



Showing the Spanish Horse – In Hand

Horses are traditionally shown differently in Spain to the way they are usually shown in many other countries. So what are these differences - and why?

Outside Spain it is not uncommon to see an in-hand horse being run up in the ring on a short rope or reins and so often 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 is able to allow the horse to run straight and at its 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.

Free lunging and initial training



Octavio III – Yeguada Iberica

A priority when working youngstock is that they must naturally and willingly be encouraged to 'go forward'. This is a natural action for a flight animal that uses forward motion to escape danger, so encouraging 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.

At this stage of training don't touch your horse with the whip or stick as it is unnecessary, you are using it simply as an extension of your arm (in Spanish in-hand showing competitions you can be excluded for touching the horse with a whip). Be aware that 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. Note, this applies when initially training your horse and prior to work-in-hand training where you will need to touch the horse with the whip, although even here you should still consider this an extension of your arm.

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 cannot be shown at its best and can become a problem to ride later.



Respecting my space.
Note the long soft lead rope resting in the hand, you should never have to hang on to the rope Salto (Yeguada Iberica) at 2 years 10 months

Once your horse has learnt to respect your space, walk at your shoulder and stop or go forwards to your quiet and soft command you will need to ensure he lunges well, as the better foundation he has in lunging the better he can be shown and show himself.

Lunging, body language and training to the voice

As with walking and stopping in hand the horse should go forwards calmly from your softly spoken voice commands and into the correct working gait you ask for. You do not need to shout, your horse probably has better hearing than you and extra volume doesn't do the trick, so give your commands at a normal level, softer if you can, but remember you must be consistent. Vary your tone as it is this the horse responds to more than words, sharper upwards (soft to sharp) commands for more action, downwards (normal to soft) for a decrease. You may prefer to bring his speed down with a whistle, but again, do this on a downward note and as soon he slows you could very softly praise him. He will learn to slow and/or calm very quickly if you are sensitive and consistent with this. With the halt you may need a sharper command but again do not shout, there is no need, it does not help.

Keep your body language in mind as this is as important as your voice and goes together with the way you interact with the horse. To slow the horse and reinforce your voice or whistle command you may find raising your hand and if necessary giving the lunge rope a soft tap helps. Again praise the horse softly for obeying.

The importance of consistency in body language, actions and voice, cannot be overstressed, along with the clear definition of sharper commands and softer 'downward' sounding signals. Another consideration is the frequency of commands, for example once the horse has moved forwards into a good walk don't keep telling him to 'walk on' or whatever, if he's doing it then a swift praise is enough otherwise he will lose the meaning but also the spontaneity. After giving a command to walk, trot or stop for example, also avoid shouting 'good boy, good boy' at him in the same tone of voice, as this is also confusing for him (what instruction is it?) while he will find this difficult to perceive as praise.

Again regarding body language always be very aware of what you are doing, as the horse will be! How many times do you see a handler asking the horse to speed up, say from a walk to a trot, while sticking the left hand out in a 'towing' motion? Now consider the horse - how does he differentiate this from the similar action to ask him

to slow or stop? He may find it hard to differentiate between an arm up or an arm out! Remember your initial work – getting him to move forwards. His impulsion comes from behind; you cannot 'tow' him anywhere with success.

Keep the horse's attention at all times, keep a mental contact with him as well as a soft contact on the lunge line, don't throw the line away so it drags on the ground and don't demean him by having a loud conversation with somebody outside the school rails if you want him to understand and respect your 'conversation' with him.

This is where your initial efforts in getting him to willingly go forwards benefit and everything is linked – you should already have a forward going horse but now he moves easily into a relaxed movement, controlled by your quiet voice and perhaps other relaxed body language, without hauling on the lunge line and trying to run off over the horizon. Once this is achieved he is ready for work and starting to lower his head and soften his poll. He may even understand and remember this way of going when you start to ride him.

Now 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. With a little distance between the horse and handler the horse will more naturally run straight, so he doesn't fall out at the shoulder and is himself more confident to show off his paces. There is also less chance for the handler to get trodden on or knocked over and of course the judge will have a better unobstructed view of the horse in action.



Alert yet calm, with no intention to run off.
We spend as much time as necessary allowing
our young horses to relax and stand quietly,
until we are ready to move.

Salto – Yeguada Iberica

Training for the show ring

There are various ways to teach your horse depending on your preferences, stage of training 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.



Trotting-up 'Spanish' style
Octavio III (Calificado graded). Owned and bred by Yeguada Iberica

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.

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.



Walking at the shoulder

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.

Standing up, in front of the judge

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.

It will help if you spend time on some basic training before showing your horse. You will need to prepare him to automatically correctly place his hind and front feet, his neck position and remain alert and focused.

As you walk the horse up to the judge hold the whip low and turn in front of the horse and to bring him to a halt you can raise the whip to waist height while giving him your halt command. Don't overdo this; you don't want him backing up. When training for this you need to ensure his hind feet are placed correctly so keep an eye on them and try to stop him at the right moment, if badly placed then you will need to move him forwards a couple of steps again. Another method is that you can also move him over a step to one side to encourage correct positioning, by gently showing the whip down one side. Praise him when he stops square, he will learn from this, so you need practice, repetitions and patience. You also must not let him stand with his hind feet out behind him as his lower hind limbs (cannon) should be vertical and in line with his rump supporting his weight, not hanging out further behind. Always remember the imaginary square conformation 'box' he should be standing within.

In training him to place the front feet correctly you can again use the moving to the side method, praising him when he stops squarely, or if he stops with one leg stretched forwards you can gently tap it at the knee so he lifts it and brings it back – do this softly otherwise he will step back with all four legs. Again, praise him when he stands square.

To ensure he shows his best neck position your horses should not be tense, although this may be difficult to achieve for a youngster at a show. Again, training and patience pay off where you have practised setting his hind feet and legs, then his front feet, and then you work on the neck stretch by encouraging him to reach his head down to the ground without moving forwards. Drop down, lower your stick as far as you can, whistle softly and encourage him to drop his head and neck down then bring yourself and the stick up stand back a little and encourage him to bring his head up and reach forward. Practice, repeat and praise when correct.

Now that you have a horse that stands square on all four and with his neck reaching forwards you have to keep him alert. This is where you need to know your horse and be creative. You see handlers swishing the whip around the floor in front of the horse, or waving it above their heads or making odd noises. The intention is to keep him alert and focused while his head and neck maintain a good position. So if he tends to lift his head and compress his neck then you need to bring his focus down, with the whip, or if he slouches and goes to sleep then you may need to get him to focus on the whip waved higher. It's up to you to read your horse, keep him alert and focused in the best direction.

The tack

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.

A 'Serreta' is usually used in Spain, with a long leather lead rope, 4m in length being popular. The serreta (sometimes referred to as a Spanish cavesson) is similar to a leather head collar but with a steel insert inside the nosepiece to make this part rigid. Professional handlers use serretas that have a soft leather covering to protect the horse. A.N.C.C.E. 2013 regulations state that the nosebands on serretas (Spanish nosebands) must be lined. Note that some horses are seen with scarred noses after being worked in the serreta but this damage is unnecessary and avoidable and is only caused by incompetent handlers, never by professionals.

The serreta allows the handler flexibility and precise control while giving the horse a natural freedom that cannot be achieved using a bridle. It is not just coincidence that masters training work in hand and Alta Escuela and the great classical schools use the Spanish cavesson.

Despite this there is a growing trend today to use what are called presentation bridles, with a loose chain to connect to the show rope.

Traditionally the serreta does not have a throat lash however these are now a requirement at some shows in some countries.



Spanish single-ring Serreta

A.N.C.C.E. 2013 RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR CONFORMATION - FUNCTIONAL COMPETITIONS FOR PRE HORSES B. Specific aspects: 1. Handlers:

1.1. Horses shall be presented in presentation bridles or those with lined Spanish nosebands only; any other device that modifies the natural presentation of the horse or that causes damage or pain is absolutely forbidden. Only in the case of mares in sections 7 and above, may a head-collar be used, provided that this is made of leather and is of sufficient quality to guarantee the correct handling of the horse in the arena, both while waiting and at the moment of the in-hand presentation in the arena. On the contrary, should this not occur, the presenter shall be indicated to replace the horse or the horse shall be invited to leave the arena, thus being eliminated.



Levante (Yeguada Iberica)

The Spanish presentation serreta. Sometimes the rosettes and flashes are seen in the 'stud' colours.

Note that A.N.C.C.E. judges are free to enforce the regulation below and will sometimes insist on a plain serreta or presentation bridle.

A.N.C.C.E. 2013 RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR CONFORMATION Article 31. Handlers and riders - 9. The following shall be a reason for a warning, without elimination. 9.1. The use of martingales, breast plates, rubber rings and any other type of artificial aid (whether plastic or material tied to the whip, or any other material that could be used in the presentation of the horses, including side, lateral, sliding or balancing reins, nose ties, etc.), any type of boot or bandage and any type of blinker (blinder), including ear covers and any others. Likewise the use of any decoration on the horse, such as ribbons, knots, flowers, etc. shall be a cause for elimination. Only in the Functionality test is the normal braiding of the mane and tail allowed.

A traditional plaited leather show rope
This one has a leather billet



Yeguada Iberica & Viva Iberica, Carretera de Cordovilla, 02500-Tobarra, (Albacete), España