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# Helena Life



Souza on Monitor, a 6-year-old Marchador stallion.



Brazilian horse trainer Felipe Ribeiro Souza works Gilberto, a 3-year-old Marchador stallion, through the gait test necessary for the horse to be certified by the Brazilian Marchador Association.

## Elegant equine

**■ Boulder Valley rancher is Montana's first breeder of Mangalarga Marchadors — Brazilian beauties with a swift, graceful gait**

Story and photos  
By LAURA TOBE  
IR Staff Writer

The horses that mingle in Tressa Smith's corral on her Boulder Valley ranch may not look like exotic imports, but under a saddle, their smooth gait reveals 200 years of careful breeding.

The horses are Mangalarga Marchadors, a



is a breed known for its smooth, quick and easygoing temperament. Bred to work the range, the Marchadors are right at home on Smith's Boulder Valley ranch, but they won't be the same Lazy T brand that the other horses on the place have.

They wear the unique Marchador brand - a horseshoe over the letter M.

Altogether there are only about 90 Mangsteiga Marchadors in the United States, and the eight horses at the Lazy T Ranch are the only Marchadors in Montana.

Smith has been raising the Brazilian horses since 2001 in hopes of giving the ancient breed a new home in the Old West.

Located at the base of the Elkhorn Mountains—the ranch house where Smith lives was the family's summer place, and the fields where her Marchadors graze are the same pastures where she rode as a girl. A horsewoman in childhood, she always found a way to stay in the saddle no matter where life took her.

She worked cattle, competed in rodeos, and after moving to Washington D.C., she took up equestrianism and foxhunting. By the time she met her first Marchador on a business trip to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, she had ridden hundreds of horses.

That first ride was unforgettable, and Smith has trouble describing just what it feels like to ride a Marchador.

"They were just so smooth and fast," she says. "It was speed, but it was like sitting on a cloud."

She later found that Marchadors have two distinct gaits, or marches, the picada and the tala. The gaits are smooth because the horse's stride is a pattern that keeps three feet on the ground through most of the stride. As a result, the rider feels little vertical movement.

That gait is not taught, it comes naturally to a Marchador.

It wasn't just the gentle ride that won Smith's affection. She said she was immediately struck by the horses' easy disposition, willingness and athleticism.

In Brazil, the Marchador breed was developed to work cattle, but over time, the capable, double-headed horses became popular not just on the ranch but also in the show ring.

Most gaited horses are confined to a narrow definition. These horses are not — they do anything," Smith said, adding that Marchadors are used for polo, dressage, jumping and endurance.

Wanting to bring the unique horses to Montana, Smith traveled to Brazil in 2001 to start her ranch. She chose three mares from the Mangsteiga Foundation Farm, owned by Raul



Pupila, a Marchador mare, waits for a handout at the fence on the Lazy T Ranch. Marchadors are known not only for their smooth gait, but for their easy-going attitude.

Junqueira, the man who introduced Smith to the breed.

She purchased three mares, each of them bred to a different stallion, and began a long process of paperwork, quarantine, and shipping to get them to Montana. The process took months longer than expected, and Smith said that when the horses arrived it was February, and two of the three mares had already foaled.

The third was due any day.

A week later, Jobins was born — the first Marchador born in Montana.

That was three years ago, and this spring Jobins and the two other colts born to Smith's mares were among the first Marchadors in the United States to be officially certified.

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## Equines: Horses are certified at age 3

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a team of Brazilian inspectors.

Marchadors cannot be certified until they're at least 3

years old. The breed is held to a high standard for

physical confirmation, and the march must be flawless.

In preparation for the inspection, Smith hired Felipe Ribeiro de Souza, a trainer from Janqueria's farm, to break the young horses. He stayed at the ranch for three months, training the colts before the judges, Getulio Tadeu Vieira, and Jose Eduardo Castello de Teves, came from Brazil for the examination.

The men gave Jobim and the two other young horses their approval, and, having received the official certification, the horses were branded with the Marchador M.

The first Montana-born Marchador certified at the Lazy T, was a long time in coming, and Smith said she plans to continue breeding and training the horses with hopes of selling them. The certification is key to laying a solid foundation in the U.S. for the establish-

ment of the Marchador breed.

Along with Lynn Kelly, a Marchador owner and breeder in Arizona, Smith has helped form the U.S.

### ON THE WEB:

[www.montanamangalargamarchador.com](http://www.montanamangalargamarchador.com)  
[www.usmarchador.com](http://www.usmarchador.com)

Mangalarga Marchador Association.

For now, the U.S. Marchador association does not have the ability to certify horses, so the organization follows the same certification process as the Brazilian association, which requires an inspection by Brazilian veterinarians.

Despite centuries-old bloodlines, the Brazilian Marchador Association takes a high-tech approach to maintaining the breed with DNA analysis, and extensive databases. Without a DNA test and proof of heritage, a Marchador can't be certified.

Smith said the requirements for certification are strict for a reason -- to maintain the breed. As ties between the two countries grow stronger, Smith has hopes of starting an in-vitro breeding program using surrogate mares and frozen semen from Brazilian stallions.

of your house with wheels the size of your car, machines that get zero miles per gallon and have the word "WARNING" in big black letters all over them, followed by statements that inevitably begin, "TO PREVENT SERIOUS INJURY OR DEATH..."

Walking around, admiring and climbing into these rigs, were hundreds of guys, virtually every single one of whom wore work boots, Wrangler jeans, a T-shirt, and either a ball cap or a cowboy hat. Most wore belts with large, manly buckles, some of which were pointing almost straight down under the weight of bottles large enough to contain Richard Simmons. These guys don't belong to health clubs: They chew tobacco while digging the holes that become health clubs.

I was given a tour of the

Field Day by the guy who started it, Mike Griffith, a Texan who pronounces "vehicle" as "vee-hickle" and uses many Texas expressions such as, "That vee-hickle is slick as a whistle." He gave me a ball cap and drove me around on a rugged vehicle that he preferred to drive directly through dirt mounds, rather than around them. Mike showed me various Field Day activities, which included safety seminars and skills competitions. But the main activity, which at any given moment hundreds of guys were engaged in, was randomly digging big holes and then filling them back in, or moving a mound of dirt the size of, say, Vermont, from one side of a field to another, and then moving it back. And if you don't think that would be fun, then you are, no offense, probably a woman.

