

Chapter II-5

Sit Back and Shorten Your Stirrups

When a newcomer with knowledge about equitation arrives in Chile, inevitably there is an initial shock upon seeing the manner in which the Chilean huaso rides. While being informed about the comfort of this laid back, chair-sitting posture, the new observer cannot help but think back to countless references that give importance to the rider maintaining a balanced vertical column over the horse's center of gravity. Opinions as old as the original hippologist Xenophon (400 B.C.) and as recent as the most famous director of the Spanish Riding School of Vienna, Col. Alois Podhajsky, reiterate the critique of riding a horse in a "chair sitting" position. However, before jumping to critical conclusions, I think it is important that we review a bit of history regarding the riding methods used down through the ages. I think this will clarify that man's posture while sitting astride a horse has varied a great deal with the physical characteristics and gaits of the horses, the type of tack used and the specific functions performed by the team of horse and rider.

"A la Brida" Versus "a la Jineta"

For years, my travels around the world and my extensive reading of equine literature have made me aware of the two different styles used in riding horses. Although this distinction is less mentioned in the United States, the terms "a la brida" (in Europe the French term "à la bride" is more commonly used) and "a la jineta" (in Europe the French term "à la ginete" is used) are common knowledge amongst most horse enthusiasts throughout Latin America. As a general rule, horsemen, and in particular stock horsemen of Latin America, like to identify themselves with the "a la jineta" seat. For some reason, there is an enchantment linked with the traditions of warriors from southern Spain and northern Africa that were in the limelight shortly before the conquest of the Americas. Closer observation of the various riding styles offers greater scrutiny in the diversity of equitatorial postures that are found in various cultures, which over time have been identified with one or the other school of riding.

In theory, the "a la brida" school was developed for a more controlled style of riding that required a precise communication between horse and rider for every move. It was the method most often employed by the knights and chargers who fought in rigid battle formations that required maximum stability in the saddle. It is also the riding style most often used in *Haute Écôle* or baroque equitation that is heavily based on predetermined combat maneuvers.

On the other hand, the "a la jineta" school was a historical part of the many cultures that had more improvised fighting methods based on attack and retreat with light weapons in hand. The elevation that is made available by the short stirrups in the "a la jineta" style was useful for providing added reach in the use of lightweight weapons and in galloping over uneven terrain where standing up in the stirrups could offer greater comfort and security. In more modern times, this riding style offered greater ease in flexing and stretching the rider's body when using cattle handling equipment, such as ropes, goads ("garrochas"), boleadoras, etc.

The characteristic that most obviously classifies riding techniques into one of these fore-mentioned schools is the amount of bend in the rider's knee. Ever since the original Iberian clashes between the Visigoths and the Berber horseman of northern Africa, a comparison has been made between the straight-legged posture of medieval knights and the bent-knee carriage of the Moorish warriors. If these are the true historical representatives of the "a la brida" and "a la jineta" schools, many people are overlooking serious differences with more contemporary versions that are given the same nomenclature.

The medieval knights had a very stiff posture in the saddle, in which their straight legs were held out well in front of their bodies. This required a very low heel in narrow metal stirrups that received a constant forward and downward pressure to assure their stability. This push into the stirrup was made possible by bracing the hips and lower back firmly against the cantle of the saddle. As a result, the original stereotype of the "a la brida" riding style, more correctly known as "estradiota", had the legs in front of the horse's center of gravity, the torso

somewhat behind it and the brunt of the rider's weight on the posterior portion of the horse's back. The posture was incredibly stable and served the one-dimensional charges with heavy lances well, in bracing themselves when contact was made with the target.

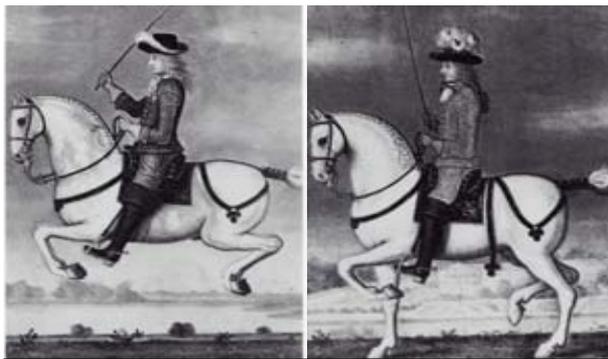


Figure II.112 Horse and rider of the Royal Danish Manège demonstrate an "estradiota" riding style.

Although all disciplines have their own specific equitational traits, today we can still see riding styles that closely resemble the medieval "estradiota" when watching the vaqueiros competing on **Brazilian Crioulos** in the Golden Bit Competitions, and, to a certain extent, in the riders of the gaited competitions of the **American Saddlebreds** and **Tennessee Walking Horses**. All use an extremely long stirrup leather and hold the stirrups well forward while having contact along the full length of

the leg. Although the Chilean huaso does not qualify as an example due to his use of a short stirrup leather and a bent knee, the manner in which he distributes his weight in the saddle and braces himself in counter pressures between the stirrup and cantle are identical to the premise of the "estradiota" school.

In the 16th century, Federico Grisone introduced another "a la brida" riding style that would come to be known as "a la bastarda". This style also maintained the full leg contact with what was essentially a straight leg posture, while bringing the heel of the foot under a hip that was placed nearer the pommel of the saddle. This created a more logical vertical column in the rider's weight distribution. More importantly, it also created a deeper and more erect seat that gave rise to the classical three points of contact, at the two seat bones and the narrow bony ischium that unites the two sides of the pelvis under the rider's crotch (the angle formed by the inner sides of the legs where they join the human trunk).



Figure II.113
Inigo Velez de Guevara riding "a la bastarda"

The "a la bastarda" seat eventually evolved into the classical "three point seat" we classify today as "a la brida". Although in principle it still implements the same vertical column of weight distribution, it differs in having a slight knee bend that offered a maximum of two inches of crotch clearance when standing in the stirrups. Today, this style is best identified with in the dressage world, but it also is common in the world of western pleasure, cutting, reining and most other American stock horse events. It is also notable in the riding techniques of the charros and vaqueros of Mexico, as well as the gauchos in the northern sectors of Argentina, such as Salta, Jujuy and Catamarca. In fact, the famed Argentine equine expert, Ángel Cabrera, stated that ALL gauchos rode with long stirrups and clothespin postures up until 1885. The posture of the Peruvian horse trainer and rider, known as a "chalan", on the **Peruvian Paso**, and most riders of smooth gaited breeds for that matter, is also closest to the "a la brida" style.

What was originally termed the "a la jineta" riding style was exemplified by the horsemen from the Barbary Coast. It was easily identifiable by the short stirrup leathers that resulted in a bent knee posture that hugged the horse's shoulders. However, what is so often overlooked is the fact that these horsemen placed their feet behind the theoretical plumb line that comes down from their hips, as they were in more of a kneeling position that actually raised their heels. This style of riding was commonly seen before stirrups were ever invented, so it

seems logical that with the advent of stirrups, the leg posture remained constant in some ancient cultures. This was made possible by the use of a large platform stirrup that served as a resting place for the entire sole of the foot. As a result, a low heel placement was not necessary to take a firm hold on the stirrup.



Figure II.114

A two-point stance version of a “a la jineta” riding style can be seen in this sculpture of Balthasar Charles of Spain, prince of Asturias and Portugal

Any need for the riders to brace themselves against the bent knees to maneuver their horses or their own bodies with agility usually accompanied a leg that was bent well back across the horse’s rib cage. On the other hand, bent knees that were lodged below the exterior portion of the wider and taller fork of the saddle sustained the pressure in the stirrups. More importantly, like good bareback riding postures, this created a more erect torso position as well as partial contact with the ischium (crotch) of the rider and less contact with the buttocks. It is interesting to note that the “Moorish” bearing shares some important similarities with the seat distribution of the modern “three-point stance” of the “a la brida” style, and has very little resemblance, aside from a short stirrup leather, with the “two-point” stance of the modern “a la jineta” style. Only when needing more height or extension in the saddle did the Berber rider stand in the stirrup

in the traditional two-point carriage.

In more modern times, the “a la jineta” style came to be associated with short stirrup leathers with a vertical lower leg placement. Most contemporary disciplines carry this out with a conventional narrow stirrup that support the ball or arch of the foot, as can be seen in riding styles used in polo or jumping. However, even in the Doma Vaquera (Spanish reining) of Spain, where the “Moorish” flat platform stirrup with full foot insertion is still used, the leg position searches for a more vertical weight distribution. The main difference between these three disciplines is their dependency on the two-point stance, which is greatest in jumping and polo and almost non-existent in Doma Vaquera.



Figure II.115

Figure II.116

Figure II.117

Modern examples of riding styles that resemble: a) “estradiota” , b) “a la bastarda and c) two-point stance “a la jineta”.

In the stereotype of modern “a la jineta” disciplines, the inner parts of the knees are the two main points of contact. At a gallop, the buttocks are usually elevated, but can also make full rhythmic seat-of-the-pants contact with the saddle. The often-used elevated two-point stance concentrates the leg contact in the lower part of the inner thigh and knees. When the saddle is in touch with the seat of the rider choosing to sit in the saddle, it is plainly in the back portion of the gluteal muscles rather than in the crotch.

As we are already beginning to realize, this idea of classifying all riding styles into two categories is a much too simplistic outlook. In reality, there are numerous variations that differ significantly amongst themselves and which have usually been developed to the specific needs

of a special kind of function. The contemporary Chilean stock horse seat is certainly the prime example of this, as it doesn't fit cleanly into any one particular category.



Figure II.118 Before saddles and stirrups were used the bareback seat often had knees bent, lower leg angled back and heels up while using a three-point seat.



Figure II.119 The true "a la jineta" style of the Berbers used a similar posture to that used when riding bareback



Figure II.120 Platform stirrups were designed to hold entire foot so that the stirrup was not displaced when the rider's heel was raised.



Figure II.121

The Chilean stirrup leather length is “a la jineta”. The huaso’s fixation in the saddle by counter pressures on the stirrup and cantle of the saddle are plainly “estradiota”. The huaso’s seat, which places the weight firmly on the buttocks, is closest to the sitting position of “a la jineta”. However, unlike the “a la jineta” school that at a canter uses a “two-point stance” that depends largely on the pressure of the knees with a “forward seat” that only lightly touches the saddle with the buttocks or not at all, the huaso continues to sit solidly on his buttocks. It would seem the Chilean Rodeo seat is a “four-point stance” whereby the seat entails contact with both knees and both buttocks. Lastly, the function of Chilean Rodeo identifies most with the armored warhorse that must charge at the command of the rider. No equine sport mimics the unilateral control of the knight’s charge more than precision pinning of a steer in the Chilean Rodeo. The similarity to the “a la brida” style is also present in the two-hands-on-the-reins approach, as well as the strong dependence on the use of the spur.

The Chilean Rodeo Seat

The modern Chilean huaso sits well back on the cantle of his saddle, bracing himself to counter the force he places on stirrups that are held in front of his saddle. His heels hang far below the wooden stirrup that supports the arch of his boot. In spite of the traditional Chilean claim of being a classical representative of the “a la jineta” riding style, as I have already stated, this aspect of huaso posture has much more similarity with the original medieval “estradiota” riding style. Since the degree of knee bend has always differentiated the “a la brida” and “a la jineta” schools of equitation, the extremely short stirrup leathers in the Chilean Rodeo seat permits them to identify with the “a la jineta” disciplines, if one wishes to ignore all the other incongruencies.

The Chilean stock horse saddle is made to facilitate this unusual combination of riding styles. The seat of the saddle definitely angles down from front to back, putting the rider’s weight solidly across the cantle. The design is intentionally made in this manner, and even has leather coils that act as supportive shock absorbers below the back portion of the cantle (although how functional they are is questionable).

Shifting the rider’s body weight behind the horse’s center of gravity is compensated by the fact that the rider’s heels don’t go underneath his shoulder and hip. Instead, the stirrups are so short that the bent legs hold them well out in front of the body, where they embrace the posterior part of the horse’s shoulder. Only in this position can they maintain the lowered heel that is necessary to not lose the toehold in the opening carved into the solid wooden stirrups. The result is a very comfortable position for the rider, akin to sitting in a cushioned, low-backed bar stool with your legs steadied on the brass footrest in front under the bar counter. Unfortunately, much more could be desired regarding what is convenient for the horse. Ironically, while the modern “a la jineta” style served to permit the rider to use his seat in forward position (in fact, it is also known as the “forward seat”), the Chilean version maintains the rider’s seat farther back on the horse, justifying coining a new term: “rearward seat”.

This position in the saddle creates an equitation that is unlike any other in the world. When standing in the stirrups of a Chilean saddle, it is suggested that at least 20 cm (8 in.)

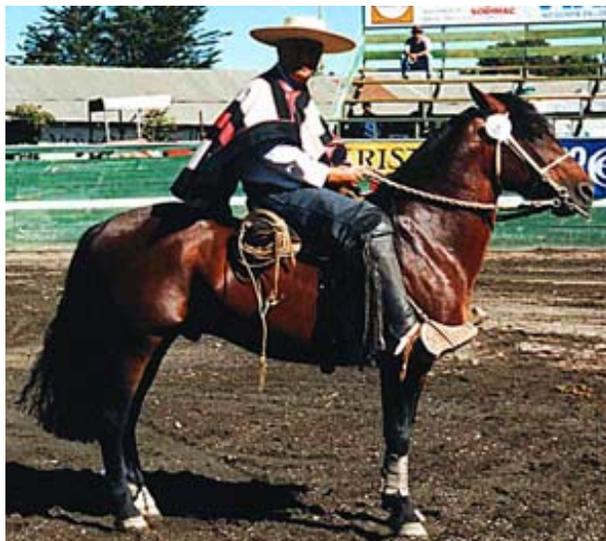


Figure II.122 The Chilean Rodeo seat displaces the weight of the rider well behind the center of gravity of the horse.

clearing should exist between the rider's crotch and the saddle seat. Sitting in the saddle with stirrup leathers of this length puts the rider's calves and inner foot in closer contact with the back portion of the horse's shoulder, as opposed to the rib cage that is the primary point of contact in other types of equitation. The frontal location of the stirrups permits hugging the horse's shoulders with the rider's knees. However, as I will discuss later, it also requires an artificial extension of the leg in order to establish the needed contact with the ribs.

By bending the leg, the rider frees up his hip joint and increases the range of lateral mobility in his knees. To understand this clearly, simply compare your ability to swing your knees to the sides when sitting in a normal kitchenette chair, versus what you can accomplish with your knees hanging straight down while straddling the upper rail of a fence, or even, for that matter, when standing upright on the ground. That added flexibility is very useful when riding stock horses, since they make unpredictable moves based on their cow herding instincts. With so many lateral movements that make up such an important part of the Chilean Rodeo, this shoulder embrace gives the huaso a very good "feel" for his horse.

Chileans Use an Extremely Short Stirrup Leather

Some forms of equitation border on the very limits of both "a la brida" and "a la jineta", and it can be difficult to classify them one way or another. For example, Chilean horsemanship is clearly one of the more drastic examples of a bent knee position that many would qualify as "a la jineta". On the other hand, the Chilean huaso does not utilize the "forward seat" that short stirrup leather length is associated with. What, then, is the reason for the use of such short stirrups in the Chilean Rodeo seat?

Many other cultures have adapted the "a la jineta" school of equitation to meet their particular needs, and the Chilean justification may have been motivated in part by the small stature of their horses. With most of their horses varying between 1.37 m and 1.42 m (13.2-14 hands), a taller than average rider using an "a la brida" style of riding would find his legs dangling well below the horse's ventral (bottom of the belly) line. Although this would have its aesthetic inconveniences, it would not make normal equitation impossible, since well-trained horses respond to calf pressure more than heel pressure. A good example of this is the straight-legged seat that native Icelanders use to ride their small horses.

Then again, the Chilean tradition brings with it a strong reliance on the use of the spur. Riders with long stirrup leather astride short horses would position their spur below the point of body contact, limiting their use unless notable leg movement was utilized. This would prove impractical in the Chilean corralero horse, since it requires constant pressure to carry out the largely lateral movements used in the Chilean Rodeo. The seemingly obvious solution would have been to reproduce a taller **Chilean Horse**, but this would have handicapped their ability to pin bovines in the sport that had turned into the main justification for the breed.

Figure II.123 Short stirrup leathers, long spur shanks and wide rowels place the spur pressure in the appropriate part of the horse's anatomy



Sitting Behind the Center of Gravity

The unusual thing about the Chilean huaso's style of riding is that, in spite of their very short stirrups, they do not crouch into a forward seat to raise themselves over the horse's center of gravity. In fact, the Chilean saddle probably distributes the weight of the rider farther back than any other saddle ever designed. There is some compensation in this fact, since the legs are bent so much that they are held out in front of the hips. With the backward tilt of the saddle, the

rider's torso is often slightly behind the vertical, thus offsetting the weight of the legs that are always in front of the center of gravity. This posture in the saddle also creates a greater dependence on the rider balancing himself over his buttocks while holding a relaxed, somewhat convex, lower back.

The best analogy I can make to help the reader understand this unorthodox style of riding is that of a tightrope acrobat who has to balance himself while straddling the stretched wire. He could opt to be as straight as possible, with the profile of his head, shoulders, hips and feet all in a straight line, or he could lean back slightly with his body and move his legs slightly forward until he found the equilibrium needed to maintain the same center of gravity. The manner in which Chilean huasos balance themselves in the saddle is not the conventional one, for sure. It defies what almost every formal equitation book instructs us to do, yet one must not be too quick to judge, as the decades of this style of riding have surely found practical reasons for its existence.

The first place to look for such answers is in the specificity of the sport in which this breed is the sole participant. The distribution of the weight so far back into the cantle of the saddle surely must be related to the act of pinning the bovine to the padded area on the half-moon arena wall. This involves a very strong, forward and upward impulse as the chest of the horse hits the sides of the steer. Ideally, a good pin would push the opposite side of the steer against the cushion and then partially roll the animal on the top border of the padded wall, often lifting the legs of the bovine off the ground. In signaling for this thrust, the rider simultaneously spurs the side of the horse as he projects his own body forward and out of the saddle towards the point of contact. As soon as the contact is made, the rider is thrown back, where he falls onto the cantle of the saddle and out of the way of the horse's elevated front end. During this stage of the event, the deep-seated and high-cantled saddles become a safe haven for riders to fall back into.

Another reason the huasos justify their saddle design is because, throughout much of the Chilean Rodeo competition, the horse is making contact with the bovines while working off its hind legs. As the pair of participants cross the medialuna towards the pinning pads, contact between horse and steer is usually maintained as the driver is pushing the steer forward and the pinner is containing the bovine in the desired path. The regulations of the sport require that contact is maintained with the steer as the paired team cross into the posture and pinning zones.

The uniqueness of this event is that rather than being based on sheer speed, it is a combination of speed and power. This requires the **Chilean Horses** to work with their haunches



Figure II.124 Proper posture for the pinning horse during the lateral movement requires that the hind legs be well under the body.

well under them, carrying a greater proportion of their weight on the hind legs. The contention (but not necessarily an opinion I am in total agreement with) is that weight must be taken off the forehead, in order to not load the part of the body that is being pushed into the bovine. Since so much of this is done in lateral movements, this further emphasizes a shift of the rider's weight back onto the loin of the horse, so that it can offer more stability to the hind legs that are the origin of both drive and lateral impulse.

Having said all this, it is only fair that I should also mention that the present huaso style really only gained popularity in the last four decades. Before then, the fork of the Chilean saddles was much straighter and stirrup leathers were not nearly as short. This was even more

the case in the 19th century, when the **Chilean Horse** had a broader application as a general ranch horse and participating in rodeos was more of a pastime.

Interestingly, Joaquin Larrain's article on the motor functions of the performance horse also points out that a horse's center of gravity is in front of the midpoint that divides the four sustaining bases created by the horse's legs. However, some justification for posterior weight placement may exist in Larrain's estimate that the forelegs sustained 58 percent of the horse's weight. More sophisticated research has shown this figure to be even higher, and the weight supported by the forelegs is greater yet when the horse has forward momentum. So, in light of the workload that corralero horses have to do in pushing the steers with their chest, there may be some logic to placing more weight behind the center of gravity. Or better said, perhaps when taking into account the pushing force of these rodeo horses, the center of gravity may be farther back than is estimated for a horse that is simply sustaining his weight.

The Chilean Spur, a Fundamental Tool

Yet another way in which Chilean huaso equitation varies from so many of the other conventional equestrian methodologies is his dependence on the spur. In most of the world, the spur is a reinforcement of leg pressure that was either not responded to, or that was responded to unenergetically. The Chilean school would require us to consider the spur as THE principal means of contact for body cues. So important is this tool in the objective of the huaso that the **Chilean Horse** has been selected to be more tolerant to its use. Moreover, most huasos admit with no sense of remorse that "we would be nothing without our spurs".

In Chilean Rodeo rienda events, the rules state that the horse must be notably spurred when being run in front of the judges. It is very important in the **Chilean Horse** tradition that submission to the spur is shown. If there is any sign of rebellion, resentment or bitterness about being spurred, it is thought this is a sign of an uncooperative or cowardly character. As a result, any horse participating in a Chilean Rodeo rienda competition that energetically twitches its tail laterally when spur contact is made will be immediately disqualified.

In realizing how many other equestrian disciplines are permissive of tail twitching, it almost seems incomprehensible that the Chilean Rodeo Federation is so strict regarding this measure. However, when one realizes that the sport of Chilean Rodeo requires a very bold character and a high threshold for pain, it becomes more understandable why tail twitching is chastised as a means of screening unsuitable temperaments.

Furthermore, in a type of equitation that has a potentially intimidating tool in the large Chilean spurs, such a regulation serves to make the horse trainers more cautious about abusing the horse unnecessarily. Interestingly, tail twitching will not disqualify any corralero horse in the cow working event of the medialuna. So, if the objective of culling horses of weak psychological makeup is a worthwhile consideration in the breed, it would seem logical that the rule apply either across the board, or not at all.

It used to be the case that rienda events were part of the preliminary training for horses that were destined to compete in the Rodeo. So perhaps in days gone by the fact that this rule was only applied in the rienda competition was a logical solution. Very few corralero horses formally compete in rienda nowadays, so it seems that a revision is in order.

Actually, the tail twitching prejudice was inherited from the equestrian mentality of the Spanish colonists. As the Spaniards constantly tried to improve their horses for high-level equitation, character and trainability were given a great deal of importance. In the royal studs of Spain, temperament was considered extremely important, since the horses were being trained for the king and his family. It was desirable that the horses be fiery and flashy, so they could make a good impression in public appearances. However, on the other hand, it was expected that the horses have no malice. By selecting highly trainable individuals, the risk of accidents in the royal family was minimized.

The result of the impressive breeding program in the Royal Stud of Córdoba over a period of two centuries of selection was a temperament that, even 230 years later, is admired in the **Andalusian** breed today. These are spirited horses that are always desirous to please. In spite of their fears, they are courageous when asked to perform. They are bold enough to confront the

unknown. Once tamed, they are easy to work around, almost never kick, and even the studs show surprisingly little signs of aggression. It is amazing to see the large “cobras” (groups of collared mares tied together at the neck) of 12 mares working side-by-side when they are asked to work in circles, back up, side step and change directions. Very rarely do you see any ears pinned back in a sign of displeasure or intolerance. The possibility of kicking or biting a fellow-performer is almost unthinkable.

This attitude is similar to what one witnesses with German Shepherd dogs in their country of origin. Aggressive dogs are eliminated from competition if they bite or growl at the judge and shy ones are also disqualified if they run away from a gunshot test. Temperament is an often-underestimated part of the objectives one must pursue in breeding domestic livestock and companion animals. The Spanish always sought to breed an animated but manageable horse (and ironically the most aggressive and unmanageable bovines), and all native American breeds of horses are, to some extent, indebted to this wise Spanish emphasis on suitable dispositions.

I don't think the **Chilean Horse** breeders have tried as conscientiously as Spaniards did to obtain this noble type of personality in their breed. However, since this was the goal of most of the Spanish culture in imitation of the efforts of the royal studs, the genes came over readily in the equine importations to the Americas. If there is a major difference in the **Chilean Horse**, it may be that they are little more headstrong.

After all, what a Chilean corralero horse is asked to do is unlike anything seen outside of Chile. The **Andalusian** “rejoneadores” gracefully toy with the fighting bulls as they entice them to charge, only to dodge out of their way at the last seconds. Cutting **Quarter Horses** are nimble cowhorses that contain cattle with their lightning-quick reactions. They may show their aggressiveness by pinning their ears back, but for the most part they are using positioning rather than contact to control the cattle. Roping horses use force to take command, but at the end of a tight rope that provides a comfort zone of safety. The **Australian Walers**, **Australian Stock Horses**, the **Criollos of the Americas** and **AQHA** reined cowhorses excel in driving cattle with a determined character but only with slight shoulder contact at a run. Just about every cowhorse discipline has to do with controlling cattle by intimidation from a distance, but only the corralero horse can claim a full speed collision and a driving follow through as a means of immobilizing cattle. It takes a very strong personality to even try this, not to mention the demands of asking the horse to do this over and over again.

So it becomes clear that the spur design was adapted to the **Chilean Horse** as much as this breed has been adapted to the Chilean spur. Regardless, Chilean horsemanship would advise us of the need to accustom the **Chilean Horse** to the spur early on. With the prudent and progressive use of this tool, it can come to mean many different things.



Figure II.125
Most often the Chilean spur is used with lateral pressure of the large rowel

The jingle of the large Chilean spur has a calming affect as it sounds with the body movements of the traveling horse. However, the musical signal of the spur can also be a wake-up call. A horse that is about to take off at a full run, or a horse that is standing calmly not realizing that soon he will be asked for a departure of some kind, will take notice at the huaso's heel shaking, which immediately causes him to perk up his attention.

A flat pressure from the side of the large rowel is used when simply wanting to suggest sensitive signals. A different kind of contact still can be made if the ankle is bent towards the outside and the bottom tip of the spur can touch the lower extremities of the belly, causing the horse to tuck up his abdomen. If the huaso's ankle is bent inwards, there is a slight contact made in the upper portion of the spur, and this can serve to emphasize a holding leg when the horse begins to run through the flat pressure of the spur. The spurs can also be angled backwards so that its points can make diagonal contact with the mount. This is a more insistent signal when wanting to emphasize pressure in front of or behind the girth, or perhaps initiating a fast departure.

The strongest statement that can be made with the spurs involves pointing the toes of the boot outward and pressuring with the full tips of the spur. This can be done in gouging manner, which is most commonly seen in the moment when the horse is asked to pin the cow to the wall. More and more, huasos are realizing that in well-trained horses with a valiant makeup, this gouging is uncalled for. Granted, there are different levels of severity according to the leg pressure that is applied. Ideally, this should not be a stab, but rather a controlled progressive increase in pressure.

The other way in which this leg position is used in a training environment is when the rider wants to regain a stubborn horse's attention. In this instance, the rider can roll his spurs up the horse's side, causing a sharp tickling sensation. Most horses will be much more attentive after this, since it is very unusual for them to feel the spur pressure over such a broad area.

It is worth mentioning here that the size of the Chilean spur gives the misleading impression of it being a very traumatic representation of this piece of riding equipment. However, the fact that it has such a wide-diameter rowel with a large number of points means the contact with the horse is spread out over a greater area. This distributes the force of the human leg and thus dilutes the pressure that more traditional spurs would deliver in a single spot.

The only exception to this is if the points of the spur are sharpened, which should never be the case. Still, there is no doubt that if one were to dig the spur into a horse with extreme force, the Chilean spur might be more apt to break the skin due to the small area of contact at each individual point. This is not the intended means of using the spur. Unfortunately, as in all modes of equitation, there are always those who misuse what should be considered an aid by resorting to it as a source of punishment.

One last comment is merited in regard to the Chilean spur. This is a spur that has been designed over the years for the **Chilean Horse**. This is a thick-skinned and densely hair-coated breed that is not as fragile as other breeds with the opposite characteristics. I don't mean this to imply that they are dead-sided horses that don't respond readily to leg pressure, because nothing could be further from the truth. However, they are less apt to suffer cuts and abrasions than **Thoroughbreds** and **Arabs**, or other breeds that have been significantly influenced by either. As a result, they are more tolerant to the use and abuse of the spur. When introduced slowly and used correctly, the Chilean spur should be a useful tool with any horse that is ridden with a Chilean saddle. However, these spurs have little place alongside conventional English and Western saddles that require straighter leg positions, as the point of contact would be too far back on the horse's side.

Two-handed Stock Horse Reining

As we look at various schools of equitation around the world, another interesting distinction is that between the use of direct and indirect rein pressure. As a general rule, in disciplines that want to maximize the interaction between horse and rider as the primary objective, both the rider's hands are freed for use as a means of communicating with the horse. With this definition, a very sensitive direct rein is the more common alternative, but the indirect rein is also subtly used to either emphasize the signal of the direct rein or to contain head, neck or shoulder movement. As a higher degree of collection is desired, the sensitive indirect rein and leg pressure, as well as a rotation of the torso, become more important in forehand directional instructions.

On the other hand, events that require the horsemen to use equipment unrelated to the control of the horse usually require having a free hand available for these purposes. Here, a sole dependency on the indirect rein is required along with other body cues. This was the traditional means of handling horses in combat, as well as in games that simulated these types of actions. For the most part, the majority of stock horse breeds also incorporate the "neck reining", or indirect rein, in order to ensure that the rider has the alternative of handling the needed accessories for working the cattle. As a result, even in events such as western reining and Spanish Doma Vaquera, the horses are shown with one hand on the reins to ensure their usefulness under practical working situations.

Once again, the **Chilean Horse** lurks in the gray areas of not clearly fitting the description of one school or the other. The traditional training calls for teaching the horse how to “neck rein”. A braided rawhide lariat is a required part of the tack for all competing corralero horses, because historically the leather rope has been a part of the huaso’s work gear. So, it goes without saying that the need for neck reining is obvious in making use of the lariat. At a walk, the **Chilean Horse** is always expected to be ridden with one hand, on neatly coiled thick leather reins. Yet, having said all this, it is probably surprising that this is one of the few specialized stock horse breeds that compete with two hands on the reins. This fact implies much more than simply having a greater dependency on the direct rein. Part of the explanation also lies in the amount of contact and force the Chilean **corralero** horse puts on the bit.



Figure II.126 One of the few stock horse events where riders use two hands on the reins.

First, let me touch on the importance of the direct rein in **Chilean Horse** equitation. Since so much of the work this breed does is high-speed side-passing or two-tracking, controlling the neck placement of the horse becomes crucial. In fact, the Chilean Rodeo requires that the pinning horse always have some chest contact with the cow as it moves past the first banner of the posture zone in the arena. In the initial part of the first pass across the arena, the speed of the fresh steer may be so great that the horse cannot keep pace with the bovine if it tries to maintain a truly perpendicular body position. This requires that the horse two-track at a run beside the heifer while keeping the point of the left shoulder on her side.

In order to simulate the desired perpendicular position, as well as prepare the horse for crossing into the “pinning zone”, where full contact with the chest is required, the riders ask for a great deal of exterior lateral neck flexion. Consequently, they bend the neck past the axis of the horse’s body into a position that is perpendicular with the cow. This over-flexion of the neck in the faster stages of the Chilean Rodeo makes the use of the direct rein indispensable.

Through neck reining we can make sharp turns or spins of the entire body working off the haunches. We can also ask for a slight bend in the neck, which, in unison with the rider’s leg pressure and body rotation, can help us make a nice arc in the direction the horse is traveling. However, there are some definite limitations in asking the horse to go in one direction at high speed and over-flex the neck in the opposite direction by merely using the indirect rein. Since this is such a common position in the faster moves across the arena, the two-handed guidance of the corralero horse is very convenient.

The other factor that plays a part in the two-handed approach towards running these cattle is the fact that this is an inherited ability that requires an aggressively natured cowhorse. One of the amazing things one realizes in riding these horses is that they actually LOVE what they do. As in all inherited dispositions there are exceptions, but the main difference between the **Chilean Horse** and other stock horses is not so much in the athleticism that is necessary for the maneuvers that are carried out during a Chilean Rodeo. The BIGGEST difference is that the **Chilean Horses** have the innate desire to make contact with the cattle.

This is such a genetically ingrained motivation that it doesn’t take a whole lot of Chilean Rodeo eventing before the **Chilean Horse** is desirous to do more than he is asked. Normally a very even-tempered breed; one is impressed with how calmly stallions, mares and geldings all stand next to each other inside the arena awaiting their turn to compete. But when the horses are brought into the “apiñadero”, where the first warm-up laps of the steers are carried out prior to entering the main arena, almost all the horses are “on the muscle”.

The closest thing I can compare to this change of character is taking a racehorse out to the track. No matter how much time and patience you devote to starting out your two-year-olds right, after they have had a taste of that speed on the track, a good number will become hard-

mouthed and run into the bit with more force than you desire. I realize that some of these bad racehorse manners are a result of devoting too little time to the proper education of the horse. Nonetheless, the same economic pressures that make one prioritize competing, over idealized schooling programs, are as much a factor in the Chilean corralero as they are in **Thoroughbred** racehorses.

Like the racehorses, so many of these **Chilean Horses** are pushed too fast into their professions. Old timers would never have considered campaigning a corralero horse in rodeos before he was at least five years old. Now, three- and four-year-olds are getting their first taste of rodeos, when they are not mentally prepared for the pressure. Many of these horses no longer get the solid foundation of practical ranch work. More and more, the urban owners have started to specialize these horses for the Chilean Rodeo competition. Psychologically, they are wound too tight in a life that is too concentrated on trying to win. The expensive requirement of a multitude of maiden steers for ideal training conditions makes many people opt to introduce the refined training stages to their horses in the show arenas.

Lastly, there are strains of bloodlines in the breed that simply have temperaments that are much more difficult to relax or contain in the heat of competition. The more specialized the breed becomes, the better the competition gets and the more demanding the judges make the events. All these factors contribute to a more frequent incidence of hard-mouthed horses and temperaments that are over- anxious to charge into the cattle.

Perhaps this is not a good reason for keeping two hands on the reins, but I can assure you it's a practical one. It can often take a great deal of strength to implement the control that is desired in obtaining the high point pins. It must be remembered that this is not a sport that deals only with athleticism and finesse, even though there is a lot of both involved as well. It is also an equestrian sport that requires speed and brute strength. As any draft horse puller can attest to, in the heat of a demanding physical effort, it becomes hard to regulate the desire to perform.



Figure II.127

The two handed style can be convenient to contain the desire to pin in overly competitive horses.

Riding with a Tight Rein

Facing the reality that the sport of the Chilean Rodeo induces the participating horses to run into the bit could be proposed as the reason that the **Chilean Horse** has traditionally been ridden with a taut rein. This rein tension, which would be atypical to most American cowboys, is certainly not necessarily indicative of an insensitive mouth. The epitome of sensitive equestrianism can be seen in the Spanish Riding School of Vienna or the Andalusian Royal

School of Equestrian Art, and neither makes use of a loosely hanging rein. The loose-reined collection that was demonstrated artistically by the riding masters of the 17th and 18th centuries seems to have been largely forgotten outside of the North American western riding circles. A very interesting book titled *Dancing with Horses*, written by the talented German Klaus Ferdinand Hempling, brings back to the forefront the idea of working the classical seat with a loose rein. Only time will tell if he rekindles followers.

In fact, most two-handed horsemanship styles throughout the world follow the standard principles that state a straight line passing through the forearms and reins should connect the rider's elbows and the horse's mouth. It is unquestionable that the origins of proper biting procedures for stock horses in all the Americas came from Spanish colonial influence. Yet, even today, the Doma Vaquera stock horses of Spain evidence an incredibly sensitive mouth, notable collection and a constant, yet very light, contact between horse and rider through stretched out reins held in only one hand.

In observing well-trained **Chilean Horses** at a walk, one cannot help but be impressed that, in spite of their thick build, these little horses have an uncanny ability for collection. They demonstrate a sensitive mouth that succumbs to the bit as their head oscillates around the vertical position. Yet, there is contradictory evidence in the manner these horses are schooled at the faster gaits.

When watching the horses run the cattle in the half-moon arena, it is interesting that most of the horses jut their noses out as they run. It would seem that this is the practical head position, as the riders ask the pinning horses to place their heads over the back of the steers they chase across the arena. Later in the pin, they must once again thrust forward and upward in order to immobilize the bovine. This conscious effort to charge forward seems to override any message from the contact with the bit.

Having said this I do think there is room for improvement in establishing a greater respect for the bit even in the "heat of battle". A head may need to be raised to work over the top of a steer's back but when away from the steer a collected head position would still seem advantageous. Half of the runs in the Chilean Rodeo offer this opportunity as the driving horse and rider have no impediment to using a more balanced head position.

In essence, the experience has shown that corraleros work running into the bit in all the stages of the Chilean Rodeo. So, it is easy to assume that it is their passion for what they are doing that drives them past the point of contact with the rider's hands. I think much like racehorse jockeys, most huasos would tell you they need to feel the horse running into the bit. The huaso school stresses low, closely held hands, in a fixed position over the withers. The huasos generally brace their elbows near their bodies, giving them a good support for maintaining this position. As a general rule, there is not a lot of pulling involved, but it is obvious that the horse is exerting quite a bit of pressure on the rider's arms.

Star-gazing Stops

In the "apiñadero", one can especially appreciate the abrupt stops. This eye-shaped corral is used to run the steer down each side into the corners, eventually making three laps of the enclosure before a gate opens the way to the main field. The idea is to take some of the run out of the fresh animal before having to tackle driving the bovine across the diameter of the large half-moon arena.

So, in this initial part of the competition, the cattle are driven hard and fast down a side wall, and then the horses come to a screeching halt as the steer finds his nose in the corner of one end of the corral. Then the process is repeated down the other side wall and into the opposite corner. These stops give the spectator an opportunity to see the corralero horses sink their hocks into the ground as they stop on a dime. Unfortunately, the sit-back signal of the rider is also accompanied by a pretty firm yank on the reins, which in most cases are connected to a sensitive Chilean O-ring bit. The reaction is to be expected, as the horse throws his muzzle up in the air to alleviate the bit pressure, often accompanied by a gaping mouth.

Of all the unusual aspects of **Chilean Horse** equitation, this is the one I have been least able to understand. The perplexing thing is that the sensitivity shown by these horses to the bit

at the walk is so distant from their reaction to the bit when running and totally opposed to the reaction they show when brought to a sudden stop. In my efforts to give the traditional techniques the benefit of the doubt, I have concluded that the inborn drive to chase and pin cattle may simply push these horses past the stage of normal responsiveness to the bit. This drive thus requires a harder than normal pull to detain them, and thus the horses react to the severity that is required to stop them when using a potentially rigorous bit.

That all sounds nice, and perhaps there is even a bit of logic in that explanation, but I know better. A well-schooled horse depends very little on the bit for the realization that he is being asked to stop. In using a spade bit that has a solid beaded metal hobble incorporated, the hand signals for a stop should be minimal. Even if the horses had a higher than normal head carriage due to the repeated requirement to hold them above the cattle, there would be no need to finish a stop looking at the heavens with an open mouth.

Perhaps the most poignant reason these are invalid excuses is that the same tension on the bit, head postures and open mouths can be seen in so many of the contestants in the Chilean rienda competitions. Some of the participating horses in these competitions are specialists in this event and do not compete as corraleros in the Chilean Rodeos. Therefore, one has to assume that at least part of what we are seeing is a result of the methods and mentalities used in training the **Chilean Horse**. As always, there are precious few riders and horses for whom these generalities do not apply, but my comments are based on the majority of the paired teams I have seen in Chile's best rodeos.

I do think there is a cultural influence on these results, as the Spanish school, which mandated stopping dead on a given point, probably influenced the stop in Chile. This required a horse to push his legs well under his body while elevating the forequarters to stop all forward impulse. This is still the objective in the Spanish Doma Vaquera reining competitions. There is little slide to the stop and, one can see more practicality in this end result. A long sliding stop may be pretty to watch, but it would not do much for you out on the range.

That may explain why Chileans have traditionally looked for such a sudden stop, but somewhere over time the maneuver lost the collection denoting a mouth that respects the bit. It is gratifying to see the Spaniards put such a stop on their horses while maintaining a vertical head posture. I suspect that this was the case in Chile at some point in time as well, but now it has lost ground that needs to be recuperated.



Figure II.128 Rudenda's portrait of Jorge Huneeus exemplifies the good mouths and soft hands that were commonplace in the training techniques of 19th century Chile.

So, I must conclude that the biting and collection process of the **Chilean Horse** has room for improvement. Most likely, at one time this was not the reality of the horsemanship of this country. After all, it has been recorded in history that, in the colonial days, this was revered as one of the areas of the Spanish colonies that had the highest caliber horsemen. Paintings and drawings from the mid 19th century by Gay, Rujendas and others, would indicate that during this period the desired collection was still very similar to its Spanish origins. Where and why the Chilean horseman lost this custom is an enigma that I would love to solve. Whatever the answer to this puzzle is, I suspect the reasons lie partly in the specificity of training for needs of a single competitive event. An added consideration is the fact that this sport required the traditional colonial Moorish bit to be changed into the Chilean beaded O-ring bit by eliminating the shanks of what was originally designed to be a leverage bit.

As recently as 1949, there was an understanding of the principles of collection shown in Joaquin Larraín's article (published in Chile) appreciating the motor function of performance horses. He clearly makes the point that before asking any maneuver of the horse, the rider should be assured that the mouth is never any higher than an imaginary horizontal line that

projects itself from the top of the hip and across the withers. Physiologically, we also know that a collected head position results in a rounded back that is better conformed to support the weight of a rider sitting down for a stop. On the contrary, the raised muzzle that is so commonly seen in Chilean pictures and crafts results in a dipped and weakened back that must confront the additional weight of the procedure.

What I can assure the reader is that the problem does not lie in any of the physiological limitations of the horse breed. The admirable collection that is seen at a walk is proof that the ability to flex is there. My own experience in retraining mature **Chilean Horses** that came to me with the stubborn habits of stopping with their nose jutting up and out has permitted me to show that stopping with very light rein pressure and desirable head positions is certainly feasible. The first young **Chilean Horse** sent to eventually compete in the USA, is being trained by the excellent reining trainer Craig Schmersal. With just three months of training he has obtained a wonderful head position, even as the horse is starting to develop a nice sliding stop. Perhaps maintaining this sensitivity in the heat of the corralero competition is a more challenging and a more time-consuming training endeavor than most wish to invest in. I trust that, with time, the huasos will rediscover the virtues of collection. In the future, the **Chilean Horse** will probably be trained for other disciplines that can find even more advantages of working under collection. I do think that both are possibilities in upcoming years, as I already see trends in that direction.



Figure II.129 – II.137

Nine photos that depict how the stop in Chilean “rienda” has evolved over the last forty years



Figure II.138

Chilean horses being trained for reining are showing a different style with more break in the poll and very light contact on the mouth.



Figure II.139



Figure II.140

Rational Versus Irrational Breaking and Training

All we see in the formal display of **Chilean Horse** equitation is the end result of the traditional training procedures implemented by the “amansadores” (trainers who break the horses and teach fundamentals) and “arregladores” (trainers who teach more advanced skills and finishing touches). Nonetheless, the public display of a finished horse will not give a clear picture of all that is involved in the training that obtained those results. Since those actions are also part of the overall equitation, I think it is important that we take a close look at the training methods, especially those that distinguish the huaso manner of doing things.

These training traditions in Chile have descended from origins that are a mixture of polished and rough procedures. There is no denying that, much like in the American west, the initial stages of the huaso heritage was not very sensitive with the equine partner. Mistakenly, it was thought that manhandling a horse into submission was the fastest road to obtain a trainable candidate. Without trying to justify this action, it merits explaining that the violent tendencies of most horse breaking throughout the Americas was a product of the fact that, in the grazing territories, horses and cattle expanded to uncountable numbers. This overproduction made their value insignificant. As a result, not much concern was given the risks involved in the choice of breaking tactics, and equally little worry was felt when mounts were given perilous tasks. I dare say little concern was even given to applying medical attention to grave infirmities or accidents. It simply was too easy to bring that life to an end and go out and round up another mount.



Figure II.141 Traditionally Chilean Horses were broken to ride with a lead pony

Throughout their past, the huasos have been desirous to maintain their clean and neat gentlemanly appearance. As a result, anything that can be done on horseback is preferable to

doing it on foot. This includes the training of the horse. Customarily, little groundwork was done in preparing to break and train **Chilean Horses**. In the early days, horses were lassoed and snubbed to a post much like was done in the rest of the Western Hemisphere. Like the gaucho tradition, the huasos often placed the saddle, halter and reins on a blindfolded horse that was later coupled to the cinch of an experienced mount ridden by a collaborating horseman. As the rider of the green horse whipped and spurred his bronc into a fury, the accompanying horseman broke into a gallop, forcing the untamed horse to follow him around a large corral until he “gave up the fight”. Actually, a variety of methods were used to start horses, but most lacked patience and understanding. There certainly was no empathy for the reactions of a horse being exposed to so many new things at once.

The modern huaso is much more interested in starting his horse with methods that minimize the horse’s fear. The more conscientious ones teach the horses to work on a long line with a surcingle and fixed reins first. Later, they are worked with saddle and loose stirrups, and eventually they are lunged fully tacked with a rider. For a good number of sessions thereafter, the young horses are accompanied by an experienced horse and rider that may start off leading the green individual and eventually simply serve as an adjacent example of the various gaits the inexperienced horse is asked to perform. Whether the methods are crude or refined, what has been a common ground in the tradition of Chile has been starting horses alongside experienced mounts.



Figure II.142 Starting Chilean Horses with “natural” horse training methods in round pens is becoming more popular.

More recently, the “natural” horse breaking methods have also penetrated the **Chilean Horse** repertoire. Better known in Chile as “Rational Breaking and Training”, this time-tested method is based on learning to communicate in equine body language. Gaining the horse’s trust results in a bond that permits the trainer to saddle, mount and ride at all three gaits in the initial session, if so desired.

It is interesting that the stock horse world has been more receptive to put to use these newly introduced methods than the more sophisticated Chilean **TB** race horse breeders of worldwide repute.

My experience in using natural colt starting methods on **Chilean Horses** has given me more reasons to admire the temperament of the breed. Even when the **Chilean Horse** receives little handling in its upbringing, and is often not handled with patience when being trimmed, vaccinated or wormed, I found that, as a whole, the breed responded incredibly well to the natural training approach. Even rogues with hardened temperaments due to harsh mistreatment in their past were quick to forget their unfortunate history and give me their full confidence when they realized my intentions were good.

The more finite “feeling” that is required by the trainer to connect with the horses in this natural manner will probably not make this the most common method for ranch hands to start horses. All the same, all the more recently introduced systems have definitely come about from the advantages of being more respectful of the horse’s feelings in the breaking process, and this should result in more trainable horses in the future.

As a general rule, tradition laid a solid and narrow road of training methods for the Chilean stock horse. It is my opinion that the horses either adapted to this system or went by the wayside. It is an accepted generality that certain bloodlines have not been appreciated because they were too difficult and rebellious to train. My observation has been that most of these

lineages are horses with a good deal of character and they did not succumb to the rough tactics of old. Ironically, they have persisted because they represent a stallion that was a gifted corralero. My contention is that many of these horses could have great potential in the rodeo if their capacity were harnessed with more patient and respectful treatment. Oftentimes, winning the heart of a horse with a strong personality turns his determination into a greater will to win.

Leather Bits, Ring Bits, Beaded Hobbles and More...

After gaining the respect of the horse, the huaso has historically been a patient and conscientious horse trainer. One of the many unique aspects of Chilean custom is the use of the "guatana". The guatana is the first bit that is used on the **Chilean Horse**. Typically, the breaking process is done in a leather halter with reins attached to the chin strap. But once the horse is docile and accepting of the rider, a long piece of sole leather about 1 cm (about 3/8 inch) in width is looped around the mouth several times. This is carefully fitted so that it lies over the tongue and rests at the corner of the mouth, where it is attached to a halter with the noseband about 20 cm (8 in.) from the tip of the nose. If the horse has a tendency to put his tongue over the guatana, a cloth tongue tie is used until he forgets the habit. This leather bit will be used until the horse is competent in all the procedures required of a Chilean stock horse. The idea is to protect the bars of the mouth and assure that in the learning process none of the sensitivity of the nerves beneath the gums is sacrificed.

If, at various stages of training, or with certain horse personalities, a stronger "bit" is required, twisted or braided leather guatanas can be used. Practical braided guatanas are also made from pantyhose, and these have a more consistent texture when in contact with the saliva. Both alternatives offer some rougher edges that the horse will be more responsive to. Another, even more effective, alternative is a horsehair guatana. This is made up of three or four strands of braided horsehair that, with use, will cut some hairs that expose tips that the horse's tongue is sensitive to. This is also an effective soft bit alternative for finished horses that have become a little hard-mouthed.

In the huaso tradition, the guatana is always the preferred way to start horses, and it is often considered a desirable working bit, in order to leave the metal bits for the competitions when the horse will need more control to temper his instinctive desire to pursue the cattle. The first metal bit that is used in the transition towards the traditional Chilean bit is a metal guatana or "riendero". This is another unique part of Chilean horsemanship, as this multi-jointed snaffle that can also have a metal chin strap with rollers (termed beaded hobble), is not a common tool in other equestrian disciplines.

Once the horse is well accustomed to the metal guatana with metal beaded hobble, a solid bar or curve bit with a beaded hobble is used. It is important to note that all Chilean bits that are used in the sport of rodeo have the metal beaded hobbles. Only a horse performing in a guatana (and very few perform in this manner) would not have metal seen below its chin.

Eventually, the huasos will turn to the most traditional of all bits, which is actually known as the "Chilean bit" in some equine circles of the world. This is a spade ring bit with a high port that attaches at its highest point to a metal ring that goes over the tongue and under the lower jaw. The lower part of the ring has seven to 11 rollers (or beads, if you will) incorporated into its design, in order to diminish the friction on the chin and underside of the mandible.

This same bit with long "S" shaped shanks is known as the Moorish bit ("Morisco" bit) and most likely this was the most common bit used in the colonial and early republican days of Chile. It is still in use in Argentina. As an early version of the leverage bits that were first used in the fourth century, the Moorish bit was designed to be used with a long shank, so the rider could gently touch the roof of the mouth with the port of the bit.

However, as in all the bits used in corralero horses, the shank of the contemporary version of the Chileno bit is very short or non-existent. This is most likely the result of taking the traditional bit of the colonial period and cutting off the shanks so it would serve the purposes of performing in the rodeo. As I have already mentioned, any excessive length in the shank would cause inadvertent abuse to the horse's mouth when holding his head over the steer. As a result, the traditional Chilean mouthpieces don't offer a lot of leverage with which a rider can more

effectively and sensitively ask for collection. This is an ironic reality because the Moorish bit, and all spade bits that succeeded it, were meant to be “a la jineta” bits that were handled by one lightly held hand.

In the early stages of training the **Chilean Horse**, it is very common to include a metal or leather cavesson. Loose cavessons are the most common means of connecting tie downs or standing martingales. The tighter cavessons restrict the horse from opening his mouth and thus make it harder to place the tongue over the bit or nervously chew on the bit. The cavesson is fitted so that it has a 1 cm (3/8th in.) clearance with the horse’s jaw. Very early on in the training of young horses, the huasos show an intense concern for trying to ensure that their horses work with a closed mouth that induces a proper tongue position under the bit.

The martingale is set so the distance between the throatlatch and the tie down is usually around 8 inches. The huasos depend a great deal on the tie downs during training and it’s their contention that it teaches proper head placement. This often induces the horse to support his nose on the cavesson and, as a result, the horse may tend to lean into the bit less.

Personally, I don’t like this idea under any circumstance, but less so in this breed since the **Chilean Horse** is never expected to carry his head low. Conformationally, the breed has a rather high neck-to-shoulder union, but with a very wide base of the neck. As I have already stated, there are justifications for a high head carriage in working the cattle in the Chilean Rodeo competitions. Therefore, there is rarely a reason to bring the heads down. If the tie down is meant for anything in this type of horse, it would be to try and inhibit the horse from raising the head too high, but generally this is a result of harsh hands and a poorly trained horse.

I feel this is much better done with the give-and-take of proper hand positions and asking for a degree of collection. If the horses are taught to flex at the poll, then they will not gain the leverage they can obtain by raising their head and straightening out their nose. As popular as the tie downs are in training, I have spoken to many old timers here in Chile and they agree the great majority of horses don’t need them. Effective hands that act and react are usually a better alternative to a fixed unalterable pressure.

Introducing the Spur in Training

In the initial stages of training, the horses are soon introduced to the large Chilean spur. Some huasos actually use spurs from the first time they get on the horse. In the old days, spurring until they stopped bucking was thought to be a manner of forcing them into submission. This has changed a great deal over time, but in the rural communities any sign of rebellion in a horse is usually met with the boisterous advice of “pícale, pícale!!” These words suggest that the rider should dig into his horse with his spurs.

Fortunately, nowadays the first rides are usually carried out without spurs. Thereafter, trainers may go to the normal Chilean spur or, in some cases, expose the horses to a smaller blunt spur first. Regardless, the introduction of the spur is slow and cautious. Nevertheless, we must understand that the position of the rider in the Chilean saddle obligates the trainers to start using the spur early on. With a rowel that varies from 3.5 to 7 inches in diameter, the Chilean spurs take some getting used to. Their use does have some advantages, since the better quality spurs have an appealing jingle, and after a while the sound of the spurs has a calming affect on the horse in motion.

Good riders start using the Chilean spurs by laying them parallel to the sides of the horse. This acts as a broad area of pressure that horses readily move away from because of the metallic feel, while not associating them with any particular type of pain. Immediately, the huaso begins to use the spur to initiate the desired body position. Since the “chair sitting” position in the saddle offers little leg contact with the ribs, the spur holder, long shaft and wide rowel serve as an extension of the leg that establishes proper contact with the horse. The huasos learn to be very sensitive with the use of their spurs, but part of the learning process is that the horse accepts the contact with the spur when it is utilized. Eventually, as the horse progresses to the more polished stages of training, the spur is used in a variety of other ways.

It is interesting to note that in training rienda horses, some trainers try to teach a conditioned response between spurring and tucking in the tail. A leather or cotton cord is looped

loosely around the base of the tail with a long piece of the cord going up to the rider's hand. As the spur is used, the rider simultaneously gives a pull on the leather cord, causing the horse to tuck in his tail. Eventually, all spur contact is associated with tucking in the tail rather than wringing it, which, as we have already mentioned, is a cause of disqualification.

Other trainers prefer to simply tie the end of the tailbone snugly with a cord that is extended between the hind legs and fixed with little slack to the bottom side of the cinch. Many trainers routinely use this system on any young horse that has the slightest tendency to wring his tail. I don't think this was what they had in mind when they wrote the regulations regarding tail twitching, but this is a typical example of how trainers get around such rules when confronted with a horse that does not have the traits that were deemed desirable for the breed. The fact is that in starting young horses, huasos have a great awareness of horses that play with their tongues or twitch their tails. As a general rule, they try to take corrective measures immediately to not risk these actions becoming undesirable habits.

External Lateral Neck Flexion

The corralero horse seems to always be working on a curve and, as a result, the trainers do emphasize a lot of circles in their training. First, horses are simply expected to pick up the correct lead and learn to gallop with cadence. The frontal position of the rider's legs makes the protruding stirrup on the lead side more noticeable to a **Chilean Horse**. The rider's leg that is opposite the lead maintains lateral pressure with the spur. Nevertheless, in initiating a lead change or canter departure, signaling with the stirrup on the lead side is preferred.

A particularity of **Chilean Horse** equitation in working circles (they refer to them as "troyas") is that there is a preference for the tip of the nose to be slightly angled towards the outside of the circle. The rulebook actually states that the head position should be straight, but a slight angle to the outside is also permissible. This implies that a slight head angle to the inside, like most equitation books would promote, is not desirable.

This goes back to the exterior lateral neck flexion that is required by the pinning horse when chasing the steer across the half-moon arena. In either direction, the pinning horse is on the lead that corresponds to the direction he is traveling in, while the horse's head is flexed back towards the steer on the opposite side of the lead. In fact, when most corralero horses are warming up in a large round pen prior to going to the half-moon arena, it is typical for them to gallop two-tracking around the perimeter of the corral, while periodically asking for exterior lateral neck flexion. This is such a common part of their training that it has undoubtedly influenced the desired head position that is sought in working circles.

I have heard rebuttals to this explanation that point out that the driving horse is run across the arena with his head in the opposite direction. It is true that the driving horse works the steer on the opposite side of the pinning horse. This horse and rider pair is responsible for the forward motion of the bovine. Initially in the run, they start right behind the hips, but in a fast moving animal they often work their way up to the ribs on the fence side of the bovine. When in this stance, they often use lateral neck flexion towards the steer, or, in other words, bending their neck in the opposite direction of the pinning horse. In essence, in this part of the run the pinning horse and the driving horse are facing each other on their respective sides working the steer as mirror image of one another. However, what is overlooked in this argument is that, since this horse is on the opposite side, it is also on the opposite lead. Thus, the neck flexion is still exterior neck flexion (bending the neck back to the side that is not on the lead of the gallop)

So, in reality, regardless of whether the horses are pushing the steer to the right or the left, and regardless of whether we are talking about the driving horse or the pinning horse, which may be on the exterior or interior side of the bovine, the bottom line is that the Chilean Horses that are competing in the half-moon arenas are always flexing their necks to the opposite side of their leading leg

Incomparable Lateral Dexterity

By now, it must be an accepted fact to the reader that the Chilean corralero horse has to be able to side-step and two-track with great ease. I would say that in most horse breeds this is a rather sophisticated exercise that is rarely taught to most representatives. If they are taught these

maneuvers, it is generally at a walk where they can practice response to leg pressure that can be handy in positioning horses to open gates, to place themselves next to other competitors, to help their riders reach for desired objects or get near a fence where the rider can dismount.

Some individuals will be taught to two-track at a trot as they half-pass their way across a diagonal of an arena while maintaining the horse's body parallel to the long sides of the field. In Spanish Doma Vaquera as well as upper levels of dressage, they demand shoulders-in, haunches-in, side passes and galloping a two-tracked diagonal between opposite ends of the arena. Once again, I make note that while I mention these more demanding maneuvers, there are few individuals in the horse world that are competent in performing them.

The amazing thing about these statements is that ALL Chilean corralero horses are extremely proficient at lateral movements, PLUS they are capable of doing something very few other horses are asked to do. They can flat-out run a two-track and a side-step. This is an amazing feat to watch, since it is not a natural gait in the horse. Anatomically, the horse is made to exert its effort in forward and backward movements. Ever since equids evolved from feeders of the underbrush to browsers and eventual grazers, they progressively lost physiological reinforcement for lateral movements. It would be safe to say that all horses are capable of side-stepping and two-tracking, but riding or training a **Chilean Horse** makes one realize that, in this breed, these movements come naturally.

Undoubtedly, the requirement for so much lateral execution is one of the reasons the **Chilean Horse** has short and rather upright pasterns. It is also the reason that breeders give so much importance to selecting a wide stance in the hind legs, since narrow builds are more prone to interference or give rise to potentially fatal accidental missteps. Loose shoulders are also a necessity, as this breed is asked to cross over their forelegs with ease and coordination. Still, aside from the natural attributes, there is also a great deal of emphasis on perfecting these movements in training.

While the **Chilean Horse** is learning the importance of the lateral gaits, it is also being taught the conventional commands of neck reining, turning on their haunches and, to some degree, spins. The "arregladores" (trainers) will stress the importance of doing everything that they are asked off their hind legs. Simple turns are always a product of rotating on the inner hind leg and a huaso would look down on anyone that asks his horse to turn with when the outside hind leg is moving forward.

Early on, the trainers look to teach the lateral gaits. Progressively, they increase the time and distance they are worked. A great deal of emphasis is given to displacing the hindquarters laterally with a light pressure of the side of the spur rowel. They are also trained to circle their forequarters around their hindquarters. With time, horses will laterally jog a circle around their haunches. Eventually horses are asked to canter laterally around contained haunches that make a small one-meter (about three-foot) diameter circle.

As the horses progress and they are perfectly coordinated at lateral work in the slower speeds, they are asked to move at faster paces. They are often asked to perform these tasks in heavy footing so that they have to work harder at them. They are also asked to execute lateral displacement facing in towards the middle of a wide circle so that their hind legs have to cover more ground than their forelegs. This exercise increases the workload of the hind legs, and when they are turned around to the conventional position of facing towards the outside of the circle, the result is a much speedier execution. Eventually, they are asked to carry out these maneuvers perpendicular to the side of a large steer while they maintain chest contact with it at all times. This is repeated over and over until the horse practically looks for the proper "postura" (perpendicular posture) on his own, every time he is put next to the steer.

This is an extremely important ability that has to be drilled home to the **Chilean Horse** if it wants to be effective in the half-moon arena. Other horsemen and horses may see a fenced arena and think about cantering figure eights with flying lead changes, or they may contemplate performing a shoulder-in down the fence line, or they may be tempted to fence their horses to a stop on both ends of the enclosure. But, when you put a huaso and a **Chilean Horse** in that situation, I can assure you that in no time flat they will be cantering perpendicular to the railing along the perimeter fence. Even in a simple warm up, it is truly an impressive feat to witness,

not to mention the thrill of seeing them do this all-out beside a fresh steer running with his tail curled in the air.



Figure II.143



Figure II.144



Figure II.145

A natural predisposition for fluid lateral dexterity is one of the strong aptitudes that distinguish the Chilean Horse breed.

Physically Immobilizing Cattle

The last unique skill that the **Chilean Horse** must master before going into the Chilean Rodeo competition is the pin. This skill is initiated by working alongside the “topero” (bumping lead steer). This is a gentle steer that has been taught to lead by a rope that is placed around its horns. It is later taught to move away independently from a driver holding a short cane, and eventually it will move on its own in circles at the desired speed and direction. The breed of preference is the **Holstein**, since they are very agile, energetic and possess a large angular frame. A good “topero” is a very valuable animal, since it is a key player in the training of the **Chilean Horses**. The good ones will walk, trot and gallop slightly ahead of the horse and rider that are driving them and not be fazed by the work of the corralero horse training at its side.

Much of their justification is simply to teach the proper posture to the developing horses. For many sessions, the horse is taught the proper posture at a walk in both directions. As they get better, the steer may be walked up a hill so that the horse will have to side-step up the gradient. In all sessions with the “topero”, the horse is asked to move around and face the steer head-on when finishing the exercise in any given direction.

This is practiced religiously, since all pins in the Chilean Rodeo end by changing the direction of the steer. Letting the steer get past you and out of the pinning wall will annul whatever you accomplished in the pin and add negative points to your score. So, regardless of how proficiently a pin was performed, it is very critical that the horses quickly wheel their hindquarters around to block the forward progress of the bovine.

As the horse proves to be adept at the slower speed, he is asked to maintain his posture at a trot and, eventually, at a canter. These sessions not only instill important habits related to the corralero sport, but they are also conditioning muscles that horses normally do not use in this manner. They also are fine-tuning the foot coordination that will be needed in working the younger steers at higher speeds. Luckily, this work is enjoyable to the horses, as they really look forward to these lessons with the “topero”.



Figure II.146 Working a bumping lead steer in an open field is one of the final phases in training a paired team of Chilean “corralero” (horse used in Chilean Rodeo) horses

Up to this point, the horse is simply shadowing the steer’s movement on either side. However, when the time comes to start teaching the pin, the “topero” will have to get pushed around some. Because of the value of the “topero”, he is never banged into with an impacting hit. However, the horse that is being taught to pin will first be asked to make contact and push the steer’s side with his chest. This is slow, progressive work, but it does not take long for the horse to get the idea that he likes pushing into the steer.

When he has clearly picked up the craving for this, he is moved alongside the steer at the various gaits that correspond to his stage of development. Then, at any given moment, he is asked to push into the steer. This control of pushing on command is very important, since, in the Chilean Rodeo, placing the pins on the various parts of the steer will determine the amount of points earned. Once the skill of maintaining proper posture and pushing the steer on command have been mastered, some strengthening exercises can be implemented by pushing a heavy adult steer for longer periods of time. This brings out the power in the hindquarters so that when the opportunity comes to pin, it can be executed with vigor and confidence.

The closer the horse in training comes to competing, the more the **Chilean Horses** are taught the cowhorse skills needed to work loose cattle. This is especially good practice for the horse and rider team that will eventually go into competition together. This can be done with any type of cattle, and simply requires driving them for a time, so that they tire enough to be able to start controlling the animals in the traditional driving and pinning positions. The horses can take turns doing each function. As the bovine is guided in the desired direction, the horses learn to maintain their corresponding placements while confronting the greater unpredictability of untrained cattle out in an open field. Many feel this is the ultimate preparatory scrimmage for the real thing inside the medialuna.

Eventually, this can be done inside a half-moon arena, where as many as four pins are asked per horse, per session. It’s advisable that in these practice sessions the cattle are pinned in a variety of spots, not just in the pinning zones. This stops the horses from out-guessing the riders when they approach the padded area. For the sake of performance in future competitions, it is important that the horse only make an effort to pin upon the rider’s command.

That Unbeatable Walk

Simple things, like a good energetic walk, are also highlighted in Chilean tradition. Most trainers work their horses in the morning until they start to break out in a light sweat, and will then ride them at a crisp walk for an hour or more in the afternoons. There is an old huaso saying that if you want to get the best possible walk out of your horse, you should walk him for at least 7 km (nearly 4.5 miles) every day. I don't know whether to credit the breed, the traditional afternoon walk or the validity of this old saying, but I have never seen a breed cover as much ground at a walk, with the enthusiasm that is typical in **Chilean Horses**.



Figure II.147 Out for the afternoon walk.

As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, I can certainly attest to the fact that the **Chilean Horse** is a great walker. I must admit that trying to keep up with that little dun gelding while on my much larger and more robust palomino **Quarter Horse** is one of the experiences that got me started on this breed. That was my first exposure to a **Chilean Horse**, and it would be the start of many personal experiences and observations that have done nothing but bring me great admiration for this energetic, hardy and athletic Chilean stock horse.

Conclusion

As you can see, there are many aspects that make the equitation of the **Chilean Horse** incredibly interesting. To start with, they have unique tack. This gives rise to a very original style of riding. The training that is geared towards the thrilling sport of Chilean Rodeo also introduces some principles that are not readily seen in other schools of equitation. Finally, there is the excitement of the Chilean Rodeo itself. It is not only a spectacular challenge to train and ride the participating horses, but moreover, it requires doing this in coordination with another team member, with whom you must learn to think as one. Like all good cow events, it also involves the added variable of how well the horses and riders are able to read the cattle.

Whether you simply want to be immersed in the enthrallment of learning all these new facets of horsemanship, or desire to eventually actively participate in some or all of the options this incredible breed has to offer, there is no denying that when seeing the **Chilean Horse** history in light of their selection, their purpose and their skills, are fascinating things to learn about.



Figure II.148 Heading for home.



Figure II.149 – II.150

Years of practice are needed to master the skills used in the complex sport of Chilean Rodeo.