

Chilean Huaso Attire

Hat The Cordoban styled hat that has become symbolic of the huaso distinguishes itself from its Spanish counterpart by having a much narrower hatband and a groove along the outer edge of the flattened crown. Interestingly, most of the cylindrical-crowned hats in the Spanish-influenced colonial days of Chile had wide hatbands. Although the shifting fashions of the huaso have given rise to different widths of hatbands, for the most part the narrow hatband has been more prominent over the years. The huaso uses a narrow cord with a slipknot off center to the right side. When not in dire need, this is tightened behind the base of the back of the cranium. When windy conditions or the working speed of the horse require, the hat is taken off and lifted up in front of the head, permitting the cord to hang straight down. The chin is placed through the hat cord before returning the hat to the desired position of the head and tightening the cord snugly under the jaw at the level of the Adam's apple. In lacking the aerodynamic shape common in the North American cowboy hat, the hat cord (also known as a "stampede string" in the U.S.A.) is a crucial necessity when riding Chilean Horses at working speeds. Certainly, in the 1960's, huasos conscientiously imitated the Cordoban hat of the mother country. This gave rise to a short-brimmed, wide hatband huaso hat that deviated from the more traditional style. However, even in this temporary straying from the roots of huaso fashion, the crown of the Chilean hat did not alter. What has consistently been a clear distinguishing factor of the huaso hat is the perimeter groove on the top of the crown. The fact that the members of Amish and Conservative Mennonite religions have this identical style hat makes one wonder if this may not be another example of German influence in the huaso heritage. Typically, the Cordoban style hat in Spain has a medium brim of 8-9 cm (3-3.5 in.). Although the huaso fads have led to a variation in the width of the brim from 7 cm (2.75 in.) to 15 cm (5.9in.), by and large the huaso hat has more closely resembled the wider brim of the Amish hat than the Cordoban style. It is only fair to also point out that the wider brim of the huaso hat could surely be justified by the "chambergos" or "guarapón" hats used by both the Spanish residents and criollos in the colonial days of Chile. It is impossible to look at the shape of the huaso hat and not accept that its similarity to the Cordoban hat made it a palatable alternative when choosing headgear for the huaso attire. It is also human nature and historical experience that nations that have recently gained their independence look for a source of separate identity from the mother country. It is conceivable that, either through the influence of specific German descendents in the founders of the modern Chilean Rodeo, or simply the happenstance of an interesting new alternative of a similar yet unique hat style within the German community, the birth of the huaso hat took place. Either could have been the result of an ethnic minority that had strongly incorporated themselves into the livestock industry of their adopted country.

Jacket and Shirt The huaso uses a short Andalusian jacket that is closely tailored to the body. It hangs no higher than the hipbone, as regulations stipulate that they "should cover the kidneys". This jacket is always used unbuttoned, as the round fasteners that line up in the front of the jacket and on the end of the sleeve are purely of a decorative nature. Under the jacket, a solid-colored shirt with a narrow or non-existent collar is used. White is the most common color shirt, but gray, light blue, pink or pale green are also permitted. The shirt normally has elegant pleats that run down the front. This top can be made of a wide range of fabrics, ranging from the most common of materials to pricey satin. It is always used buttoned all the way to the neck when using any type of poncho over the top of the jacket.

Chamanto One of the most distinctive features of the huaso that can be seen from afar is the use of the "chamanto". One could speculate that this is part of the more modern theatrics of the Chilean Rodeo sport, as no poncho of this dimension was ever used in the real working world of the huaso. Officially this short, navel-to-hip length poncho has now become a part of the standard costume in the Chilean Rodeo. Practically speaking, it carries on the distinctiveness the huaso always had with the use of a poncho, but established a new style that was short enough to be out of the way for the equitational demands of the sport of "running cattle". Once the huaso is off his horse and relaxing in the festive environment away from the competition, the chamanto is folded neatly and hung over the left shoulder. To some degree, all chamantos are a work of art. Most good quality chamantos are reversible, (referred to as a double-sided chamanto or "chamanto de dos aces") usually bearing different color combinations and designs on each side. They have an incredible elaboration of finely woven patterns that can take an artisan up to six months to make by hand. The designs displayed on both sides of the chamanto are steadfast representations of the huaso or his "collera" (paired team). For the most part, the chamanto is considered an elegant dress poncho that is only used on special occasions. In a recent APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) meeting that united world leaders in Chile, President Lagos gave each of the participants a beautifully elaborated chamanto as the representative memorabilia of Chile. They can be made of wool, but for the most part, the impressive details in the Flemish gothic-styled artwork make it more desirable that they be made of fine silk thread with brightly colored dyes. They come in almost any color combination, but the national tri-color of red, white and blue are undoubtedly the most common. There are areas of Chile that are especially known for their elaboration of quality chamantos, and the proud acquisition of such a variety will require a hefty payment that can reach thousands of dollars.

Manta and Poncho It is important to take note that the word "poncho" would imply a heavier, mid thigh-to knee length, rectangular textile made of coarse-woven sheep wool or camelid hair that also has a central orifice that is placed over the head. In Chile when this type of poncho is made of a finer weave of wool or camelid hair, it is better known as a "manta de Castilla". For a time, it was referred to as the "manta larga" (long spread) to distinguish it from the "manta corta" (short spread) that is now a working version of the chamanto. In Chilean Rodeo circles, the word "manta" will only have this latter meaning. It is a short

poncho of the same dimensions as the chamanto, and is usually not reversible. It is also easily distinguished because it has no intricate patterns or designs. It is basically made up of four broad bands divided by three sets of stripes. The "manta" is made up of two or three colors and another heavier band with the same colors is incorporated all around the perimeter to give the "manta" the needed weight so it will hang in place. These rodeo "mantas" can be made out of woven silk, cotton or wool threads. The longer poncho is more of a ranch tool, although occasionally they will be pulled out in a rodeo that runs into foul weather. Most huasos own a "manta de Castilla", but it will usually only be seen outside of the medialuna as over-clothing when ambient conditions get cold or rainy. In some circles, they even distinguish the quality and thickness of the weave between the "manta de Castilla" and the poncho, the latter being the coarser of the two. Either can be made of sheep wool or fine camelid hair (llama, alpaca or the most valued of all, the vicuña). Not too much importance should be given to the differences between the rodeo manta and the chamanto. In essence, they are both modernized versions of the poncho that has always been an inseparable part of the huaso's attire. The chamanto is a dressier version of the rodeo poncho and the manta is a working form of the same article of huaso clothing. Their inclusion in the huaso dress has been done with great beauty and good taste. More importantly, this noticeable garment has a profound symbolism. This most conspicuous feature of the huaso outfit is the only contribution that has its origins exclusively in the Native American heritage. That legacy that comes from the original inhabitants of this continent is an undeniable part of so much of what the huaso spirit has come to represent.

Pants The dark woolen pinstriped pants are of full length and straight legged, so as to be presentable after rodeo competition when the leggings are removed. In the past, it was common to have patches of leather sewn into the portions of the leg that make more contact with the stirrup leathers, as occasionally the huaso rode without the leggings. These long pants replaced the calf-length pants of the 18th and early 19th centuries, which in turn replaced the short mid-thigh bloomers that were introduced by the conquistadors themselves.

Sash Around the waist, a wide sash of bright red or maroon silk or woolen weave is wrapped tightly about the midsection, much like is the custom of the famous bullfighters in the mother country. Ideally, this sash should be wrapped high enough that it covers an area half way up the front of the Andalusian jacket. This not only gives a trimmer and more athletic appearance, but also offers support for the kidneys and lower back during grueling sessions atop the saddle. It's important to emphasize that in the sport of Chilean Rodeo, the act of pinning bovines to the quincha is not only a test for the physical attributes of the horse, but also the conditioning of the rider. The sudden surge forward in the pinning impulse of the horse can violently whip the back forward if the rider's timing is not completely in synch with his mount's actions. Even in the best of efforts, there is a lot of forward and backward jarring of the back during the pin and a constant lateral rocking motion while setting up the cattle with side-stepping motions at a full run. All this would indicate that the addition of the reinforcing waistband in the required apparel is both a colorful and a very practical decision.

Leggings The pants are further protected by the use of smooth or tooled black leather leggings that start at the bridge of the foot and end up past the knee in the front, and cut slightly below the knee behind. They can be closed shut by leather straps and buckles, but since the leggings are custom fitted, they are often fastened shut on hook eyes that are hidden under a full-length line of leather fringe. In some cases, two leather buttons are the source of long leather tassels that also disguise the closure of the leggings. In the more expensive leggings, the hook and eyes are made of high quality metals that are more apt to be within view. The black processed leather "polainas", or leggings, that are such a typical part of the huaso attire nowadays have not always been associated with the history of the Chilean cattleman. Initially, sleeves of inverted sheep hides or knitted wool hung from the bloomer bottoms at the mid thigh. As the pants became narrower and longer, the sheep hide or knitted wool sleeve was only high enough to cover the knee. Straps held them in place above the top of the calf muscle. Eventually, it became more practical for ranch work to be carried out with the "bota calzón" (pant boots), which were essentially chaps that totally covered the leg up to the thigh and were held in place by a strap on each leg that attached to the rider's waist belt. These offered the ultimate protection for the thorny "espino" trees (Acacia cavens), a mesquite-like knotty hardwood that flourishes in the flat bottoms and rolling hillsides of Chile. Likewise, they protected against the cacti that prevailed only on the shaded sides of mountain ridges where precious moisture was conserved. As the huaso uniform specialized itself for medialuna competitions, the full length chaps were substituted by the leggings that covered the knee and lower thigh. Their use was not seen until the mid to late 19th century. The modern-type of "polaina" is thought to be the result of encouragement by ranchers that were influenced by their attraction to military leggings and "granadero" boots (stiff, high-topped equitation boots used by the cavalry officers). By the early 20th century, this would become the official legwear of the huasos. Certainly, it offered a distinguished aristocratic look unlike anything seen in other stock horsemen wardrobes.

Boots Below the leggings, the huasos use an ankle-high boot that has a pointed or narrow squared toe and a tall riding heel. Since the leggings overlap the boot of the same color, it is hard to distinguish the fact that the boot and the leggings are two separate artifacts. Officially brown or black boots can be used, but black is almost exclusively the color of choice. The detachable nature of the leggings coincides with the huaso's desire to impact a suave appearance in accordance with all occasions. The leathered ensemble befits the courageous competitor astride his horse, but when removing them a more serene and formal look is provided when on foot after the competition ends.