compliance to make treaties that were determinedly advantageous to the aggressive neighbors in France eventually landed

him in prison. In 1808, a mentally weak Charles IV handed over Spain to Napoleon, who named his brother Joseph I. Bonaparte the King of Spain and all the Indies (Spanish America). Ferdinand VII, who had been the rightful heir of the throne before the arrangements were made with Charles IV, was imprisoned. Napoleon then distributed a circular to all the leaders in his expanded empire in the New World, notifying that his sibling was now the ruler of Spain and its colonies.

The Spanish Empire came to a halt. This had serious repercussions in America, as the French tried to get a foothold in a hemisphere where the United States was becoming increasingly more powerful and influential. More importantly, the weak Spanish leadership had given way to a liberal political movement that promoted the re-establishment of the monarchy, but with more democratic principles. This included an opportunity for more self-rule in the Americas.

The criollo factions of the Americas never recognized the takeover by the French. They rebelled against the orders of the representatives of the king, since they argued that “their” king was no longer in power. They had a growing assurance that they were capable of governing themselves, as the colonies depended less and less on the motherland. There had long been a discontent with a lack of representation in positions of power, as only four of the 170 viceroys designated in the history of all “the Indies” had been American-born. Worse yet, only 14 of the 602 governors and captain generals were not Spanish by birth. The colonial leaders had their hopes on a more lenient Spanish government that extended greater power to the local governments. As a result, in 1810 there was a generalized emancipation movement throughout the Americas.

In 1810, the allegiance of the colonists of Chile to their King Ferdinand VII, and the fear of the aggressive nature of Napoleon’s policies, brought about the first signs of a rebellion against the authorities representing the French invaders that now ruled Spain. The Chilean Captain General, Francisco García Carrasco, deported the leaders of the criollo movement and this brought about such a level of unrest that he agreed to step down from his post in the interest of peace. An 86-year-old Mateo de Toro y Zambrano was named Count of the Conquest, but he died in 1811. Since no one replaced him, for the first time Chileans were governing themselves.

An internal power struggle now arose and finally Miguel Carrera assured his position as the maximum authority. Three different Spanish generals were sent from Peru to Chile to try and defeat the nationalist government. During the ensuing skirmishes, Carrera was saved in a battle near the river Itata by an injured **Chilean Horse** that carried him through rivers and over difficult terrain to safety. There is reason to think the horse was of “Cuevano” lineage, as the famous breeder was a good friend of the Carrera family and had given many horses as gifts to the family farm, Hacienda San Miguel. Meanwhile, Carrera’s military loss cost him his post due to accusations of incompetency. While returning to Santiago he was captured and imprisoned by the Spanish. The board of the patriots named Francisco de la Lastra supreme director and Bernardo O’Higgins the new military leader.

The initial patriotic efforts to organize a mounted militia only accumulated 3,000 horses. However, within a year, the nationalists counted on 15,000 mounted soldiers. Every city and village had a regiment of foot and horse soldiers. Regardless of social class or profession, every patriotic citizen had his best horse ready to confront the loyalists. The level of participation of the Chilean citizens was, in good part, the reason the Spanish generals from Peru were not able to contain the rebels in the Captain Generalship of Chile.

By 1813, the British had helped the Portuguese and Spanish push the French out of the Iberian Peninsula and Ferdinand VII was named king of Spain once again. Word of his re-establishment was dispersed in the colonies. In the Treaty of Lircay, the Chilean patriots accepted the authority of the king, but insisted on conserving the right to govern themselves, and pushed for the removal of Spanish troops from Chile.

The celebration of the colonies was curtailed, as it became evident that the policies of King Ferdinand VII began the persecution of the very same Spanish liberals that helped him regain his powers. Meanwhile, Miguel Carrera had been released after the signing of the Treaty of Lircay and the atmosphere in Spain brought about another wave of national discontent. Unfortunately, this resulted in another power struggle between the supporters of Carrera and

O'Higgins. At that point, the Viceroy Abascal of Peru annulled the recently signed peace treaty and sent Spanish General Mariano Osorio with 5,000 soldiers to assist the loyalist forces that were already established in the region to try and regain control of Chile.

O'Higgins and Carrera forgot their differences and joined forces. It is cited that both the revolutionaries and the loyalists counted on at least 12,000 horses for their respective armies when the confrontations started in 1813. A year and a half later, the casualties of war and the lapse in production could be felt as General O'Higgins could barely accumulate 2,000 men and horses. While waiting for reinforcements from Carrera that never arrived, O'Higgins bravely confronted 5,000 loyalist forces alone in Rancagua. As one can imagine, he was soundly defeated and this re-conquest of Chile gave end to the "Patria Vieja" (the Old Country) in September of 1814.



Figure I.121

In the Battle of Rancagua General Bernardo O'Higgins and his revolutionary compatriots bravely confronted General Mariano Osorio and the loyalist forces that greatly outnumbered them. The loss would smother the first intent of emancipation but the flame of independence had been ignited and it was just a matter of time before a new republic would be formed.

There are reports of companies of soldiers from Melipilla, Andes, San Felipe, Talca, Rancagua, San Fernando, Quillota and Curicó that never unsaddled their horses in the previous 19 months of continuous fighting. The effort that was made by average citizens, with no specialized training, striving to rid themselves of the aristocratic yoke, was remarkable. The weary Bernardo O'Higgins was forced to flee to exile in Argentina and the country sighed in relief as a return to a more normal lifestyle came about. Enormous losses had been suffered and the horse and cattle industries suffered great setbacks during the periods of unrest.

By this time, the liberator General José Francisco San Martín y Matorras had already been responsible for the independence of Argentina. His objectives were to bring down the Viceroyalty of Peru and his tactics were to cross the Andes Mountains and free Chile from the Spanish stronghold, before entering Peru from the south. Bernardo O'Higgins was among the leaders at his command when in January of 1817, 3,000 men crossed the perils of the Andes at three different points to convene in the Valley of Aconcagua, Chile.



Figure I.122 General José de San Martín of the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata (Argentina) and the Chilean General Bernardo O'Higgins crossed the rugged Andes Mountains with 3,000 soldiers in order to make a second attempt to liberate Chile from the Spanish stronghold. Note the big coarse gray Argentine steed versus the smaller more compact Chilean Horse mount.

Once in Chile, the forces of General San Martín required equine reinforcements for their campaign. The fame of the horses bred by the García-Huidobro family in Criadero Catemu and El Principal had been well established since their conscientious recorded efforts in horse breeding started in 1777. It was agreed that a visit was merited to the Criadero El Principal in order to obtain quality warhorses. Gossip of the decision reached the farm before the patriots arrived and as a result the ranch's best horses were relocated far from the view of any unannounced visitors. When the soldiers arrived, demanding horses for their regiment, the foreman showed them what remained in the headquarters of the farm. Not realizing that these were the culls of what El Principal had to offer, the soldiers took the horses while enthusiastically claiming they were the best horses they had ever seen. Most were distributed amongst the officers of the revolutionary forces and their admirable acceptance gave evidence of the quality of Chilean horses being bred some 80 years before the formation of a formal registry for the breed.

The short period of rest, a more numerous cavalry and the appearance of well-wishers wherever they went induced an excitement for battle that was effervescing everywhere. With a growing corroboration from citizens optimistic that with General San Martín's leadership a victorious end was possible, a vigorous offensive was thrust into action. After a decisive battle in Chacabuco that was entrusted to Bernardo O'Higgins his Spanish counterpart Rafael Moroto and his loyalist troops retreated from the capital to Valparaiso. General San Martín was offered the position of Head of State, but he declined and thus the supreme directorship was given to the Chilean Bernardo O'Higgins, who had repeatedly shown his leadership and valor on the battlefield.

The overthrown Spanish Captain General Francisco Casimiro Marcó del Pont was taken prisoner while a nucleus of loyalist supporters stayed firm in the south of Chile. The Viceroy of Peru sent reinforcements to their rescue. Once again, General Osorio was sent from Lima with

3,000 soldiers in hopes that he could duplicate the re-conquest he had implemented three years earlier.



Figure I.123 The Battle of Chacabuco was the first confrontation with the loyalist army after Gen. Bernardo O'Higgins re-entered Chile. Gen. O'Higgins had a resounding victory in battling the troops of the Spaniard Rafael Moroto. He not only drove the loyalist south, but he also helped spread a contagious optimism about the possibility of independence under the strategic planning of General José de San Martín.



Figure I.124 The Battle of Maipú proved the coup de grace for Gen. San Martín and the patriots. Confronting the old archenemy Gen Osorio, but this time with the numbers favoring the revolutionaries, the Spanish were soundly defeated. Eventually, Spain would respect the emancipation of Chile.

Initially, it looked like General Osorio might pull it off once again, as his first nocturnal attack in Talca was a resounding victory. As he followed the retreating patriots to Santiago, the rebel forces in the capital prepared for a strong defense as the enemy was lured to meet them on their terms. They clashed with General Osorio on the edges of the Maule River, and there they decisively defeated the Spanish forces.

The importance of this synopsis of Chilean history lies in the fact that it brings to an end the long interaction between Spain, the Viceroyalty of New Castile (Peru) and the land south of Cuzco that Diego de Almagro underestimated as too poor to merit his interest. Fortunately, there was a man willing to leave the comforts that he possessed in Peru to cultivate the hidden potential that waited on the southern horizons.

Surely, the hopes and expectations that Pedro de Valdivia had for this land were met beyond his wildest imagination. Early on, his correspondence to the king indicated he had the vision to bring to fruition the value of its fertile valleys, plentiful waters and lush pastures. The “Adelantado” (scout or pioneer) Valdivia brought the determination of Spaniards that were willing to face incredible hardships, while matching the bravery and persistence of their Native American enemies. This formed a nation that would rise to admirable productive and economic accomplishments, in spite of their comparatively limited size, population and accumulation of natural resources.



Figure I.125 The Chilean Horses would continue to show their prowess as war horses decades after the revolution. General Manuel Baquedano led a famous charge with his native bred mount in 1881 at the Battle of Chorillos that helped win the War of the Pacific



Figure I.126 Note how much Chilean Horse type General Baquedano's horse had even though this was before a formal registry was started in 1893. Compare his appearance with this modern representative of the breed. Very few breeds can claim this kind of consistency over time.

It is important that we realize that history is made up of individuals, peoples, societies and nations that make decisions as they interact in trying to direct their future. For this reason, I want you to know what kind of people made up the breeders of the **Chilean Horse**. Their strength of character is not only determined by their accomplishments, but also by their struggles. Good horsemen say that a horse is a reflection of its caretaker and trainer. I would also venture to say that horse breeds are representative of the nations in which they were shaped. Hopefully, the historical accounts of the periods of conquest, colonization and the struggle for independence I have narrated give a symbolic thumbnail sketch of some of the many virtues found in Chileans. It seems logical that a people with this much fortitude would establish a republic that would finish molding a horse known for this same quality.

It was in this Republic of Chile -- the independent, self-governing, isolated, nation -- that the story of the **Chilean Horse** would be perfected in the hands of the fans of these venerated cow horses. The breeder emphasis on stock horses was, in part, a result of the turning tide of the times. As in all colonies that broke away from their mother countries, Chilean independence did not take place only on the battlefields, but also in the mentality of a society that sought its own identity. Carriage horses had long replaced the role of the comfortable pacing horse of noble men and women. The parade horses that were identified with the pretentious intentions of the

ruling class no longer fared well with a country that was proud to be governing itself. The public exhibitions of war and equestrian games also disappeared for the same reason.

Yet, the previously most overlooked and underestimated horse type remained in a society that had a growing need for thrashing wheat and working cattle. This was the most numerous equine representative of the country, the one that most Chileans had personal experiences with. This was the horse that had won the hearts and respect of the working class man. In a sense this “ugly duckling” turned into a swan in 1817, when the nation of Chile decided what horse could best represent them.

The Emancipation Reveals the Equine Representative of the New Republic

The solid little horse that had valiantly withstood the rigors of an endless war against the Mapuches was once again the hero in the nationalistic efforts to liberate a nation from the yoke of Imperial rule. The perils of war brought recognition for the sure-footed mountain horse that maintained his body weight and vigor in spite of scarce foliage. Admirers remembered the horse that confidently maneuvered the diminutive mountain paths. The ascending and descending zigzag patterns of these paths ended in hairpin turns that often required placing all four hooves on a platter-sized stone in order to negotiate the pivotal change of direction. These were horses in which soldiers trusted their hoof placements on trails where a single wrong footfall had a deadly consequence. Yet, the mount’s loyalty to its rider was so unconditional that they would jump without hesitation off a cliff into the uncertainty of swollen rivers with powerful currents, or charge into a curtain of gunfire, or jump trenches, fences or stone walls into a sea of infantrymen with expectant bayonets, swords and spears. The character that was needed to survive such ordeals was not to be found in the proud prancing parade horses of international appeal and even less so in docile pacers that carried dandies, priests and refined ladies of the higher social spheres.



Figure I.127 For centuries Chileans have been selecting their horses to be easy keepers that are courageous, sure-footed, hardy, level-headed, dependable and loyal. These qualities were essential for war horses as well as for stock horses that tended livestock in Chile’s largely mountainous terrain. Today these characteristics can be put to use as elite trail horses that are very much at home in precipitous topographies.

It was the long history of the struggle against the obstinate Native Americans south of the Bío Bío that set the precedent for a horse type that was appreciated by all the professional soldiers of the Kingdom of Chile. However, it was the War of Independence that made these characteristics widely appreciated by the common citizen, as in this confrontation almost all able-bodied men with their personal horses became part of the militia. It is notable that after the war of emancipation, Chileans would have a much more glorified perception of the horses that, for 250 years prior, many breeders had bred for battles that so few had experienced first hand.

Understanding the need for valor and aggressiveness in wartime makes one more sympathetic to why the Chilean stockmen also put these traits to use in handling cattle. Most stock horses have some identity with the agility, good footing and valor needed to drive rowdy mountain cattle into central holding areas for the yearly chores. In many places around the world, people have to carry out such objectives with the irreplaceable help of skilled horses that learn to evade the charges of bulls, overprotective brood cows or cantankerous bovines with a scarce feel for mankind. In Chile, the difference lay in the manner that the Chilean cowboys sorted their animals once they had them penned in the large corrals and alleyways. Nowhere else has there been a methodology that resorts to such aggressive physical contact to contain and direct cattle in the sorting process.

Chilean Rodeos Fill the Voids Created by Progress

The breeders of Chilean Horses that bloomed in widespread numbers after the War of Independence were, in large part, the owners and workers of the large haciendas mainly devoted to beef cattle production. Unlike the cowboys of the open ranges of the western U.S.A., who only found fertile ground for their activities for some 40 years, the enthusiasms for horses and “cow punching” had been in the blood of the Chilean cowboy for nearly three centuries! Many a movie has depicted the cowboy depressed by the changing times of rangelands that were invaded by fences, row crops and railroad tracks. One can only imagine what an impact these same signs of progress had on the Chilean “huasos” (Chilean stock horsemen) of either employer or employee variety.

In Chile, the solution came in the form of the rodeo. The rodeo salvaged a needed purpose for the stock horse. It gave the owners and workers of ranches that were increasingly covered by irrigated grain fields a justification for continuing to breed, train and ride the horses that they had come to appreciate in such an intimate manner in times of peace and war.



Figure I.128 As the justifications for breeding America’s oldest stock horse diminished, it was the sport of Chilean Rodeo that came to its rescue. The Chilean Rodeo offered a clear objective through one of the world’s most demanding equine disciplines that simultaneously nurtured traditions that were an important part of the Chilean identity. Its ever increasing popularity assures that this legacy will be enjoyed by many future generations of breeders, competitors and spectators.

As wheat became the major crop, breeders justified their large broodmare bands by the necessity for the thrashing mares, and the colts and geldings simply became a hobby generated from the mares that earned their keep. Over time, the industrial revolution took hold, and the arrival of the first thrashing machines in 1869 assured that even the thrashing mares would be replaced. By then, it would be the rodeo itself that would have to validate all the efforts for breeding **Chilean Horses**. The needs were met by a working activity with an increased level of organization and propagation that was now turning into a full-fledged sport.

I doubt that there is a stock horse event in the world that has captivated a population to the degree that the Chilean rodeo has. Unlike the North American rodeo or the “charrerías” of Mexico, the Chilean rodeo is comprised of a single horse-mounted event. By far, the force that attracts participants to the rodeo is the challenge of pitting their teams of horses and riders against steers they hope to pin motionless in the given parts of the half-moon arena (called the “medialuna”).

Even though “rienda” (Chilean reining) competitions are by no means the purpose of the Chilean rodeo, one could make mention of them as being closely tied to the rodeo. In fact, their existence is only taken into account because the skills of rienda are the precursors to training a good corralero horse (these are **Chilean Horses** that are trained for use in the Chilean rodeo). In reality, the participation in rienda events is minimal compared to those wishing to “run cattle”, and even though it is lauded as a part of all official rodeos, many don’t even have enough interested contestants to permit their inclusion.

On the other hand, medialunas exist throughout Chile. It would be safe to say that any little town would surely always have a church, a bar and the half-moon arena known as the “medialuna”. The rodeos can be informal “pichangas” (unofficial scrimmages amongst friends) or competitions of various aptitude levels. If one is willing to travel a reasonable distance, a rodeo will be available every weekend throughout most of the year.



Figure I.129 Although half- moon arenas are found throughout Chile, the huasos will spend countless hours training their horses with a bumping lead steer out in open fields. Here the steer is being contained by the rider on the right, but as the horses in training progress, the steer will be worked completely loose while the pinning and driving riders skillfully control its speed and direction.

So, it is clear that the maturity of rodeos became the main motivation for breeders of the newly formed Republic of Chile. Initially, up until the last quarter of the 19th century there was a practical application of these skills that informally displayed in public. However, with time it was the developing sport itself that became the reason **Chilean Horse** breeders continued to flourish. The rodeo acted as a proving ground for their breeding programs, as well as a place for social interaction and reassuring camaraderie.

What is clear in evaluating the methods of horse breeding in Chile is the fact that Chileans have always

maintained the same ideals for the horses they breed. The long course of impeccable service in a land that offered few equine alternatives ingrained the idea that improvements could only be obtained from within the **Chilean Horse** breed. In effect, the qualities that had always been required for the war and stock horses of Chile were well appreciated by the breeders in the new Chilean republic. No one desired to change these attributes that had been so markedly imprinted in this breed since the days of the conquest.

Due to the fact that the rustic, docile, trainable, valiant and easy-keeping “persona” of the **Chilean Horse** was so difficult to equal in other breeds, the selection for better corralero horses also came from within the breed. As a result, the new wave of **Chilean Horse** breeders in Chile made significant efforts to create a better stock horse for the sporting event, while maintaining all the traits that made it such a superb ranch horse and warhorse.

Chilean breeders emphasized obtaining more agility, especially in the lateral maneuvers that are so critical to the Chilean rodeo. By the same token, the breeders tried to inject more speed so that these lateral movements could keep up with the younger and lighter bovines that were becoming a standard part of the rodeo scene. The weight of the steers that ranged from 350-450 kg (770-1,000 lbs.) still required the Chilean corralero horses to have the power to detain such animals running at full speed. The manipulation of bovines by horses that instinctively enjoyed chasing and overpowering the cattle required the equines bred for this purpose to have a good mouth that permitted their suitable control. As can be seen, there were many areas that breeders had to focus on in order to mold the **Chilean Horse** into the perfect corralero sport horse.

Chilean Horse Breeders Become Synonymous with Breeders of Corraleros

The merits of the **Chilean Horse** in the medialuna (half-moon arena) were unsurpassed by other breeds. As a result, the main objective of **Chilean Horse** breeders was to perfect the function required to herd and pin steers. More than any other stock horse breed in the world; the **Chilean Horse** concentrated their entire existence on developing the aptitudes that were needed to work cattle. Granted, a few precious breeders contributed greatly to the breed by selecting for sprinting speed and/or balanced and structurally correct conformations. Still, these breeders were only appreciated if their breeding programs turned out better corraleros. Regardless of the merit of a breeder the “proof had to be in the pudding”. If the efforts inside the half-moon arena were disappointing, the breeder’s program was quickly judged as a failure. For the most part, potential buyers would shun the progeny of such a breeder, who would subsequently have no possibility of making ends meet.

The overwhelming priority given to the functions for the Chilean rodeo have resulted in a very traditional method of raising horses in Chile. Since the sport of “running cattle” requires so much lateral work that is very stressful on bones and joints, the general consensus that has predominated in Chile is that horses need to be given time to grow and mature before exposing them to the rigors of corralero performance. Therefore, most breeders are in no rush to grow out their horses.

Many times the horses are not halter broken and handled until they are long yearlings or two-year-olds. Many choose not to break the horses to ride until they are three years of age. A large number of breeders like to breed their fillies like to breed their fillies at two years of age. Only as four-year-olds, after getting a foal out of them, are they then broken. It is not uncommon to hear “hard boot” breeders repeat the mis- conception that by carrying a foal they are helping the fillies to grow



Figure I.130 It is common for breeders to cross their two year old fillies so they foal out at three. The foal offsets some of the costs when the mare is later put into training and her quality as a broodmare can start to be proven while she is still performing in the rodeo. In high quality mares embryo transplants are being done.

out and mature better. I have been reminded by a friend that when young rural girls in Chile experience childbirth, they tend to fill out into womanly figures sooner and in manners that are

perhaps more obvious in the human species. It is a very interesting observation that may very well explain the traditional thought process.

Nevertheless, since the nutritional needs of gestation and lactation are rarely reinforced with supplementation of the all-forage diet, it is difficult to agree with this traditional view. What is clear is that the time required to breed the filly and later gestate and lactate a foal will obligate a later start of the training procedure. Additionally, the production of a foal during these years when hard training is ill-advised can offset the expenses of the upkeep of the mare when she goes into the long training period.

Even the horses broken as three-year-olds will rarely be competing in their first rodeo before they are five years of age, and some breeders wait until they are seven or eight before sending them out in a public medialuna. It is a general estimation that horses that start to contend later in life will have a much longer competitive life in the rodeo arena. There are some rare examples of top-notch corraleros that have been ranked in the national top 10 at three years of age. Nonetheless, for every such example there are a thousand that don't make their debut until they are five. Being careful of not shortening the useful life of the long-lived **Chilean Horse** may be a prudent consideration. It is very common that **Chilenos** live past 30, and individuals may still be competitive at some rodeo performance level while in their 20s.

The precautions are due in part to the physiological immaturity of horses that have been raised on a very low level of nutrition. Most developing **Chilean Horses** are exposed full time to the elements with no supplementation until they are confined in stalls, at which point they will be broken to ride. Some even face the harsh winter months in the reforested mountains at a distance from pastures which their hooves would damage in times of excessive rain. Here, they learn to eat patches of sporadic native grasses that are complemented with forbs from the surrounding trees. Others face the summers on hillsides where they have no access to irrigation and make do on scorched, dry and overly mature forage that grows around the resistant and thorny "Espino" (*Acacia cavens*) trees.

Remarkably, under all these conditions the **Chilean Horse** stays fat and healthy. Undoubtedly, if their every nutritional need were met during all the phases of growth, the **Chilean Horse** would be more precocious. Its adult stature would also very likely be a couple of inches taller than is obtained under the restricted diets found in some of the seasons throughout most of Chile. Then again, the traditional methods of raising these horses assure the low rate of metabolism, the high coefficients of digestibility for poor quality forages and the overall hardiness that has become a trademark of the breed.

The growth curve in Chilean horses raised in the traditional manner often does not reach its peak until the horses are six or seven years of age. Mature bones and joints are also needed to endure the stresses of all the lateral work in chasing cattle in the medialuna. Horses pushed too hard, too soon, would be good candidates for splints, wind puffs, bog spavins and tendinous synovitis. However, there is also a valid concern that when horses are started too young, it could also have a detrimental effect on the psyche of a horse that is too immature to withstand the pressures of competition.

Starting to Savor the Breed

As the characteristics of the **Chilean Horse** start to be envisioned by the reader, I also hope that there is clearer awareness of the reasons behind the traits that have been valued in this isolated country with its own particular history. There is no doubt that the three-and-a-half century war with the Mapuches gave great importance to breeding a courageous horse that could maneuver over the topography of the colony and country, as well as subsist on the fragile supply of nutrients on the mountainous terrain it so often encountered. For hundreds of years, the members of the Spanish cavalry respected this battle prowess; however, it was not until the War of Independence that a large proportion of the common citizens had reason to appreciate these attributes first hand as they entrusted their lives to the genealogy that had arisen under their very noses.

The fact that Chile was not a source of known mineral wealth in its early days (when gold and silver were valued most and copper and iodine was of little consideration) meant that its economy had to depend on agricultural products. Cattle production was the initial resource, and later the international demand for wheat pushed the sizeable cattle industry into the mountains, as well as farther south into less developed lands. Being a small and narrow country meant that it did not have the wide expanses seen in other reputable cattle producing areas, and this motivated extensive production on sparsely covered hillsides that required an incredibly hardy and resourceful stock horse.

More than three centuries of open-range cattle production in Chile made roundups a crucial part of production schemes. The huge receiving and sorting corrals that became a standard fixture in the Chilean roundup system gave rise to further reasons to value and develop the lateral dexterity and valiant temperament that never shunned contact with the cattle when it was needed. When these qualities were honed for a formal sport that tested aptitude levels, one of the most specialized cow horse breeds of the world was developed.

The **Chilean Horse** breed has been the result of development in a distinctively isolated part of the world, along with an equally unique history that motivated many reasons to mold the uncontested national horse into a breed that is unequalled for its task. It would be a tremendous oversight on my part to not make the reader aware of the geographical and political history that provided the reasons for the qualities that represent the **Chilean Horse** breed. It would also be a hasty reader who wanted to learn about the individualities of the **Chilean Horse** breed without trying to understand how and why they came about, especially in light of a phenotype that is so uncommon in the major horse breeding countries of the world.



Figure I. 131

The Chilean Horse is a unique breed that was largely developed in a specific climate and topography that was isolated by its geographical limits. Chile's distinct history gave rise to a horse culture unlike any place else in the world. Tested over centuries of open range cattle production and honed to perfection as a competitive cow horse in 160 years of breeding for a single cow horse event of incredible complexity, the prepotent Chilean Horse differs from any stock horse you have ever come across. Understanding its past will make you aware of its tremendous potential in the future.