

# The Paso Fino horse

## About the Paso Fino Horse

The Paso Fino horse reflects its Spanish heritage through its proud carriage, grace and elegance. Modern care and selective breeding have enhanced its beauty, refinement and well-proportioned conformation that convey strength and power without extreme muscling. With its lively but controlled spirit, natural gait and presence, and responsive attitude, the Paso Fino is indeed, a rare and desirable equine partner in the show ring, on the competitive trail rides and on that Sunday afternoon pleasure ride.

## Growing in Popularity

The ancient history of the Paso Fino is fast becoming the future of show and pleasure horses in the U.K. To demonstrate its versatility, Paso Fino horses compete in Western classes (Trail and Versatility). Paso Fino horses compete in endurance rides, including the 100 mile ride (Golden horse shoe).

They continue to grow in popularity, as one by one, converts are won over through the Paso Fino horse experience. If you test ride a Paso Fino horse, you will quickly display the infamous "Paso Grin". You just can't help yourself when you ride the smoothest and most willing horse.

## The Paso Fino Breed Standard

- A. **General Impression:** The Paso Fino is born with a gait unique to the breed and its attitude seems to transmit to the observer that this horse knows its gait is a very special gift that must be executed with style and pride! The gait, being totally natural, does not exhibit the catapulting or exaggerated leg action of man-made gaits; rather the movements are smooth, rhythmic, purposeful, straight, balanced in flexion and synchronous front to rear, resulting in unequalled comfort and smoothness for the rider. The Paso Fino is a graceful, agile and supple equine athlete that uses all four (4) legs with precision and harmony.
- B. **Head:** The head should be refined and in good proportion to the body of the horse, neither extremely small nor large with the preferred profile being straight. Eyes are large and well spaced, very expressive and alert, and should not show excessive white around the edges. Ears are comparatively short, set close and curved inward at the tips. The lips should be firm and the nostrils large and dilatable. Jaws are defined but not extreme. The impression should be of a well-shaped, alert and intelligent face.
- C. **Neck:** The neck is gracefully arched, medium in length and set at an angle to allow high carriage, breaking at the poll. The throatlatch should be refined and well defined.
- D. **Forehand:** Shoulders are sloping into the withers with great depth through the heart. Chest is moderate in width. Withers are defined but not pronounced and slope smoothly into the back.
- E. **Midsection:** The midsection is moderate in length with a well sprung rib cage. The top line should be proportionately shorter than the underline. The back should be strong and muscled. The midsection should join the forehand and the hindquarters so as to give the horse a pleasing, proportioned appearance.
- F. **Hindquarters:** The croup is slightly sloping with rounded hips, broad loins and strong hocks. The tail is carried gracefully when the horse is in motion.
- G. **Legs:** The legs are straight with refined bones and strong, well-defined tendons and broad, long forearms with shorter cannons. The thigh and gaskin are strong and muscled but not exaggerated. Standing slightly under in the rear is acceptable. Pasterns are sloping and medium in length. Bones are straight, sound and flat; joints are strong and well defined. Hooves are well rounded, proportionate in size and do not show excessive heel.
- H. **Mane, Tail and Forelock:** Mane, tail and forelock are as long, full and luxurious as nature can provide. No artificial additions are allowed. A bridle path not exceeding four inches is acceptable.

- I. **Size:** Paso Fino horses are 13 to 15.2 hands with 13.3 to 14.2 being the most typical size with weight ranging from 700 to 1100 pounds. Full size may not be attained until the fifth year.
- J. **Colour:** Every equine colour can be found, with or without white markings.
- K. **Disposition:** The Paso Fino is an extremely willing horse that truly seems to enjoy human companionship and strives to please. It is spirited and responsive under tack while sensible and gentle at hand.

## The Unique Gait of the Paso Fino Horse

The Paso Fino is born with a gait unique to the breed, and its attitude seems to transmit to the observer that this horse knows its gait is a very special gift that must be executed with style and pride! The gait is smooth, rhythmic, purposeful, straight, balanced in flexion and synchronous front to rear, resulting in unequalled comfort and smoothness for the rider. The Paso Fino is a graceful, agile and supple equine athlete that uses all four legs with precision and harmony. The gait of the Paso Fino horse is totally natural and normally exhibited from birth. It is an evenly-spaced four-beat lateral gait with each foot contacting the ground independently in a regular sequence at precise intervals creating a rapid, unbroken rhythm. Executed perfectly, the four hoof beats are absolutely even in both cadence and impact, resulting in unequalled smoothness and comfort for the rider.

The Paso Fino gait is performed at three forward speeds and with varying degrees of collection. In all speeds of the gait, the rider should appear virtually motionless in the saddle, and there should be no perceptible up and down motion of the horse's croup.

1. **Classic Fino** - Full collection, with very slow forward speed. The footfall is extremely rapid while the steps and extension are exceedingly short.
2. **Paso Corto** - Forward speed is moderate, with full to moderate collection. Steps are ground-covering but unhurried, executed with medium extension and stride.
3. **Paso Largo** - The fastest speed of the gait, executed with a longer extension and stride, and moderate to minimal collection. Forward speed varies with the individual horse, since each horse should attain its top speed in harmony with its own natural stride and cadence.

The Paso Fino is capable of executing other gaits that are natural to horses, including the relaxed walk, the canter and the gallop.

## The Paso Fino Show Divisions

In show competitions, the Paso Fino horse is judged in various divisions based upon the horse's natural ability.

**Classic Fino division:** The only gait performed is the Classic Fino gait. Gait is fully collected, with very slow forward speed, very rapid footfall and stride is exceedingly short. The Classic Fino gait is an evenly spaced, four-beat lateral gait that is smooth, animated, exciting and executed with brilliance and style. Flexion and extension should be harmonious in all four legs. The horse must present a picture of symmetry and fluidness of motion. The horse must perform this highly collected form of the gait naturally and willingly.

**Performance division:** The gaits performed are collected Corto, collected Largo, and collected Walk. Performance gaits are executed with brilliant style, and collection. The horse is collected, fully balanced and exhibiting symmetry in flexion and extension. The extension is longer and the footfall not as rapid as shown in the Classic Fino gait. The horse should demonstrate pride, style, elegance and enthusiasm, along with good manners and ready response.

**Pleasure division:** The gaits performed are mildly collected Corto, mildly-collected Largo, and flat-footed Walk. Pleasure gaits are executed with mild collection, moderate extension, style, and willingness. The horse's head carriage is natural and relaxed. The gaits should be fluid showing no tendency to labor or become "strung out" Manners and obedience of the horse are particularly important. The horse should be controlled with minimal restraint and the rider should appear to be enjoying themselves.

**Bellas Formas division:** The gaits performed are a Corto or Classic Fino gait. The horse is shown in hand by either one or two handlers. Conformation, gait and manners/finish are judged.

**Specialty division:** This division showcases the versatility of the Paso Fino horse. Classes include: Western Pleasure (includes a lope), Versatility (includes a canter and jump), Trail (trail obstacle course), Costume (of Spanish origin), and Pleasure Driving (cart). Country Pleasure gives a relaxed way of going suitable for trail riding.

## **The History of the Paso Fino**

The Paso Fino horse's journey to the Americas began more than 500 years ago with the importation of Andalusians, Spanish Barbs from North Africa, and smooth gaited Spanish Jennets (now extinct as a breed) to the "New World" by Spanish Conquistadors. Bred for their stamina, smooth gait and beauty, "Los Caballos de Paso Fino" – the horses with the fine walk – served as the foundation stock for remount stations of the Conquistadors. Centuries of selective breeding by those who colonized the Caribbean and Latin America produced variations of the "Caballo de Criollo," among them the Paso Fino that flourished initially in Puerto Rico and Colombia, and later, in many other Latin American countries (primarily Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Aruba, and Venezuela). Descendants of the Conquistadors' horses are believed to have spread into North America after the Spanish soldiers forayed for a brief time into this territory. The modern-day mustang has traces of his Spanish forbears. The Nez Perce Indian tribe, renowned for their expert horsemanship and sophisticated knowledge of breeding spotted horses, may have mixed some Spanish stock into their famous Appaloosas, whose name is derived from the Palouse River region of the Nez Perce's tribal homeland in Oregon. Awareness of the Paso Fino as we know it today didn't spread outside Latin America until after WWII, when American servicemen came into contact with the stunning Paso Fino horse while stationed in Puerto Rico. Americans began importing Paso Fino horses from Puerto Rico in the mid-1940s. Two decades later, many Paso Fino horses began to be imported from Colombia. For a while, there was some contention as to which country produced the "true" Paso Fino. Though there are still some self-professed "purists" who advocate for one or the other country, the American Paso Fino - true to our "melting pot" tradition - is often a blend of the best of Puerto Rican and Colombian bloodlines.