



## Doma Vaquera La Garrocha Acoso y Derribo

### La Doma Vaquera

This can be literally translated as schooling for the stock horse and is a specialised form of equestrian art based on the principles of riding a la jineta and working with cattle in the country, including fighting bulls. Horses ridden a la doma vaquera must have speed and lightning reactions combined with precision, while remaining calm and working in total harmony with their riders.

This highly specialised form of riding (a la jineta) has been practised by the Iberians for centuries, believed to be inherited from the early Cinetes or Ginetes, where for example; the horse and rider can smoothly carry out in harmony the sliding stop and the gentle levade followed by a half turn on the haunches, as this was used in early guerrilla warfare and for surprise attacks, where a high degree of collection was required from a horse completely at one with its rider. Such a high degree of collection is required that it does not differ from the basics of high school (Alta Escuela) and the Spanish Riding School at Vienna is an example based on the same principles.



This riding style, where the horse carries out highly collected manoeuvres calmly and softly yet with lightning speed when asked, forms not only the basis of high school but is used for cutting cattle, working fighting cattle and by the rejoneador, the horse mounted bullfighter.

Real doma vaquera is an art and requires a high standard of horsemanship and it is not surprising that it has existed for years among those people working with cattle; for example the gauchos of South America, the charros of Mexico, the puchta of Hungary, the llaneros of Columbia and Venezuela and of course the vaqueros of Spain.

Cowboys in the USA also train horses to react with rapid speed, turn quickly and execute sliding stops, as they too work with cattle, however modern Western riding bears little other resemblance to doma vaquera as these horses are not required to work in the same highly collected way. The riding style is different. One example is that 'neck reining' is not used in doma vaquera (and is not allowed in competition).

### Doma vaquera – Competition

Doma vaquera competition is a popular spectator sport in Spain and parts of Southern France. There are not so many competitors as in many other horse disciplines as the standard of horsemanship required is so high and the horse also has to be very highly trained a la jinete

Competitors ride in a 60m x 20m school in front of 3 judges and their individual 'writers', through an 8 minute test. All tack and riding clothing must be absolutely correct and traditional otherwise the rider is excluded. The single bridle with vaquera bit is held one-handed only, in the left hand and the hand should be kept as still as possible, using the fingers for control and neck reining is prohibited. The right hand is rested on the rider's thigh when walking and in front of the rider's stomach at other paces. Touching the reins with the right hand in front of the left brings instant exclusion, as does leaving spur marks on the horse.



*Bucanero/Richard Lust*

Before being allowed to compete the horse is checked by a vet and the judges for soundness and condition. If not in 100% condition the horse is excluded from competition.

The rider rides around the school and presents himself and his horse to each of the 3 judges in turn, where tack, clothing and the horse's condition is checked prior to commencement of the test. A bell is rung to signal the start of the test and the rider moves from standstill into canter on the

right leg up the centreline and skid stops anywhere from halfway to three-quarters of the way down the school, then acknowledges the judges and begins the test.

A number of moves must be carried out at walk which must be the vaquero's working walk, moving with the rhythmic cadence of the paso castellano, with the horsehair mosquera on the horse's bridle swinging freely, through a freestyle which must include such as large and small circles, figures of eight and 'caracoles' on both reins, half pass, full pass, rein back, demi-pirouette (twice), turn on the forehand and turn on the quarters, all twice on each rein. Any poor paces at walk are penalised, as are hesitations during or before specific movements. The rider also has to present a true 'collected' walk for several paces in front of the judges. After 4 minutes a bell is briefly rung warning the rider there are 4 minutes left

Usually around this stage the rider begins the part of the completion requiring canter and gallop work, again freestyle but including, all on both reins and still riding single-handed; canter half pass, counter canter circles with flying change to counter canter on the other rein, small and large circles with flying changes, two time or one time flying changes, canter pirouette on both reins twice, canter/demi-pirouette/flying change/demi-pirouette/canter, canter to gallop to canter with clear transitions, gallop to skid stop (in the length of the horse) to rein-back (in a straight line and usually over half the school) with a transition straight from rein-back to gallop, repeated, then rein-back with an instantaneous transition to Castilian walk. Any paces at trot (which is 'forbidden') are penalised. The test ends within the allotted 8 minutes and usually with a gallop to skid stop facing the president of the judges.

## Training the horse for doma vaquera

Clearly the vaquera horse must be athletic and spirited, referred to in Spain as 'chispa', meaning 'sparkle'. However his temperament is just as important, as he must be able to perform instantly while always remaining calm and responsive. Impulsion; from standstill to gallop to skid stop, balanced on his hind legs with his hocks brought under him to be asked to turn, move forwards or stop, instantly but calmly and with grace. To properly achieve this requires more than just a good horse, exceptional horsemanship and knowledgeable training in the traditional vaquera style is a necessity.



*Buccanero & Joaquin Rodriguez/ Yeguada Iberica*

No gadgets or draw reins etc are used in the traditional training of the vaquera horse. Often, one of the traditional methods, allows the horse's ridden training to begin with the reins attached to a two-ring serretón, or muserola, in conjunction with a second set of reins and a standard vaquera curb bit. The serretón/muserola and reins are used at first and as the horse progresses, then slowly and carefully the bit and second reins are introduced, until eventually the first set of reins and the serretón or

muserola are dispensed with. The horse is trained with the rider using both hands at first, while using both sets of reins, not single handed as the horse will be ridden later when just using the curb.

In Spain there are special classes in competitions for young horses just starting doma vaquera where the rider can use both sets of reins and two hands.

Note 1: the curb bit has been used by riding masters for centuries, in fact several centuries BC, and in vaquera the lightest of aids are to be used. It is said that in competition dressage the rider 'commands' but the vaquera rider 'entreats'.

Note 2: The serretón or muserola should be covered in soft leather and the reins must be used with a soft and sensitive hand.

For an indication of the correct clothing and tack for doma vaquera, doma classica and the ferria see the article [Spanish Tack & Riding Clothing](#)

Note: Tuition is available at Viva Iberica. [Hourly/daily rates](#)



Rumboso (Yeguada Iberica)



## La garrocha

The garrocha - a long pole used for working cattle in Spain. It is never used in doma vaquera competition.



Modern romance and websites where the garrocha is featured tend to dwell on the rider 'dancing' around his pole, or garrocha, to music. Yes, the garrochista can work in displays with the garrocha in the same flamboyant style as he has for centuries, but the real use of the garrocha has been and still is today a practical working tool of the vaquero while working in the country with cattle, notably the fighting cattle and the fighting bulls of Spain.

Again, the jineta style of equitation of the vaquero is imperative, combined with a responsive horse with superb impulsion and able to balance on his hind legs and instantly change direction or stop – dead stop in its own length.

Typically the vaquero may need to cut a cow out of the herd, where he will catch her attention and entice the cow to charge and the vaquero rides as close to her as possible with the intention of separating her from the herd. When the cow stops the horse must also immediately stop, maintain the same distance and keeping her attention. As soon as she charges again the rider must instantly keep with her, keeping her attention and repeating this until she temporarily loses her herd instinct and does not immediately try to return.

Garrocha tuition is available at Viva Iberica. Hourly/daily rates



*7 Colts – Garrocha - with Richard & Buccanero / Pedro & Lidiado at Yeguada Iberica (photo Rafael Lemos)*

## Acoso y derribo



The garrocha is also used in acoso y derribo, which is the method used for testing the courage and strength of young fighting cattle, where a pair of riders drive each animal for maybe up to half a kilometre then use the garrocha to tap the animal near its hip in order to unbalance it and bring it down. If the animal swiftly gets up and charges the rider/s then it passes the test and will most likely be used for breeding. Hence the name 'toro bravo' or brave bull.

Competitions for acoso y derribo are also held in Andalusia, with a pair of riders driving individual cattle over a set course with the aim of knocking the animal down three times over a set space, so long as it gets up each time and either continues to gallop the course and/or attacks/charge the rider/s.



*Pedro Clares Albaledejo riding Yeguada Iberica's Lidiador  
Painted by Cathy Spearing from a photograph taken by Sian Wynn  
at a Yeguada Iberica Open Day*