Chapter II-2

The Road to the Half Moon

They were pastel colored mountains, sparsely covered with seasonal vegetation. The streaks of brown, red, orange, yellow and blue minerals were not visible from afar, but they were clearly appreciated at close range under the green shrubbery that hinted at the smells of periodic moisture. The rainy season meant occasional precipitation that at times came in continuous weeklong downpours. However, for the most part, the sunshine prevailed much more than overcast skies and the temperatures were always pleasant.

On this 18th century day, a string of horses kicked up dust while they arduously followed paths that seemed too narrow for a four-legged beast. With preciseness, they placed each hoof in depressions made by the consistency of previous travelers. These footholds were reassuring in light of the slippery consistency of the loose gravel above and below the trail. Their passing rolled pebbles off into the deep gorges below. These deep depressions that challenged a weak man's vertigo were carved out by swollen rivers that looked insignificant in the distant bottom.

As the vibrations of the earth announced the presence of outsiders, occasionally hares would run from the oncoming parade of mounted horsemen. A rider from the northern regions of the country mentioned that where he came from, it would be more common to see hairy chinchillas (*Abrocoma cinera)* in the river bottoms and incredibly quick vizcachas (*Lagidium viscacia*) darting between stones and den entrances on the elevated sides of the mountain. The latter are cat-sized desert highland rodents with long squirrel-like, fluffy tails that dart around with reaction times that almost seem unreal.

On the adjacent mountainsides, groups of homogeneously colored camelids were prancing away effortlessly to what they considered safe distances. The similarity of their markings to those of the American "pronghorn" antelope insinuated their wild status. Their multicolored and longer haired cousins, the llamas and alpacas, have long been domesticated by the Andean Native Americans. Occasionally, these guanacos would stop and look back through their huge, expressive eyes and tremble throughout their head and neck as they made the characteristic rumbling sounds that expressed their concerns to intruders. Then again, perhaps they were just laughing at the species that has been unable to domesticate them during the thousands of years they have shared the mountainous regions of the Andes.

A rider stopped to pick up an egg of the ñandu, the largest fowl in the Americas. This ground-laden bird is a slightly smaller version of the African ostrich. It is much harder to see in the wild, as its gray and light brown feathers blend incredibly well with the colors of the arid land it inhabits. The cracked and calloused fingers of this experienced trailblazer carefully brushed off the dust from the massive egg that filled the palm of his coarse hand. His parched mouth finally felt the satisfying sensation of saliva as he thought of tomorrow's omelet. One ñandu egg will effectively substitute for an entire dozen of the laying hen variety and it is just as tasty. Instantaneously, the association of ideas reminded him how much he also enjoyed the meat of the bird and before he knew it, he was reminiscing of the many times he chased these speedy runners on horseback and caught them with the help of his trusty "boleadoras".

This prehistoric weapon is usually made up of two fist-sized, spherical stones that are often wrapped in leather and contained by narrow footlong cords that, in turn, are attached to a main rope, the opposite end of which is grasped in the user's hand. A three-rock version also exists, where one stone at the end of the main rope is held in hand while twirling the other two to gain momentum before the throw. With the rocks on the outer perimeter of the circling loop, the entire instrument is swung around the cowboy's head and released in a calculated effort to reach and wrap around the bird's legs, immobilizing it until the hunters can get there in time for the kill.

Other riders commented on the tracks of mountain lions and gray or red foxes that sporadically crossed their trail. These were the only large mammalian predators in a country that was incredibly free of threatening wild animals. Looking at the surrounding environment, it would be easy to imagine rattlesnakes, coyotes, gila monsters and bears, but for the most part, the limited fauna that existed was not intimidating in nature.

The Round Up, a Yearly Festivity

The jagged hills were now dotted with countless horsemen who left their camp early to comb the countryside for cattle. Every foreman, cowboy and young aspiring cowboy in the entire region seemed to be in on this popular roundup. The cattle they were searching for were wild, long-horned Iberian stock that thrived and reproduced efficiently in just about any environment in the Western Hemisphere. Central Chile offered more than adequate conditions and, as a result, cattle numbers flourished.

Cattle had fast become the largest agricultural endeavor in the effort to develop this long and narrow strip of land nestled on the western edge of the Andes Mountains. In the early days when the Spaniards began their efforts to dominate the Native Americans, the South American aborigines preferred stealing horses instead of cattle. As a result, cattle numbers soared in this land with few natural enemies. Once this vast area south of the kingdom of Peru was amply conquered and mapped as far as the Bío Bío River, cattle breeding followed as the traditional manner in which the land was cleared for the colonial objectives to establish a more “civilized” way of life.

As was the custom in the Spanish regime, conquistadors and favored political friends were granted large tracts of land where an “encomienda” (royal grant) could be established under their domain. The size of these parcels of land can best be understood by the fact that the entire Chilean territory controlled by the Spaniards during the 17th century was divided into fewer than 30 “encomiendas”. This entitled the recipients to huge properties that were destined to export agricultural products and minerals to wherever the mother country most needed them. The privileged few were also assigned a proportional number of the conquered Native American population, which would become a source of free labor for their activities. It was the written intent of Spanish Royalty that these Native Americans receive a Catholic conversion and conscientious treatment with proper living conditions and nutrition. Too often, reality did not live up to the expectations.

As a result these large blocks of land started to form a dependent, working populace that required a logical list of goods and services that were essential for their subsistence. The small urban nucleus that formed the home base for the “encomienda” would later give rise to more diverse communities and, eventually, small towns and growing cities. Finding solutions for all these needs slowly set up a network of producers and craftsmen that would eventually meet the needs of a growing number of citizens in the colonies. It was a good plan that repeatedly showed how effectively it gave rise to development of colonies and eventually nations throughout the Americas.

In the 18th century, cattle were run over these large ranches without the restrictions of fences. Most of the time, the delimitations of these properties were natural boundaries, but where these did not exist, they generally went undefined. As the number of ranchers grew and cattle-owning employees or smaller independent sharecroppers also increased in numbers, it was common that the cattle of various owners intermingled in the extensively managed, uncontained landscape. This “Spanish” system of managing communal grazing lands was something the people from the Iberian Peninsula inherited from Visigoth invaders in their past.

The Spanish already had the positive experience of implementing a law in 1529 whereby they obligated all ranchers in New Spain (Mexico) to put registered brands on livestock. This proved an effective means of instilling order in large common grazing grounds. As a result, it was also determined by a law imposed by the Town Council of the city of Santiago that once a year a round up had to be held in order to identify the new generations of bovines. Initially, notches in the ears, slashes on the nose bones or hanging strips of brisket were used as indicators denoting to whom they belonged. Eventually, these brutal practices gave way to the use of registered brands that were applied with perhaps equal insensitivity in using red-hot irons that burnt in the identifying sign into the young bovine skins.

Ever since this decree of the 12th of February 1557, when cattle breeding depended on the yearly roundups to classify and identify the cattle, “cow punching” skills were required and appreciated in the Chilean territory. The Iberian cattle were treacherous by nature, and the carefree manner in which they were raised made them even more worthy of respect when a need

to be handled arose. The thick, thorn-infested brush of the lowlands with frequent river crossings, as well as the steep and rocky mountains that were always close by, created a need for a skilled and valiant horseman to sit astride a sure-footed, hardy, lightning-quick, athletic horse with a strong character.

These ancestors of the Chilean "huaso" still had not developed an exclusive identity. As is logical, their dress and customs were strongly influenced by both the Spanish and Native American influence that surrounded them. Boots and baggy imitations of the Spanish leggings were incorporated into the dress of the owners, foreman and mestizos bearing a higher percentage of Spanish blood. The leggings were made of inverted sleeves of sheep hides that were tied in place below the knees. A tall crowned hat with a short and fallen brim was also a result of the Spanish fashions of the time. It was common for ordinary laborers of the to time use a long and colorful kerchief under their hat that draped over the back of their neck and shoulders, much like the subjects painted in the famous masterpieces by Goya.

Noblemen, mestizos and Native Americans all used long-shanked spurs, with conservative diameter rowels possessing only five or six points. The lower social levels buckled their spurs to their bare or sandaled feet. The long ponchos, or "mantas de Castilla" as they are known in Chile, were a sign of the influence of the indigenous societies that had long mastered the art of weaving llama hair into colorful patterns. They effectively shielded the riders from harsh vegetation and inclement weather as well as offering a degree of privacy when "nature called" and the user had to get off his horse and squat in open range. Chileans of the period distinguished themselves as rarely going without their mantas. Usually, another thinner woven cloth was tied around the waist. In looking back at the paintings and drawing of the 18th and 19th century, one is hard-pressed to identify the Chilean "huaso" as we know them today. However, under these borrowed forms of distinctiveness, the love of horsemanship, stock horses and working cattle was creating a solid foundation for what was to come.

The Chilean cowboys were prone to want to do everything on horseback. As is the case with all good vaqueros, their mounts were their source of pride. Not only were they always desirous of showing off their horsemanship, but there was also a special meaning in pitting their skills against others to gain the desired respect of their peers. Nowhere were the talents of horse and rider tested more dramatically than working the perfidious lands of the roundup. For this reason, their best horses were prepared carefully to peak for that long-awaited week of the year.

As a result, these yearly round ups, or rodeos as they are called in Spanish, were always a source of great expectation. By law, the municipalities had to determine when these cattle gatherings could take place, but they were usually in the spring month of October (Southern Hemisphere seasons are opposite to those in the north), traditionally on St. Mark's Day. This cowboy gathering was generally four to seven days long. The normally home-bound Chilean cowboys uncharacteristically packed their bedrolls, warmest saddle blankets and saddle bags full of eating supplies with them, as they made this pilgrimage to a common spot where they would share in vivid daytime camaraderie and sleep under the stars.

"Rodeo" was the name given to the entire weeklong activity. However, the word specifically referred to the massive roundup of all livestock present on the premises. All these animals were driven to a predetermined place where provisional working corrals were built. The main objective was bringing in the cattle, but herds of horses, goats, sheep, donkeys and mules were also gathered, in an effort that all the livestock might have their ownership defined.

Mind you, these were the days when horseshoes were an unknown commodity for the working horses of Chile. Yet, these tough Chilean equines had to be sound enough to spend long days working the rocky mountainous terrain. They had to look for and drive out cattle in the most incredible places.

They pursued their tasks up and down sharp ravines and across overgrown plains that unexpectedly gave way to a multitude of swift rivers. They hovered on mountain ledges with deadly drop-offs, on occasion maneuvering uncooperative cattle that usually outweighed them with nothing but a braided leather rope tied to the right side of their cinch. When lassoed cattle tried to flee down steep hillsides, quick-witted dallies had to be made on the nearest tree or shrub to prevent being dragged or jerked off balance. When these same cattle were led downhill, the horses had to make daring plunges in an effort to forego being charged by the angry beast at

the end of their rope. Once arriving at the creek bottoms, they had to dart around sheltering rocks and trees until colleagues could rush in to lie on another rope that assured the needed control. In all these intrepid duties, the **Chilean Horse** had to show the unusual characteristics of having the level-headedness, valor and reflexes to confront these aggressive bovines under punishing and uncertain footing, at altitudes where oxygen was thin and where steep gradients multiplied the physical demands of the objectives.

Chilean cowboys ecstatically went about their business of bringing into the working pens every domestic hoofed animal that was grazing within the ranch's boundary. Those who did not get recognition in the roundup knew they would have many opportunities to prove their merit in the corrals. Slowly, the livestock were moved over long distances to reach the home base. Most outfits had 12 to 15 hectares (30 to 37 acres) of fenced area waiting to receive the incoming animals.

"Ramadas" or makeshift palm branch shelters were built for human refuge, should the unpredictable spring weather take a turn for the worse. Kitchens and roasting pits were set up in areas that could feed the hundreds of tired cowboys after a week's work. Barrels of red wine were stockpiled. Clay ovens were built so that the women could prepare the traditional foods of "empanadas" (pasties or turnovers made of beef, onion, raisin, hard boiled egg and black olive) and "cazuela" (a stew made of beef, potato, yam, pumpkin-like quash and rice). During the roundup, cowboys fended for themselves, part of the time sleeping away from the main camp. When the cattle were penned and the cutting began, so did the festivities that culminated on the last day after the duties were terminated. It must be remembered that this was not a routine ranch chore… this was THE event of the year!!

All the entering livestock were placed in the receiving corral known as "la enfriadera" (literally translated as "the cooler", since it probably cooled down the feisty spirit of incoming animals). In typical encomiendas, this required enough area to pen around 7,000 animals. Next to this largest corral was the "desparejo", or sorting pen, which was used to group animals in common categories. The third corral was used for receiving all non-bovine species. This could often mean up to 2,000 horses, mules and donkeys. The last corral on the opposite end of the receiving pen was the "corral de aparta", or cutting corral, which generally had the capacity to hold 150 to 200 head. Groups of this size would be driven from the enfriadera into this enclosure to be sorted out to the corresponding pens in between. In order to move the animals to their destinations, there was a long, fenced corridor that ran adjacent to all the corrals.

It is interesting to note the manner in which the desired animals were picked out of the cutting corral. A tight line of riders, all standing side by side, was formed across the cutting corral, leaving all the cattle to one side of the line. This live fence was called a "manga", or sleeve, and it closed in on all the animals until they were squeezed off to one end of the corral. The foreman and some key vaqueros would then wander into the herd and slowly cut out the desired individual from the group. The bovine was contained on one end of the corral adjacent to the live fence of riders. Here, a space was opened to let the bovine through, and immediately two riders from the live fence took over chasing the animal down the fence line out to the long corridor that was called "cancha de carreras", or raceway.

The herding rider prodded the cattle forward with a "garrocha" (pike or goad). This three meter (9.75 foot) long wooden lance with a pointed steel tip is still part of the Spanish vaquero's equipment for handling the aggressive fighting cattle breeds. Meanwhile, the pinning rider put his horse's neck over the loin of the bovine being moved. Galloping perpendicular to the flank of the steer, the pinning rider used his horse's chest to push the bovine as close as possible to the fence. Once properly positioned, both cowboys used the characteristic animated Chilean cow calls of "Juoi! Juoi! Juoi!" to drive the animal down the 200-meter (217 yard) corridor to whatever pen it was assigned to. In actuality, the modern day terminology of the "pinning" rider is not an appropriate description of the original "containing" riders that positioned their horses perpendicular to the bovine, because until 1860 there was really no consistent pinning involved in this process.

The first job was to cut out all the livestock that did not belong to the main ranch. Later, all ranch animals that required branding or castrating were also cut out in order to implement these procedures. At this time it was determined what calves had potential as herd sires and the

rest were castrated. From those castrated, the stronger calves were chosen for future oxen. The rest of the steers and the bottom end of the heifers were put in a group destined to be fattened for slaughter, while the daughters of the cows with the best udders were cut out as future milk cows for the ranch's needs.

In-Ranch Slaughter of Cattle Required More Skillful Horsemanship

After the close of the October rodeo, the slaughter of marketable cattle was carried out right on the premises of the ranch. Usually, this chore was initiated in the month of December, but well before the Christmas holidays. It must be understood that the development of the great cattle raising areas of the United States went to great efforts to drive cattle to railroad yards because in the eastern portion of the country there was an attractive market with a sizeable customer base. In South America, the cattle proliferated faster than the needs of the negligible human population. This reality made meat a cheap by-product of an industry that established non-perishable hides and tallow as the principal marketable goods.

Unfortunately, the addiction to working cattle on horseback made a game out of the slaughter of cattle as well. The huasos of the time would form two parallel lines of horses facing each other, perpendicular to the side of a designated pen. Consequently, these horsemen were a type of live chute coming out of the gate of one of the corrals where around 30 head of cattle were penned daily.

One by one, the doomed bovines were let out of the corral, whereupon they raced away to presumed "liberty" in the alley formed between the mounted horses. Immediately, a pair of cowboys assigned to downing that steer would accelerate quickly until one of them could extend an iron hock scythe incorporated at the end of his lance within reach of the fleeing steer. Helped by the hazer that contained the bovine to a straight run, the designated rider skillfully used this implement to cut the superficial flexor tendon above the steer's hock and cause it to frantically collapse to the ground between 50 and 150 meters into its flight to freedom.

The team in charge of butchering would then rush to the scene and commence the killing, skinning and collection of fat. The fat was often placed in a crude pit where circling horses trampled it during the midday heat in order to bind it all together. Then, chunks of bovine blubber were placed in an adobe press, making blocks of fat that weighed between seven and 11 arrobas (an arroba is an old Spanish unit of weight that was around 11.5 kilos or 25.3 lbs), or 80.5-126.5 kg (177.1-278.3 lbs.). These blocks were wrapped in cattle hides so they could be shipped and marketed. The unused portion of the slaughtered animals was left to rot in the sun and be picked over by vultures and other scavengers.

In order for the butchering to be scattered over a broad area, the line of horsemen could reposition themselves for each new steer, thus assuring runs would be in different directions. Although one can imagine a type of sadistic enjoyment from this strategy, one must also accept a crude sense of practicality during a time when meat was not marketable, and no infrastructure for slaughtering existed.

As cruel as the description of this scenario seems, it is probably less cruel than the ruthless carnage of the American bison in the western United States during the same era. Mounted professional buffalo hunters would only take the time to peel off the hides of their victims. Additionally, they cut off a small number of the more impressive horns and extracted enough tongues that could readily be marketed fresh. However, the majority of the resources that were such a crucial part of the lives of our Native North American brothers were left to rot in the open plains.

Worse yet was the policy of promoting "game hunters" to shoot thousands of American bison from the comforts of train windows. Disgustingly, no effort was made to salvage anything from the over 40 million buffalo that were slaughtered in a less than 60 year period. Whereas South American cattlemen were underutilizing the excess of their growing cattle numbers, the North American comparison was largely responsible for diminishing the wild bison herds to near extinction.

This standard procedure of slaughtering was used in Chile for more than 250 years. In 1820, it became more common for ranches to establish rudimentary slaughter areas that had

containing pens adjacent to a natural waterway. The driving and pinning skills of the vaqueros were used once again to cut and move the victims of the day to their corresponding pens. In these makeshift rural slaughter facilities, large copper kettles were used to melt down the fat over firewood pits. The liquid tallow was later poured into sheep hides, where the fat was left to cool and harden. Horsemen with long leather lariats would then drag the wasted portions of the carcasses into the nearby river.

Sorting Cattle in the Raceways Leads to Old Fashion Chilean Rodeo

Throughout the 19th century, there were various popular competitions that were used to determine the pushing power of horses. Etchings and paintings of the time depict the popularity of the sport of "topeando" and "pechando". In both these contests, horses pitted their brute strength in being able to overpower the competitor by pushing after direct contact was established. Like two linemen on the American football field, they leaned on each other until the stronger of the two clearly caused his opponent to back away. Some of these contests challenged the ability to push with the chest, while others had horses leaning into each other's shoulder blades with the use of lateral force. So popular were these "shouldering" challenges that, to a degree, it proved harmful to the development of the **Chilean Horse**. Due to these competitions, for a while, many Chileans started to look favorably at bigger and heavier equine specimens.

What kept these popular events in proper perspective was the initiative between 1860 and 1869 to incorporate the horse's power into the rodeo skills where speed, nimbleness and "cow savvy" must complement potential for success. The first manner in which this was carried out was eliminating the garrocha, or lance, from the driving rider. This meant that the rider now could only depend on his mount to push the bovine in the desired direction. The second factor was incorporating the idea of actually pinning the animal to a stop, since in practice many cowboys implemented this procedure when nearing the end of the "raceway", where they had to detain the bovine to enter a given corral.

Initially, the idea of pinning imitated the procedure that was carried out in the real life ranch rodeos. Here, it was common that tired cattle were often stopped by moving up from the traditional flank position and pinning them between the shoulder blade and the head. This was an effective means of stopping cattle that were being driven into specific "chiqueros", or classification pens, after running down the ranch raceway.

However, in competitive events where fresh cattle were being worked, this had disastrous results. At the time, most Chilean cattle were horned, and this meant that hefty contact in this part of the cattle's anatomy either risked breaking cattle horns or getting horses gored. This was aggravated even more when the straight fence line was changed to the curved half moon shape.

The viewer value of circular arenas was already well tested in the equine activities of thrashing wheat and in the paired equestrian games that had become part of the Chilean tradition. Some riders had possibly been tempted to try out their pinning skills in such facilities whenever they were available. Whatever the initial catalyst was, the idea of a grandiosely large round arena was quickly popularized as the center stage for the Chilean Rodeo activity.

New Rules and Infrastructure Create a More Spectator-Oriented Sport of Rodeo

For practical purposes, an eye-shaped retaining corral known as the "apiñadero" was placed inside the ring in order to hold the cattle needed for the competition. Originally, the "apiñadero" was defined by the traditional custom of placing horses and riders side by side, in order to make a "live fence". With time, a stationary fence took its place, but riders continued to control the inward and outward flow at the openings on both ends. The remainder of the circular enclosure left for the main event took on the crescent shape that was responsible for receiving the name of "medialuna", or half moon, that has become synonymous with the Chilean Rodeo sport.

The new curved fence line offered the pinning rider a more convenient angle with which to pin the bovine. Consequently, more and more huasos started letting the cattle drift off the fence line, while also leaving some space between their horse and the cow. When the sudden

charge was required of the stock horse, it made a powerful frontal impact that abruptly detained forward progress of the steer. Unfortunately, these violent crashes also had more traumatic repercussions on all participants.

As a result, in 1869, a variety of rules were made to reduce the mistreatment of the livestock, while making it more challenging to properly carry out the pins. These rules remained unchanged until 1920. Their creation permitted the general public to see a representative example of ranch rodeo activities while showing sensitivity for the welfare of the animals and setting higher standards of equestrian competency.

The most important manner in which this was carried out was in demanding that all horses approaching the pinning areas must have constant contact with the cow. Just as you are limited in the pain you can inflict in trying to punch a person's arm when your fist is required to always be in touch with the arm, the cattle also benefited by not permitting horses to charge into the act of pinning. Needless to say, maintaining this proximity with a side-stepping horse leaning on cattle running at full tilt was a severe test for horse and rider.

The other rule that also made the pinning much more technical was stipulating that the pinning must be done in a specific area of the fence. No longer could the riders simply wait for the appropriate moment that facilitated making their move to pin the cattle. Now, they had to coordinate their efforts to coincide with pinning in a particular area, and this required much more positioning, sensitive horse-rider communication and teamwork between the two members of the "corralero" team.

Lastly, it was determined that working the cattle in the ranch rodeos was never a specialized one-man job. It was felt that all participants had to master all facets of the activity. For this reason, it was agreed that the cattle would now have to be pinned in two different areas, thus requiring that both riders had to alternate in the driving and pinning positions.

Little by little, riders began to realize that it was very difficult to pin the cattle at the flank position, where the containing riders had traditionally placed themselves. As a result, a technique was evolved whereby the horses and riders drew near the sides of the running bovines and established contact in front of the shoulder blade. Here, it was more certain that the thrust into the neck or shoulder blade would permit pinning the bovine. Some more gallant competitors waited until the last instant in front of the pinning area to let the cow slip by far enough forward to implement the more prestigious pins farther back in the cow's anatomy. Either way, what became clear was how critical it was to be able to position the horse at a desired point, perpendicular to the bovine.

As important as all the rule changes were in defining the newer version of this rural equine pastime, nothing had a greater impact on the sport and the horses that were bred to excel in it as the new shape that identified the platform for Chilean Rodeo activities. The creation of the new medialuna (half-moon arena) configuration made the sport of Chilean Rodeo a much more acceptable event for spectators. With the round event arena and the requirement to pin in both the right and left halves of the curved raceway, suddenly the action was very visible to all the viewers sitting in the surrounding bleachers. The impact of those changes at that time in history became a crucial part of the background of the Chilean stock horse. Had it not been for the keen interest that arose for the sport of Chilean Rodeo after the changes of 1860, the genealogy of the native **Chilean Horse** may have been lost forever. To understand this fully, we have to touch on details behind some serious threats that moved stealthily on the Chilean stock horse in the middle of the 19th century.

Three Activities Justified Chilean Horses until the End of the 19th Century

It is important to note that, up until this period in time, the stability of the **Chilean Horse** was based on three important realities. As we have already talked about in depth, this was a horse that was used to work cattle from the early beginnings of the conquest of the Chilean territory. So, as the cattle industry expanded by leaps and bounds and rapidly became the number one agricultural enterprise, the **Chilean Horse** also dug in a firm foothold on the equine demands of the country.

However, we cannot forget that the horse first stepped on Chilean soil because of the needs of conquering soldiers. The horses served as an efficient tool for the military forces to discover, conquer and develop the lands west of the Andes. For the 346-year duration (1536-1882) of the Araucan War, warhorses were a valued asset of both the Spanish and Chilean forces, as well as the insurmountable Mapuches who fought relentlessly to hold on to their land south of the Bío Bío River.

While the conflict with the Native Americans was still more than 70 years from subsiding, the presence of the **Chilean Horse** was simultaneously needed on both sides of the battlefields that struggled with the idea of an independent Republic of Chile. Between 1810 and 1818, power struggles between the Spanish and the Chilean revolutionaries brought on clashes between the respective cavalries. Between 1810 and 1822, horses were key components in the Death War that pitted military forces of the new Republic against the mountainous guerilla warfare of stubborn Spanish sympathizers. Other civil uprisings had to be crushed in the wars of 1829-1830, 1850-1851 and 1859.

From 1837 until 1839, the *War Against the Confederation of Peru and Bolivia* would be a precursor for the more important War of the Pacific. Between 1879 and 1883, the **Chilean Horse** was heralded by European military leaders, who observed the remarkable pace of the Chilean cavalry in the War of the Pacific. The toughness, stamina and easy-keeping attributes of the **Chilean Horse** were a crucial reason for the success the Chilean Army in defeating the Bolivian army that controlled Antofagasta. Even more impressive was their performance against the Peruvian army, from whom they took Iquique, Arica and Tacna. In what is undoubtedly some of the most inhospitable land in the world, the **Chilean Horses** were essential in driving the Peruvians all the way back to Lima, where the Chileans even gained control over their enemy's capital.

Lastly, the short-lived Revolution of 1891 brought the **Chilean Horse** back to notable battles in the arid lands of the north. This confrontation between the backers of the president and an opposing congress was the last military conflict of the war-riddled 19th century.

The **Chilean Horse** was a proven warhorse that had the agility, courage and hardiness to withstand the rigors of war in any kind of terrain. They were asked to perform in the driest deserts of the world in northern Chile, as well as the cold, windy and wet torrential environments in the southern sectors of Chile's central coastline. They had to endure the intense heat of sandy deserts that reflected the sun's heat in environments where shade was non-existent. Water and forage were extremely scarce commodities that were only seen in the quebradas (desert valleys formed by melted snow flowing down from the mountains), where diminutive streams nurtured thin lines of vegetation. The distance of deep, sandy, barren lands that separated these quebradas generally fluctuated from 30-70 km (19-44 miles). These same deserts provided a 40-degree centigrade (104-degre farenheit) drop in nighttime temperatures.

Still, those cool desert nights hardly compared with the bitter colds and "brisket disease" (altitude sickness) endured when marching at above 4,000 m (13,000 ft.) a.s.l. in the Andes Mountains.

Rocky mountain passes were frequently the order of the day, and the only vegetation available in the altiplanos were the tough native *Festuca sp.* bunch grasses that only camelids seemed to thrive on.

All efforts to improve upon the Chilean cavalry horse simply reconfirmed that no other breed could endure the extreme conditions seen in this country. So revered was the Chilean warhorse that a good number were exported to South Africa for the Boer Wars from 1899 to 1902, despite all the difficulties of transatlantic transport.

The last justification for the thriving population of **Chilean Horses** in the mid 1800's was the fact that this territory, colony and young country had a very irregular topography. The Andes Mountains are by far the tallest in the Western Hemisphere. In spite of the fact that the tallest crest of the Andes Mountains is in Argentina, Chile's tallest spot, the Ojo del Salado Peak, is an impressive 6,908 m (22,451 ft) a.s.l.

In fact, at least 16 peaks in Chile surpass 6,000 m (19,500 ft) a.s.l. Unlike the American Rockies, the Andes Mountains have few trees and limited foliage above 2,000 m (6,500 ft.) a.s.l. These mountains are stony and irregular, with steep gradients and incredible drops in

altitude that make their transit extremely risky. Perhaps what best attests to the inconveniences of the Chilean topography is the fact that 80 percent of the country is mountainous!!

On the other side of the central valley that flows out from the base of these famous mountains, the Coastal Mountain Range parallels the Andean highlands. In much of the coastline, these mountains drop off abruptly into the Pacific Ocean. Although considered a low altitude mountain chain in comparison to the Andes, these mountains can reach nearly 2,400 m (7,800 ft.) a.s.l. in places and the four highest peaks stand above 2,000 m (6,500 ft) a.s.l. The fertile central valley in between the Andes Mountains and the Coastal Mountain Range, where most of the country's development has taken place, is full of transversal mountains that make their way east to west across the plains that only comprise 20 percent of the Chilean terrain.

The point is that it would be a gross understatement to say that Chile is a country that challenges road construction. You are either crossing the driest desert in the world, or endlessly making your way over mountains and across valleys with innumerable rivers that flow down from the eternal snows in the altitudes. Moreover, this only describes that passable part of the country, as even with today's technology, around one-tenth of the country's coastline is not accessible by land due to eternal ice fields, glaciers, fjiords or archipelagos.

For more than 350 years, the country had to be transited on horseback, as the roads were not suited to any delicately wheeled carriages. As a result, the **Chilean Horse** developed the reputation of being an extremely sure-footed mountain horse with the fortitude to cover long distances while going unshod and maintaining its weight on a minimal amount of feed.

Chile's geographical isolation was helpful in developing a specific type of horse that met all the principal needs of the country. In fact, the early colonial days had a greater diversity of horse types. The once-prevalent smooth-riding ambling horses and high-stepping parade horses slowly gave way to a preponderance of the **jaca** stock horse type that met the most important needs of the country. After the last of the very rare importations of horses from Spain in the early 1700's, for more than 250 years there was little influence from foreign breeds in **Chilean Horse** breeding programs. Moreover, the country had such a prestigious equine reputation that the limited transfer of equine breeding stock was comprised of exported **Chilean Horses**. The only significant imports over that period of time were cheap warhorses from Argentina that had little or no impact on Chile's breeding programs.

So it's clear that, for nearly 300 years, the **Chilean Horse** had assured its total dominance of Chile's equine needs due to its aptitudes as a stock horse, warhorse and effective means of transportation for the topography of the region. Even in the first half of the 19th century, the last glorious days of the mass numbers of **Chilean Horses** were assured due to the peak in numbers of large ranch rodeos. However, the breed's saving grace lay in the fact that the young spectator sport of rodeo was beginning to bud as a planned event in small regional get togethers that pitted the skills of teams of horses and riders.

The Rodeo, the Breed Registry and the Breeder Organization Rescue the Chilean Horse

In 1838, a very significant event took place for the benefit of Chilean agriculture in general, and for the Chilean stock horse more specifically. The National Society of Agriculture was created in order to promote technological advances in the field of agriculture. In 1856, this institution was the mastermind of the idea of organizing a national livestock exposition in the capital city of Santiago. This proposal was crucial in giving the ranchers a prestigious public arena where they could compete with their horses. Since this stock show would combine individual and progeny halter classes with reining competitions and culminated in a grand rodeo, this would be the first event that initiated the idea that the sport of Chilean Rodeo could be implemented in a larger scale.

Unfortunately, the idea was not put into practice until 1869, when, as I shall soon point out, the tide started turning for the **Chilean Horse** for a variety of reasons. Until 1875, this popular fair was held on the property of the Southern Train Company. Later, it was moved to the "Quinta Normal" which will always be remembered as the home of great stock shows until its closing in 1962. Ever since, this annual exhibition and contest has been held in the fairgrounds of the FISA (Fibras Industriales Chile, S.A.) on the outskirts of Santiago.

During the latter half of the 19th century, an agricultural revolution in the nation of Chile was responsible for major changes in the main objectives for owning horses. Irrigation networks that flowed down from the Andes Mountains slowly reached the fertile valleys that had been the haven of beef cattle production. Wheat became a marketable international commodity and the returns per area in production made the conversion of pastures into wheat fields a logical decision.

In 1869, the increased acreage in wheat justified the incorporation of mechanical thrashing machines. By 1889, large and famous establishments like Hacienda Aculeo were celebrating the last horse-powered thrashing, ending a long and colorful tradition that became an activity of the past. This drastically cut the interest in keeping mares that had been selected for this task. Their elimination, in turn, seriously curtailed a yearly crop of quality **Chilean Horses**.

The reduced need for stock horses diminished the importance of the **Chilean Horse**, and there was a sudden surge in popularity for introducing a variety of established registered breeds that were more fashionable in other much-imitated sectors of the world. The improvement in roads and the expansion of urban areas also caused a greater demand for coach horses. This called for a larger-sized horse, and thus the biggest and most impressive **Chilean Horses** were castrated and assigned lives under harness.

In 1845, the first horses with **Thoroughbred** blood were introduced into the country from Australia. By 1850, purebred **Thoroughbreds** were being imported and this gave way to the enthusiasm for **Thoroughbred** flat racing in Chile. In that same year, the first **Percheron** horses were introduced to Chile and, just three years later, there were imports of **Cleveland Bays, Clydesdales** and **Suffolk Punches**. In 1863, the first purebred **Arab** stud was imported and the resulting sons were used extensively throughout Chile. In 1868, the **Standardbred** breed was added to the new purebred equines being introduced to Chile and in 1870, the **American Saddlebred Horse** was also imported. In 1872, the first **Norfolk Trotter** was introduced. The pattern was set for a large influx of continued equine importation, and the fear of everything that had to be contemplated to import horses from faraway lands was lost.

The end of the Pacific War and the short-lived Revolution of 1891 brought with it one of the first prolonged peaceful periods with a curtailed need for equines in the military. Under so few requests for performing outside the garrison, the Chilean military gave way to the pressure of its peers in the more developed countries of Europe that were concentrating on laurels related to jumping and three-day events. The absence of a war in the demanding topography of Chile made it easier to criticize the conformation and size of the native **Chilean Horses**. Suddenly, they were deemed as being unsuitable for the minimum military standards, in spite of the historical merits the **Chilean Horse** had obtained over the centuries.

Crossbreeding became increasingly popular and the standards imposed by military officials and other well-intended members of the government proved tremendously disadvantageous to the "purebred" **Chilean Horse**. As early as 1882, there were pressures to obligate the "**Chilenos**" to compete with a multitude of crossbreds that were rapidly propagating themselves across the country. Moreover, the regulations for agricultural fairs began stipulating minimum heights for stallions and mares that made it extremely difficult for the majority of the typical Chilean stock horses to even contemplate competing.

The Chilean government made multiple efforts to promote a greater interest in the national breed that was increasingly being overlooked and underestimated due to the enthusiasm for newly imported ones. In 1892, an important step was taken in the history of the **Chilean Horse**, as the Sociedad Nacional de Agricultura (SNA), or National Society of Agriculture, approved the first purebred registry of a native breed in South America.

In a meeting of the SNA held on the 15th of December 1890, Don Raimundo Valdez proposed the formation of a genealogical registry for the "pura raza del país" (purebreds of the country), in order to foment the **Chilean Horse** breed by maintaining its type. The idea was to try and further improve the breed through selection, while eliminating the possibility of losing this important genealogy by succumbing to the temptations to crossbreed.

Initially, this proposal was defeated, but in the next gathering of the Board of Directors of the SNA, just one week later, Don Raimundo Valdez insisted once again. This time, he obtained an overwhelming victory of eight votes in favor and four against. By August 20th 1893, the first

Official Bulletin was published with the bylaws that concerned the registry of the **Chilean Horse** breed.

In the opinion of the famed historian and **Chilean Horse** breeder Fransico Antonio Encina, at this time there were scarcely 15 stallions and around 300 to 400 broodmares located in Chile that could be considered of pure Iberian origin. Moreover, the stallions first accepted by the SNA registry represented a mere 13 families of **Chilean Horses** throughout the country. Mr. Encina attributed this sad scenario to the arrival of the thrashng machines, the smaller properties caused by the agrarian reform, the introduction of the railroad, the arrival of specialized breeds of horses, the popularity of the automobile and the growing use of the tractor. However, in time, the genetic base would be broadened by the appearance of more purebred stock in the hidden valleys that abound in the Chilean topography.

This critical reality gave way to an important milestone in the **Chilean Horse** breed, as various influential breeders such as Diego Vial Guzman, Tobías Labbé, Francisco A. Encina, Alberto Correa V. and José and Miguel Letelier decided to aggressively salvage the valuable geneaology of horses that were at risk of being discarded or underutilized. In 1902, ***Angamos I*** was purchased for Hacienda Aculeo. In 1905, the influence of these key players helped bring about the formation of a Livestock Section of the SNA. In 1906, there was a dispersal sale organized that offered the best mares from the García Huidobro broodmare band in El Principal. That same year, a public auction at the Tattersalls featured Miguel Campino´s 34 daughters of the great ***Guante II***, who had passed away the previous year. Incredibly, at that same auction, stallions such as ***Petizo*** and ***Gacho*** also went through the ring into the hands of serious breeders with a clear goal to revitalize this breed to its greatest potential.

In 1910, the SNA formed a sub section of the Livestock division for **Chilean Horse** breeders, and 40 names were quickly registered as founders of this organization. The following year, the breeders united their views to establish clear manners in which they could promote the **Chilean Horse.** Although an independent breeder's association would not formed for another 35 years, it must be understood that the progressive leadership of the SNA was long thought of as the backbone of the **Chilean Horse** breed. All efforts for the improvement of the breed were channeled through this governmental institution, which played a crucial role in unifying criteria alongside the most influential breeders of Chile. Historical facts leave no doubt that **Chilean Horse** breeders have had formal representation since 1910.

Until 1911, there were two registries that could facilitate the paperwork proving the registry of **Chilean Horses**. The original one was the breed-specific, *Registry for Chilean Horse Breeding Stock*, and the second was a more general group that was called *The Promoter of Horse Breeds,* which in 1911 was named an official section of the SNA. In 1912, the two entities became one, and all the **Chilean Horses** that were registered under the later group received close scrutiny to assure they coincided with the data from the first official **Chilean Horse** breed registry.

Another committee was formed, and it was asked to perform a visual inspection of all horses registered. This six-man team eliminated 95 horses that did not meet the type standards of the breed. In the coming year, they did open the registry once again, as there were many ranchers desirous of now joining the growing number of horses that were being registered. On June 3rd 1914, the registry was considered closed (meaning all new registries had to be a product of registered parents of that breed).

However, in 1916, it was opened once again, as there was a petition that showed that a great number of proven purebred horses went unregistered in the region of Chillán. For a good many years, new horses were considered eligible for registry if they could show proof of their genealogy, if they passed a visual inspection of type and met the requirements of the institution of registry. In 1930, the registry was considered closed for stallions. That same year, three well-respected inspectors were assigned to unify the criterion of breed type with which new applicants would be scrutinized.

In 1934, there were three different zones of northern Chile where once again it was determined there were some focal areas with established purebred strains that needed to be inspected for registry. As these previously unknown sources of purebred representatives disclosed themselves, it became clear that purebred numbers had not dwindled as low as

Francisco Encina had once thought. After the commissions visited these areas, the registry was closed once and for all.

In this last decade of partially open registry, some important events took place. In 1921, a committee was formed to establish the first Breed Standard of a stock horse breed. So thorough was this work that only very slight changes were made in 1977, which was the only time the document was amended. Moreover, due to the detailed account of time-proven characteristics of a good cowhorse, many other stock horse associations have based their breed standards on this original document formulated by founding fathers of the **Chilean Horse** breed.

In 1930, an admirable effort was made to put these traits in to three-dimensional forms when Federico Casas Basterrica made a 1:4 scale sculpture with the guidance of Francisco Encina, Miguel Letelier, Tobías Labbé and Manuel Cerda. Although the angles and dimensions were made in close conjunction with the halter Champion ***Azahar I***, the artist was advised to make some alterations that were hoped to be improved goals for breeders. Personally, I think the lighter and more refined head of the finished product took away much of the type that is associated with the breed and, as a result, this statue has more resemblance to a **Quarter Horse** than a **Chilean Horse**. Nonetheless, it served a useful purpose of physically representing a breed standard that through words could be envisioned in a variety of manners. A more recent effort to depict the Breed Standard in sculptured form was made in 2002 by Mr. Carlos Segura who was directed by the premier halter horse judge Eduardo Ponte F. This much-improved version has the added advantage of depicting both male and female representatives of the breed.

The fact that the **Chilean Horse** breed has now been organized into a well-run purebred breed organization has done a great deal to turn the tide of once-diminishing numbers. If the registry has given the breed the deserved dignity of purebred status, there is no doubt whatsoever that the sport of the rodeo has given it the most important purpose for its existence and the greatest motivation for its continual growth in numbers after the dangerously low numbers at the end of the 19th century.

It is worth pointing out that, until 1850, the Chilean stock horse had been practically the only type of riding horse available to the horsemen of Chile. Obviously, the inventory of potential ancestors of the purebred **Chilean Horse** was greater then than they have been ever since. However, if the registration process showed anything, it was the fact that there were many breeders in the country who never wavered from their fidelity to the traits that had defined this breed over the past 350 years. In fact, the 43 years that tended the bait of crossbreeding prior to the formal recognition of purebred **Chilean Horses** served to identify the most resolute breeding establishments. Those who maintained the purity of their **Chilean Horse** strains were totally convinced of the virtues of this native breed. Undoubtedly, the main criteria that assured their unconditional support to the national stock horse came about through this breed's affinity for the Chilean Rodeo.

As solid a campaigner as the **Chilean Horse** had been in transporting Chilean citizens throughout the country or carrying its soldiers to war, the subject of whether other breeds were better suited for these functions has been, is, and always will be, heavily debated. Regardless of what is more reasonable, factors such as height, aesthetic attributes and pressure to conform to the norms of the rest of the world played an important part in the analysis. However, what leaves little room for argument is the question of whether there is a better breed suited for the sport of Chilean Rodeo. The unanimous and definitive "NO" to this question is the only real reason the world can still count on the many other qualities this breed has to offer.

Although there is no doubt that the faithful **Chilean Horse** breeders were convinced of its elite stock horse capacity in general, no viable comparisons were permitted when these horses were required to work in the raceways of the ranch rodeos or in the public settings of the newly popularized spectator sport of Chilean Rodeo. The agility for lateral movement and the temperament required for pinning were two attributes that were not found in anywhere near the same degree in other imported breeds. In essence, it was this fact that assured the purity of the breed during the nearly five decades of crossbreeding popularity.

It would seem that this alone assured the survival of the **Chilean Horse** to some degree. Having said this, we must remember that this very rural activity began to take on a public atmosphere at a time when Chile was becoming more interested in the urban societies of the

foreign industrial powers. The turn of the century brought with it a thriving economy in Punta Arenas, where all ships looking to pass from the Atlantic to the Pacific were obliged to dock. This coincided with the popularity of westward expansion in North America, as well as the various fevers brought on by the cries of gold rushes.

The boom of the nitrate industry in the northern end of the country made various ports popular layovers for ships with passengers who could access the latest European fashions, theater presentations and the finest brands of liquor and tobacco. The technological, mercantile and cultural aspects of the large cities in Europe and the eastern coast of North America were quickly becoming a part of Chilean society. In part, this mentality is what made the idea of importing foreign breeds of horses so popular. Had the image of the rodeo been maintained as an exhibition of lowly cow punching skills, surely the future for the **Chilean Horse** would have been constrained.

The identity of the Chilean cowboy slowly evolved into the huaso, the descriptive term that now clearly depicts his personality, his attire and his fervent love for the horses he fanatically uses in the Chilean Rodeo. In the 18th century, the words "guaso" and "huaso" are only mentioned briefly in literature and not always referring to horsemen of Chilean origins. Similarly, at the time, the words "gauderio" and "gaucho", which may have similar origins, were not of common usage in Argentina. Not until the 19th century are the names "huaso" and "gaucho" clearly stipulated to refer to the respective cowboys of Chile and Argentina. Moreover, the term "huaso" initially had a somewhat negative connotation, as it referred to an uneducated and obnoxious individual, perhaps being influenced by the true meaning of the Andalusian term "guasa" or "guasón". At any rate, the early use of the term "huaso" really only defined a Chilean cowboy whose distinguishing characteristic was the permanent use of a poncho.

Not until the formation of the sporting event of Chilean Rodeo was formalized, was a more gentlemanly implication attached to the word "huaso". Along with the key rule changes that took place upon the turn of the century, common attire started to identify the participants of the Chilean Rodeo sport. The Cordoba style hat replaced a multitude of regional headgear that had been used by horsemen in the 19th century.

By 1920, there was a desire and a need to regulate the Chilean Rodeo. Specific dimensions were stipulated for the official medialunas. Signal flags had to be placed at the beginning and end of the 8 m (26 ft) woven willow pinning zone. A detailed point system was created for adding and deducting points according to specific desired and undesired actions in the medialuna. One point was still being awarded for pins on the neck. One, or preferably three, judges were required for official rodeos. No more than 30 and no less than 10 head of cattle could be maintained in the "apiñadero", where contestants had to cut out the animal of their choice in order to start their runs. The number of intended pins per cow was raised to three, and team members had to alternate in the driving and pinning positions.

All these and more changes indicated that the Chilean Rodeo was now making the transition from a long-standing rural tradition to a formal sporting ceremony. This also put demands on the standardized tack and attire for horse and rider. The chosen stereotype was now becoming the well-recognized identity of the huaso, the sport and the nation. The fact that this polished image of quality clothing and tack now represented a more prestigious, dashing, courteous, self confident and proud individual did a great deal to motivate greater participation in a sport that also was attracting a larger number of spectators. As the events got more public attention, no longer was it just the ranch hands that aspired to compete in the half-moon arenas. Owners and their family members competed on equal terms with hired hands in an environment of camaraderie that superseded social, economic and educational differences.

On the 10th of October 1946, another huge step was taken in the history of the **Chilean Horse** breed. *The Horse Breeders Association* (Asociación de Criadores de Caballares) was created by a group of progressive breeders that desired to promote the **Chilean Horse** breed. Working alongside the SNA, they recommended good breeding practices that would further improve the breed. They would also take it upon themselves to endorse the breed to the interested parties within and beyond the boundaries of Chile. It was clear that the Breeders Association realized the need to maintain strong ties with the sport of Chilean Rodeo.

The Breeders Association's first major activity was to organize a grand rodeo in the city of Rancagua that would host the first National Championship Rodeo of Chile. Much like the efforts of the SNA in creating the National Livestock Exposition in 1856, this event in 1947 took the sport of Chilean Rodeo to another level. The National Championship has continued ever since, with a large number of representatives from all over the country. It is the pinnacle of the rodeo season and consistently brings together groups the highest caliber Chilean corralero horses in the nation.

The power that came with the creation of the Horse Breeders Association urged its members to put more demands on the Chilean Rodeo competitions. Only those that complied with the stipulated prerequisites were considered "official" rodeos of the association. Once again, this further categorization of higher-classed spectacles enticed more people to participate in the sport. No longer was this sport simply the commentary of the fanatics of the Chilean Rodeo. The "Champion" of Rancagua gained the national attention of people from all walks of life. With this kind of recognition for its winners, preparing horses for the Chilean Rodeo was now considered a fine art. Private trainers, or "arregladores" (nagsmen), were assigned specific duties that gained them fame as competent professionals when their efforts culminated in important victories.

The burgeoning following of both participants and fans gave rise to the first stock horse journal of its kind, when the Chilean Horse Breeders Association began to publish its annual in 1949. This publication was continued uninterrupted ever since, establishing yet another accomplishment of this ground-breaking breed.

The control of the Horse Breeders Association over official rodeos also facilitated their pushing the idea that all or some of the participants be mounted on duly registered **Chilean Horses**. When political pressure in the 1960's started to criticize the Horse Breeders Association as an organization that represented wealthy landowners, the astute guardians of the **Chilean Horse** promptly formed the "Federación del Rodeo Chileno", or the *Chilean Rodeo Federation,* in 1961.

By establishing this organization that represented all the competitors in the official rodeos, they formed a much broader umbrella of support that represented a wide spectrum of Chilean citizens. The classification of this new entity also permitted the Chilean Rodeos to become part of the federal government's General Sports Management program. The nationalistic intonations of the time were taken advantage of by stipulating in the bylaws that all Chilean Rodeo Federation sponsored rodeos would require the exclusive use of registered **Chilean Horses**. With this *coup de grace,* the future of the **Chilean Horse** was now assured.

What was perhaps created as a result of a political catalyst turned into a strong leadership for the marketing of the Chilean Rodeo. Various changes were made to make the sport more spectator-friendly by cutting down the idle times when no competitive action was taking place.

One of the most important changes was eliminating the herd of cattle in the apiñadero (holding pen) and placing these in a narrow containing chute, called a "toril". By keeping the cattle in corrals under the grandstand, the permanently loaded toril constantly fed the competitors the next available bovine through an incoming gate in the corner of the apiñadero. This eliminated the time required to restock the apiñadero, and it kept the cattle fresh and desirous to make a run into the open. Equally as important, it cut down on the time-consuming requirement of searching for and cutting out a specifically desired bovine. I suppose this takes away some of the cattle working attributes of the even-tempered stock horse, as well as the ability for the competitors to read their cattle. On the other hand, it makes a fairer distribution of cattle and a more action-packed event for viewers.

Modern Chilean Rodeo Rules Put Finishing Touches on the Sport

Other changes that came about because of the innovative thinking of the Chilean Rodeo Federation included placing large gates on both ends of the apiñadero. This required the cattle to be driven two full rounds within the apiñadero before an open gate led them into the medialuna on the third encounter with the exit from the holding pen. If the steer was permitted to backtrack

during any part of these hard driven-sessions, it resulted in one negative point for the competitor. On the contrary, a controlled completion of the two-and-a-half laps offered one point in favor of the competitor before driving the steer into the arena.

In driving the cattle across the arena, the trajectory and speed is a choice of a combination of the bovine's fickle mind and the shrewdness and strategies of the competitors. Before the entry into the pinning zone, there is a marker known as the Posture Line ("Línea de Postura") that indicates the start of the Posture Zone. While in this area, the horse must maintain constant contact with at least one of his shoulders on the steer at all times. When reaching the Sentencing Line ("Línea de Sentencia") the 10 m (32.5 ft.) Posture Zone ends and the 12 m (39 ft.) Pinning Zone begins. Herein, the pinning horse must maintain full contact with points of both shoulders and must have its entire chest leaning on the side of the steer. This requires an excellent "postura", or perpendicular posture, by the pinning horse, which progressively pushes the steer towards the pinning cushion.

Once the bovine is inside the pinning zone, it is fair game to pin the steer anywhere on the 12 m (39 ft.) outwardly inclined, cushioned pad. Contact must be made only once and with a follow through that comes from a strong forward and upward push of the chest that is powered by the digging in of the hindquarters. The driving horse and rider have the important role of "feeding in" the steer at a speed and angle that will facilitate the pinning rider to time his pin right. However, the driving rider can in no way help the pinning horse to contain the cow once the intent to pin has been initiated.

Whether the pin earned points or not, it is the objective of the pinning rider to not let the bovine get past the second Sentencing Line that marks the end of the pinning cushion. For this reason, many competitors try to make strong first pins when the cattle still have a lot of energy. If they are able to pin hard and roll the steer upward, lifting its legs off the ground, the steer will often fall to the ground when the contact ends. When the steer goes down, the chances of containing the individual within the definition of the pinning cushion is practically assured.

On the contrary, a properly or improperly pinned bovine that stays on his feet requires constant pressure against the cushion to contain his forward motion until the horse can wheel its hindquarters around to block the bovine's path. Obviously, the farther back in the steer's anatomy the pin takes place, the harder it is to contain the forward motion and the more desperate is the pivot on the forequarters in order for the pinning horse to block the steer's desire to head further down the pinning cushion. For this reason, the pins that are farther back in the steer's body are assigned more points. If a pin leaves the neck free, it's a two-point pin. If the pin leaves the shoulder blade free, it's a three-point pin. If a pin leaves the entire rib cage free, it's a maximum four-point pin. One-point neck pins that leave the head free are no longer awarded.

The outward-angled pinning cushion replaced the old solid willow wickerwork construction of years past. The cushion takes away the impact, while the slanted design permits the cattle to roll back and over to also diminish the force of the collision. This newer design also was a big improvement in preventing horses from hitting their muzzles or bits against the back of the pinning wall. This was a possible reason for injury or a cause of enough pain to the bars of the mouth to make horses shy away from making more hard pins.

At this point the pinning horse will make a 90-degree turn with its hindquarters so that it's facing the bovine. The driving horse will also move 90 degrees to its right and now take on a containing stance until the bovine gets on its feet and can be enticed by the horses to change directions. At that point, the steer is urged forward towards the pinning zone on the opposite side of the arena.

While moving the steer in the opposite direction, the competitors will reverse the roles of driver and pinner. Upon completion of the second pin, the horses reposition themselves yet again and drive the steer back down to the first pinning zone, where they will have a go at the third pin. Upon completion, the horses shift positions for a third time, and the steer is calmly driven along the fence line back towards the apiñadero. Adjacent to the apiñadero, a small exit gate is opened so the steer can be driven out of the arena. Any loss of control of the bovine before it leaves the arena results in a penalty point.

If for ANY reason the steer gets a nose beyond the far end of the pinning cushion, it costs the competitors a penalty point and no pinning points are awarded. If the steer's entire body crosses the end of the pinning cushion, there is a two-point penalty and the competitors must take the heifer into the apiñadero and come out the nearest gate in order to head in the direction of the next required pin. There is an intricate list of more explicit rules and regulations, which I will include as a useful appendix for those who are interested. However, this brief overview of the Chilean Rodeo rules is simply to give the reader a feel for this inimitable event that is the lifeline of so many **Chilean Horses**.

Most importantly, Chilean Rodeos will have various divisions where horses can try to classify for the finals, or the "Champion", as it's called in Chile. The accepted paired team categories are the following: the stallion division; the mare division; the gelding division, and the mixed division. Most rodeos will have four classifying series for these divisions, with the condition that the mixed division is only for breeders who put up a mixed paired team that is from the same breeding establishment. Each of these classification series will provide paired teams that classify for the final series.

Open series are also offered (usually there are two or three of them per rodeo), whereby all paired teams of any category that have not yet classified for the finals are qualified to compete. This includes paired teams from the mixed divisions that are not from a single breeding establishment. Each of the open series will also provide paired teams that qualify for the finals. Whether it be a classifying series, an open series, or the final series, the competition for each is structured in the same manner, with four possible steers worked by the contestants that qualify with sufficient points to go on to the next steer in the competition.

After all paired teams of a given series have worked their assigned first animal, a cutoff point is determined in the scores in order to stipulate which competitors can continue. Usually, this is determined by the best 24 paired teams with scores of +1 or more, plus any teams that tied for the last spot. After these classifying contenders have had a shot at the three pins with the second steer, the points of the first and second animals are totaled, and another cutoff point for qualifiers going on to the third steer is determined. Usually, these are the best 12 paired teams plus any ties for the last slot, based on their total scores. After the qualifiers run the third steer, the total of all three previous animals determine who will have access to the fourth and final steers. Usually, this is determined by the six highest scores, plus any ties for last place after all the scores have been tallied. The highest total score will determine the series champion. A tie requires a runoff with an additional steer. Once all the paired teams have been determined for the final series, all competitors start off with a clean slate as they once again face the first of a possible four animals.

I would like to try and clarify what many will rightfully find a confusing matter. As I said before, winners of halter expositions are given the title of Champion. In Rodeos, the winners of classifying series also claim themselves Champion Stallion, Champion Mare, etc. The final series is often referred to as "the Champion", since the winner will, in fact, be crowned with that title for that given Rodeo. To add to the confusion, the National Championship Rodeo of Chile is also known as "El Champion" and the paired team winners of this prestigious event are known as "Champions de Chile". So when you hear or read the word "champion", it's worthwhile paying attention in what context that word is being used.

Much like NCHA cutting horse competitions, these single-event competitions can seem a bit boring to the novice spectator. At all the rodeos they offer score sheets for all the classifying and open series championships and another for the "champion", or final series. These score sheets inform the public of the names of the horses and their respective riders and breeders, as well as the horses' sex and age. All scores are announced over the loudspeaker and it's advisable to jot these scores down and keep running totals for the competitors. This is a practical manner of becoming familiar with the competitors and their horses. Pretty soon, the viewer will begin to notice performance styles and human and equine personalities, as well as good and bad fortunes that influence the end results. The progressive elimination of participants and the climaxing competition between the remaining horses and riders usually makes for a very exciting run of the fourth steer. When you have seen all the series and then settle in to the

"champion", you will find that many of the protagonists are familiar to you and the finals are all the more enjoyable.

Should you have the good fortune of knowing how to ride, or even better yet, the incredible opportunity to ride one of these amazing corralero horses, it is easy to appreciate the heart and athleticism that is involved in the Chilean Rodeo. To this day, people still speak of the famous corralero horse named ***Reservado***. On more than one occasion at the many "Champions" of Rancagua in which this gutsy little black horse participated, he had the misfortune of having cattle go down on him before he could effectively pin them to the cushion. Some cattle simply get their feet tangled, while others are bounced off balance by the contact with the horse and still others fall from exhaustion after making strong sprints across the arena. Repeatedly, ***Reservado*** brought the entire 12,000 people in the Medialuna de Rancagua to their feet when facing a falling steer, as he would drop to his knees in an effort to try his best to follow through with his instinctive desire to pin.

This is just one of many examples of the goosebumps and thrills that are motivated by the incredible heart that the little **Chilean Horses** show in manipulating the steers that often outweigh them. The spectacle is really many performances wrapped into one. Each horse and rider team has a script of their own. The coordination of the "collera", or paired horse and rider team, is yet another aspect that merits its own analysis. As one gets more involved in this sport, there is a remarkable course of events behind each of the breeders. In many instances, performing horses are known to be the pupils of the domadores (starters) and arregladores (polished trainers) who are known to excel in schooling these horses so others can take them to their glory in the spotlight of the medialuna packed with attentive crowds.

At an even higher level still is the long-standing influence of a sport that has its origins in more than 400 years of working cattle in a manner that is unique to Chile. It is a sport that had some crude objectives defined as far back as 1820, and for more than 140 years has been practiced in the spectator-oriented confines of the medialuna. It is a sport that, for more than 108 years, has used registered purebred animals specifically bred for this single event! All these facts give more meaning to having the honor of witnessing any Chilean Rodeo. However, it has special significance when you witness new national records, such as the 42 total points that the winners of the 2001 Champion of Rancagua accumulated in establishing their victory.

No doubt the "Road to the Media Luna" has been long and strenuous. However, thanks to the faithful visionaries that were confident in the abilities that made up the **Chilean Horse**, thanks to the government and private organizations that unselfishly devoted themselves to preserving this national treasure, and thanks to the fans of the sport that has both justified the existence and assured the future of the **Chilean Horse**, we can all feel satisfied that the medialuna is here to stay and within its crescent-moon shaped perimeter, feisty and courageous purebred **Chilean Horses** will always be the main attraction!!