



## The Cobra, or lote de yeguas

A group, string, or lot of mares.

In Spanish competition referred to as a lote de yeguas.

The Cobra originated in days gone by when mares in Spain were sometimes used for threshing grain. Linked together with neck collars to a central pole a Cobra of mares would circle and walk or trot to thresh the grain from the chaff.

With a small bell fitted to each neck collar the farmer could hear when the mares were working, or had stopped. Sometimes the bells were selected to give a different timbre so the farmer would know which sound related to each mare.

Traditionally tails were trimmed to hock level, to keep from dragging in the chaff and picking up debris. Most breeding mares would have the tops of their tails shaved and sometimes would have a 'ring', or rings, shaved just below the base. If connected together in a preferred order, the mare furthest from the handler, the 'lead' mare, would have one ring shaved into her tail, the next two rings, the next three, and so on. Farm workers could then see in which order the mares needed to be linked.

*Encantadora V, bred by Yeguada Iberica used in Cobras.  
Three rings in her tail, so in a Cobra of 3 she would  
perform next to her handler.*



## Cobra - Competition

The Cobra is important in competition throughout Spain for breeders of the Purebred Spanish Horse (PRE) and is at last becoming a feature at National PRE breed shows in other countries around the world, where studs cannot be considered for 'Best Breeder' awards unless they enter a Cobra.

Stallions are traditionally ridden in Spain but a stud's mares are generally considered to represent the true value or success of the breeder – something not often understood outside Spain.

Breeders try to produce a 'type' with similar characteristics, rather than a hotchpotch of shapes, sizes and colours. Stock has to conform to breed type and conformation, but in competition mares also matching in size, type and colour will gain higher marks.

Three mares are shown together, judged individually and as a group, the overall picture being important. They should work obediently in harmony, although some 'chispa' (sparkle) is preferred. Good movement is important for maximum points. They are shown at walk and trot and should work in a harmonious and straight line, finishing by standing still, for the judge's closer inspection.



*Cobra of 4 in training (head collars not used in demonstrations)  
From left to right: Moraleja, Brincadora XV, Seductora XVII, Oretana III*

Use a long leather lead rope connected to the first mare's neck collar, then connected to the next mare's collar, and so to the third mare's collar. In competition it's best not to use head collars as the judge needs a clear view of each mare's head.

## Training a Cobra or lote de yeguas

If your mares are inexperienced understanding your voice, or leading well, it would be best to begin your training with each mare individually.

Each mare should be able to work obediently on the lunge and understand simple voice commands; to walk, trot and stop. Remember to modulate the expression in your voice – much more important than 'words'. Mostly 'upwards' sounding commands for upwards tempo - standing to walk, walk to trot, with a softer 'downwards' sound when coming down from trot to walk, and usually a longer more drawn out 'downward' sound to stop.

With patience you can help each mare understand when you are speaking specifically to her not the entire group, by saying her name clearly each time you give her an instruction - helps if you show more than three, or handle the mares from the back of a ridden horse.

Once each mare responds promptly to your requests in a relaxed way you are ready to put them together.

I place the most attentive and responsive mare furthest away from me. The more 'novice' next to me, with the least attentive in the centre, i.e. the 'second' mare, because if you have a mare with a short attention span she will usually follow those on each side of her!

On your first attempt it is probably safer to fit each mare with a head collar and connect them to these, including your own lead rope. Once mastered you could proceed to connecting three mares by their neck collars, leading just your nearest mare by her head collar. Once you have mastered this then use neck collars only, on all mares.

Carry a long stick. Traditionalists may use sticks from quince trees, otherwise a Piaffe whip or lunge whip with most of the thong removed. This is not a weapon and should only be used as an extension of your arm to guide and help train them to stop together in a straight line, or to encourage a slow to respond mare.

A.N.C.C.E. 2013 RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR CONFORMATION - FUNCTIONAL COMPETITIONS FOR PRE HORSES - Article 31. Handlers and riders - 8.2. The use of whips, lashes or sticks is permitted, provided they do not exceed one meter eighty (1.80 meters) in length, including the lash, except for the Cobra Sections, in which longer whips are permitted, but with the lash tied up.

## Cobra exhibitions

You can exhibit (but not in competition) greater numbers, say 4 or more mares. Sometimes in Spain handlers may demonstrate 20+ mares.

For this your mares must be well attuned to your voice and respond immediately, with the mare furthest away from the handler very attentive, responsive yet obedient.

Top handlers will canter their Cobras, have them walking backwards in line or finish a show by full-passing out of the arena.

Richard Lust at Yeguada Iberica exhibits 3 or more mares while riding a stud stallion, including Piaffe in slow pirouette, with the mares keeping pace on



the circle at walk, and sometimes finishing with them wrapping around the stallion in a circle, while Richard thanks each in turn, before they walk backwards into a straight line to end the show.



*Brincadora XV, Oretana III, Seductora XVII & the stallion Granero IV*

For many years his grey PRE mare Moraleja used to lead on the outside of the group and you would often see her left ear turned towards Richard while her right ear faced forwards. Her daughter Brincadora XV carries on the tradition today, nearly always with one ear turned, listening for Richard's voice.



*From a drawing by Glynis Mills of a Cobra of 5 mares from Yeguada Iberica.  
From the left: Moraleja, Brincadora XV, Seductora XVII, Oretana III, Encantadora V*

The mare next to the handler had a head collar as this Cobra was performing while their handler (Richard Lust/Yeguada Iberica) was riding a stallion. Other mares were just wearing neck collars.

## Traditional equipment



Neck collars, with bells, plus a long lead rope (traditionally 'ball-ended') all in natural (brown) leather.

Collars and leather linking straps can be added according to how many mares shown.



A.N.C.C.E. 2013 RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR CONFORMATION - CHAPTER VI. HORSES, BREEDERS, GROOMS/PRESENTERS AND RIDERS - Article 26 (e) Cobras in sections 13 and 14 shall exclusively be made up of mares eligible for sections 7 to 11, that is to say, aged 4 years and over. Requirements for mares taking part in the cobra section are exactly the same as those required for participation in an individual section. f) In sections 13 and 14, when the make-up of a cobra must be changed once the entries have closed, and always prior to the reception deadline, only one of the mares in a cobra may be substituted in the case of section 13, and two in the case of section 14. If there has been no change, should one of the components of the cobra suffer an injury during the competition, this horse may be substituted by another mare entered in one of the adult mare sections and that has been on the grounds from the reception and beginning of the event competition. As previously established for all cases, all horses must belong to the same stud farm at the time of entry.

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