

Showing the Spanish Horse - In Hand

In Spain horses are traditionally shown differently to how they are shown in many other countries. So what is the difference and why?

Often you see an in-hand horse being run up in the ring on a short rope or reins with his head and neck bent a little to the left, possibly falling out at the shoulder and with the handler making a valiant effort to keep up while maintaining control. The judge can only mark what he/she sees, not imagine what the horse could do if allowed to go straight and at the proper pace, so it is imperative the handler allows the horse to run straight and at the best speed for the paces being shown. Showing in the so called 'Spanish style' can make this easier and if done correctly give the horse its best chance in front of the judge.



A priority when working youngstock is that they must naturally and willingly 'go forward', a natural action for a flight animal that uses forward motion to escape danger, so assisting your youngster in doing this is certainly not unnatural. Free lunging in a small school or round pen is a good way to achieve this. Chase the horse forwards, get him to move freely and learn to balance, change leg and direction, stop and turn. If the horse is lazy or reluctant, encourage forward going by rattling something, maybe a tin full of stones, or a long whip with a plastic bag on the end! Get a friend to help at the other end of the school if you do not have a small school or round pen, make it a game and don't do it for too long - start with a few minutes, building up gradually and soon you will find your horse enjoys the game and you may not need the tin of stones, stick or friendly helper any more.

Don't touch your horse with the whip or stick as it is unnecessary and anyway you can be excluded in Spanish in-hand competition if you do this and, if your horse considers the stick a 'weapon' or a means of beating him forwards, you will have difficulty showing him well and most likely encounter other problems later on. Think of the whip as part of your body language, just an extension of your arm to help your horse understand what you are trying to communicate.

If your horse does not automatically and naturally go forwards without question when you ask then you will find him difficult to show to his best advantage and if a youngster this could also lead to other difficulties when you back and ride him later.

Now you need to teach him to walk with you level with his shoulder, stop when asked and NEVER INVADE YOUR SPACE. With a young horse this can be fast to teach, so long as he has not already been spoiled by being allowed to drag you around on the end of a rope and head collar; then it takes longer. Also avoid situations that allow your horse to 'back up' (another reason why 'forward going' is so important) because a horse that backs up when frightened, unsure or reluctant can not be shown at its best and can become a problem to ride later.



Once your horse has learnt to respect your space, walk at your shoulder and stop or go forwards when asked you are ready to prepare him for showing. In the 'Spanish style' the horse is run up on a long rope so he can move in a straight line unobstructed by the handler, which is why short ropes or reins are not used, and the handler has more control and can concentrate on running or walking at the best speed.



Octavio III (Calificado graded). Bred by Yeguada Iberica
Being trotted-up 'Spanish' style

There are various ways to teach your horse depending on your preferences and what works best for him. This is one method that can be used on youngsters as well as older horses:

Start at walk from a small circle in the corner of the school so that as he comes round facing the 'long side' you can walk him straight up the school. Do this by slightly leading with your body (but not pulling him on the lunge or rope). Most likely he will try to continue in a circle, or think you want him to walk to you, but this is where your body language is important (and why you 'lead' slightly with your body, to discourage him continuing the circle) and you will most likely find using a whip an advantage by pointing it towards his body if he attempts to move towards you. Do this quietly so he understands what you want and be aware of your body language, point the stick behind and he will probably shoot forwards and inevitably complete the circle, in front and he will stop, or worse, back-up. Always avoid backing-up.

Once you can turn your horse from a circle into a smooth straight line, walk round the edge of the school, quietly praising him when he does well, patiently stopping and re-starting when he does not, then begin to walk on a longer lead, separating yourself further from him using your whip to point him away if he is reluctant to separate, moving it behind if he slows too much. Keep this up so that it becomes natural for him to walk calm and straight on as long a line as you want. By this time your horse should also stop to a voice command. Once accomplished, do the same at trot. Again, care has to be taken to slightly lead out of the corner to ensure the transition from circle to straight line, but don't overdo it or he may stop and always be aware

of where you are pointing your whip. Make a sound the horse relates to 'going forwards' and once he understands, the whip will become less important and you can concentrate on going straight and at the best speed to allow him to show his paces.

Once you and your horse can do this naturally then do the same in the centre of the school without using the side rails as a guide. Showing at trot is when you will see Spanish handlers completing a turn on the lunge before moving off in a straight line and the idea is to get the horse moving freely forwards and then off up the centre of the school, but this must be controlled, especially with youngstock as they can easily lose balance if changing from frantic circling into a straight line. A good handler can usually complete one or two turns and then go with the horse in a straight line up the centre but remember this is not a lunge lesson and if you keep twirling the horse round trying to settle him down you are wasting the judge's time and possibly demonstrating a lack of handling ability.

Spanish handlers 'compete' among themselves and naturally like to show off their horse control, and why not, it's great fun to watch a horse being presented well and with panache, however you only need to show the judges 3 or 4 good consecutive strides, the best you are able to produce with your horse, so once achieved there is no need to keep running.



Walking at the shoulder

When showing in Spain or at National shows for the PRE the horse will need to show his paces at walk, trot and canter. You will be required to walk the horse away from and back to the judge and the same at trot. Canter is demonstrated with two or three circles on each rein. The horse will also need to be 'stood up' in front of the judge for morphological marking. The sequence you do each part can vary, typically the horse would be walked up and back, then lunged at canter on both reins, followed by trot, to and from the judge, then 'stood up' for the judges final marking.

Practise getting your horse to stand still, square and alert before going to a show. Stop him from a forward motion, i.e. do not to push him backwards into position. Be aware of his stance, for example he may have a good breadth of chest but be standing with his forelegs together giving judges the impression he is narrow in front, so you may need to walk him a step forwards to give him a chance to straighten up. There are sometimes things you can do to ensure a lazy or poor stance does not cost him marks, and keep an eye on his hind legs, you don't want them straggling out behind (the Spanish horse's body, hind and forelegs should fit in an imaginary square), so again you may need to move him forwards. Stand in front and keep his attention, make sure he is alert, wave your whip in the air above your head if you need to, but do not let him slouch. If you haven't used your whip as a weapon while training he will take notice, without backing off. Remember you are 'on show' from the moment you enter the ring and may be



noticed at any time by the judges, so ensure your horse behaves well and does not slouch and never lies down, rolls or acts aggressively to other horses, a judge may recall a favourable if fleeting glimpse of him that could decide in his favour in a tie-breaker.

The tack you use for showing may be governed by what is 'traditional' for the breed although it is impossible to show a horse in the 'Spanish style' using a bridle and reins. Usually a 'Serreta' (similar to a leather head collar but with a steel insert inside the nosepiece to make this part rigid) is used, with a long lead. Professional handlers use serretas with a soft leather covering to protect the horse. Some horses are seen with scarred noses after being worked in the serreta but this damage is unnecessary and avoidable, only caused by incompetent handlers, never by professionals.



Spanish single-ring Serreta

Richard Lust
Yeguada Iberica
02500-Tobarra
(Albacete)
España
www.viva-iberica.com