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Tresa Smith riding one of her Marchador stallions on a cattle drive. *Courtesy photo*

Mangalarga Marchadors

A Unique Breed of Horses

By Heather Smith Thomas

The national horse of Brazil is making a name for itself in the United States as a versatile, easy-going athlete that can do anything. At present, however, this is a "rare" breed in the U.S. with only about 175 animals, even though there are 300,000 of them in Brazil.

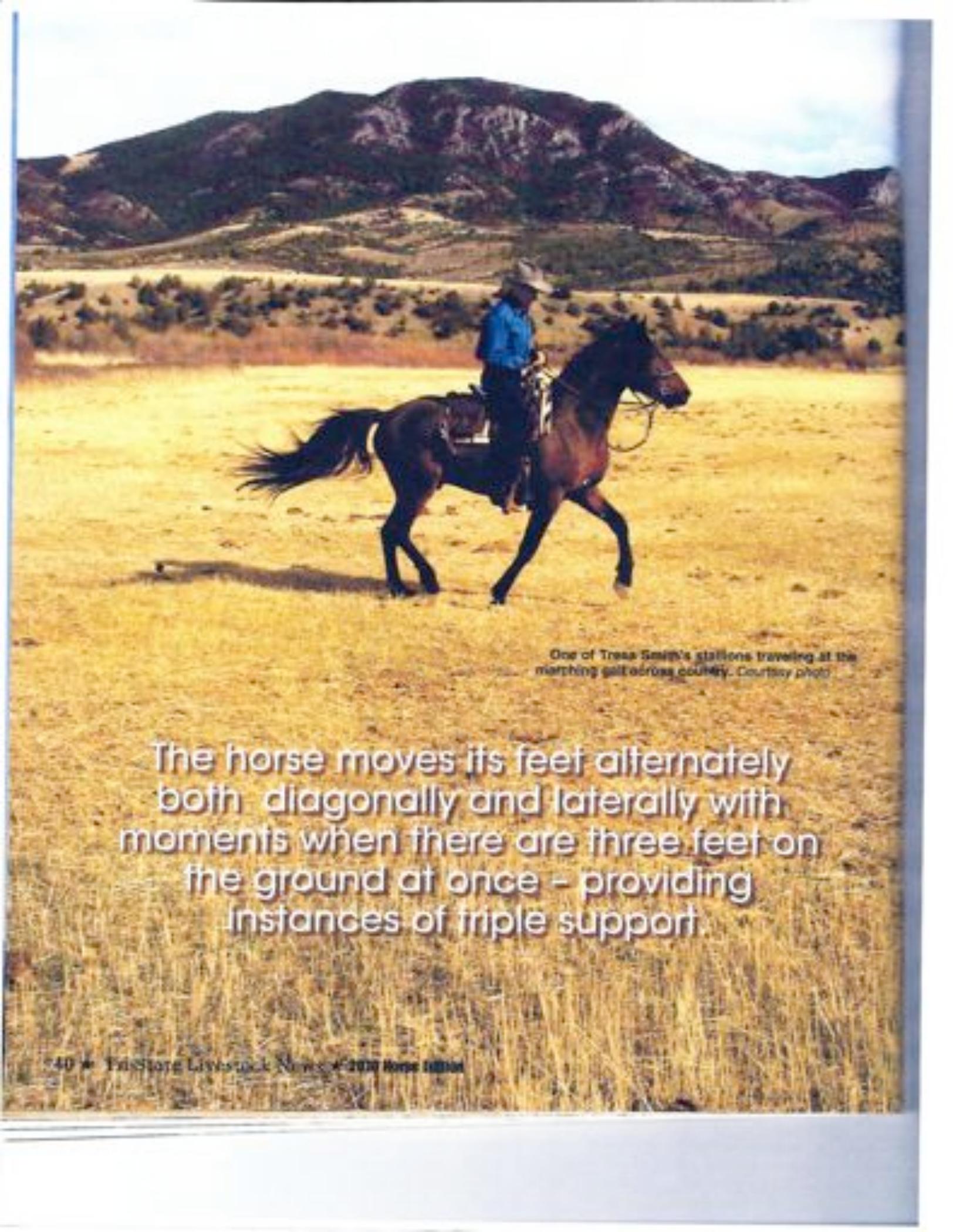
The first ones in the U.S. were imported to Florida in the early 1990s. Today there are also Marchador breeders in California, Colorado, Arizona, Oregon, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, Michigan, Ohio, and Canada, with the most numbers in Montana.

Marchadors have an interesting history. When Napoleon invaded Portugal in 1807 the king of Portugal fled and took his wife, his cavalry and his Andalusian and Lusitano stallions to Brazil. It was these stallions that started the Marchador breed. They were bred to Jennet mares, which were gaited. The resultant breed took its name from the hacienda Mangalarga and the "marching" gait, and quickly became popular throughout Brazil. In

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One of Tresa Smith's stallions doing a roll-back spin on his hind legs. Courtesy photo



One of Tresa Smith's stallions traveling at the marching gait across country. Courtesy photo

The horse moves its feet alternately both diagonally and laterally with moments when there are three feet on the ground at once - providing instances of triple support.



Marchador

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an era of horseback travel, the combination of endurance and comfort was highly prized.

"The Marchador breed gets its cow savvy from the Spanish horses, and its gaits from the Jennet mares," says Tresa Smith, who raises Marchadors in the Boulder Valley near Helena, MT.

The comfortable four-beat gait, called a march or marcha, is remarkably smooth and fast. The horse moves its feet alternately both diagonally and laterally with moments when there are three feet on the ground at once - providing instances of triple support. The horse maintains ground support at all times, with no moment of suspension as occurs in the trot or pace. Thus there's no jarring of the rider, as there is in the trot when diagonal feet hit the ground. The gait is also more stable and sure-footed than the pace (in which the body is supported only on one side at a time).

The Marchador gait is smooth, yet fast (16 to 20 miles per hour). At extended speed the horse's body lifts to create a smooth, floating sensation. It's so smooth that many riders don't realize how fast it is. One old cowboy commented, after riding a Marchador for the first time, "I didn't realize we were moving until I saw the fenceposts going by!" These horses can also move smoothly from their unique gait directly into a canter or gallop. Unlike other gaited breeds, they can stop and turn quickly, pivoting on their hind legs or doing a rollback - which

makes them ideal for difficult cattle work.

The Brazilian registry has extremely tough standards. Breed standards were set 60 years ago because the horses were changing and breeders wanted to maintain the ideals and purity of the breed. In order to receive permanent registration, a horse must pass inspection at three years of age with a test that involves conformation, gait and disposition. The U.S. Mangalarga Marchador Association (USMMA) was founded five years ago. To be registered, a horse must have registered parents and submit DNA of its parentage. Many Marchadors in the U.S. are registered with both associations.

"People had the foresight to realize disposition was one of the strengths of this breed," says Smith. "They are very calm. When they shy, it's mainly just a startle with their ears in forward position. They don't leap halfway across the road and unseat you. These horses are mellow; they really like people."

This may be the only breed in existence that uses disposition as one of the criteria required for registration.

Versatility

"Marchadors really want to do what you want them to do," says Smith. "Shannon Ford of Canada bought two fillies from me and broke the three-year-old herself, riding bareback with a bosal. The first day, she just slipped onto the filly's back and started riding her."

"Rox Rogers here in Montana taught her first Marchador everything she wanted to do. She started

with trail riding, jumping and dressage. Then she thought it would be neat to do reining. Then she did reining without a bridle. Whatever Rox decides to do, that horse does a good job with it. He's become a very versatile animal."

Smith said the Brazilians have designed a competition called the ideal or complete horse, to show the versatility of the Marchador. You ride into the ring and open a gate off the horse, then take him quickly to another station and back him up through another circle, then run poles. After that you do the marching gait, then gallop and run barrels, do a jump, then poll into a circle and just drop the reins.

"This shows that the horse can gait, gallop, run barrels and poles and then stop calmly and stand," says Smith.

Smith and her brother own a 4,000-acre cattle ranch and use their horses for cattle work. The cattle summer on rugged mountain pastures and it takes hours of riding to check on the cattle or round them up in the fall.

"These horses have the most stamina of anything I've ever ridden, and I've ridden Arabs and Thoroughbreds because we ranch in tough country," she says. "These Marchadors are always fresh at the end of the day; they have unbelievable stamina."

This breed is featured in the Guinness Book of World Records for endurance, for the longest horseback ride. In 1994 two 60-year-old Brazilian men completed an 8,694-mile ride in 18 months, to prove the stamina of this breed.

Smith discovered Marchadors when she went to Brazil on business, and fell in love with these horses. Eventually she decided to bring some back to the U.S., starting her breeding herd by importing three pregnant mares and a stallion.

Lori Silcher (Four Seasons Marchadores, near Hamilton, MT) has been raising these horses for six years.

"I've ridden cutting horses, barrel horses and have done all kinds of gymkhana," says Silcher. "I ride miles and miles in the mountains, working for a rancher/cattle broker

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Mona Lisa, a broodmare belonging to Lori Silcher. Courtesy photo

horses. I called him up and asked him more about them and he listed a bunch of things that were amazing, including their athleticism and trainability," says Silcher.

Characteristics

Dr. Tia Nelson, a farrier and veterinarian near Helena, MT, also raises Marchadors and is training to become an inspector for this breed in the U.S. At this point there are no U.S. inspectors for the Brazilian registry, and since many U.S. breeders desire dual registration, inspectors must come from Brazil. Nelson hopes to be able to inspect U.S. horses for Brazilian registry.

"As a breed, these are excellent all-around horses with athleticism, versatility and a good mind," says Nelson. "They're about the height of a large Arabian or average size Quarter Horse - about 14 1/2 to 15 1/2 hands. They weigh 1,000 to 1,200 pounds, and can't be registered if they're too large or too small."

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Marchador

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who has a Forest Service lease in rugged terrain. I've ridden my Quarter Horses all through these mountains for years, and I love them, but the Marchadors have more endurance, a smoother ride, and excellent cattle working ability."

One reason she was looking for something different was health issues. She needed to slow down but didn't want to give up her horses,

and needed something more comfortable to ride.

"I wanted a horse I could ride all day in the mountains and work cattle. A lot of gaited horses are nice to ride but are not very good at chasing cows," she explains.

"I first saw the Marchadors in a magazine. The reined cowhorse trainer Zane Davis (Whitehall, MT) was interviewed in that article. He's a Mormon who did his mission in Brazil, where he encountered these

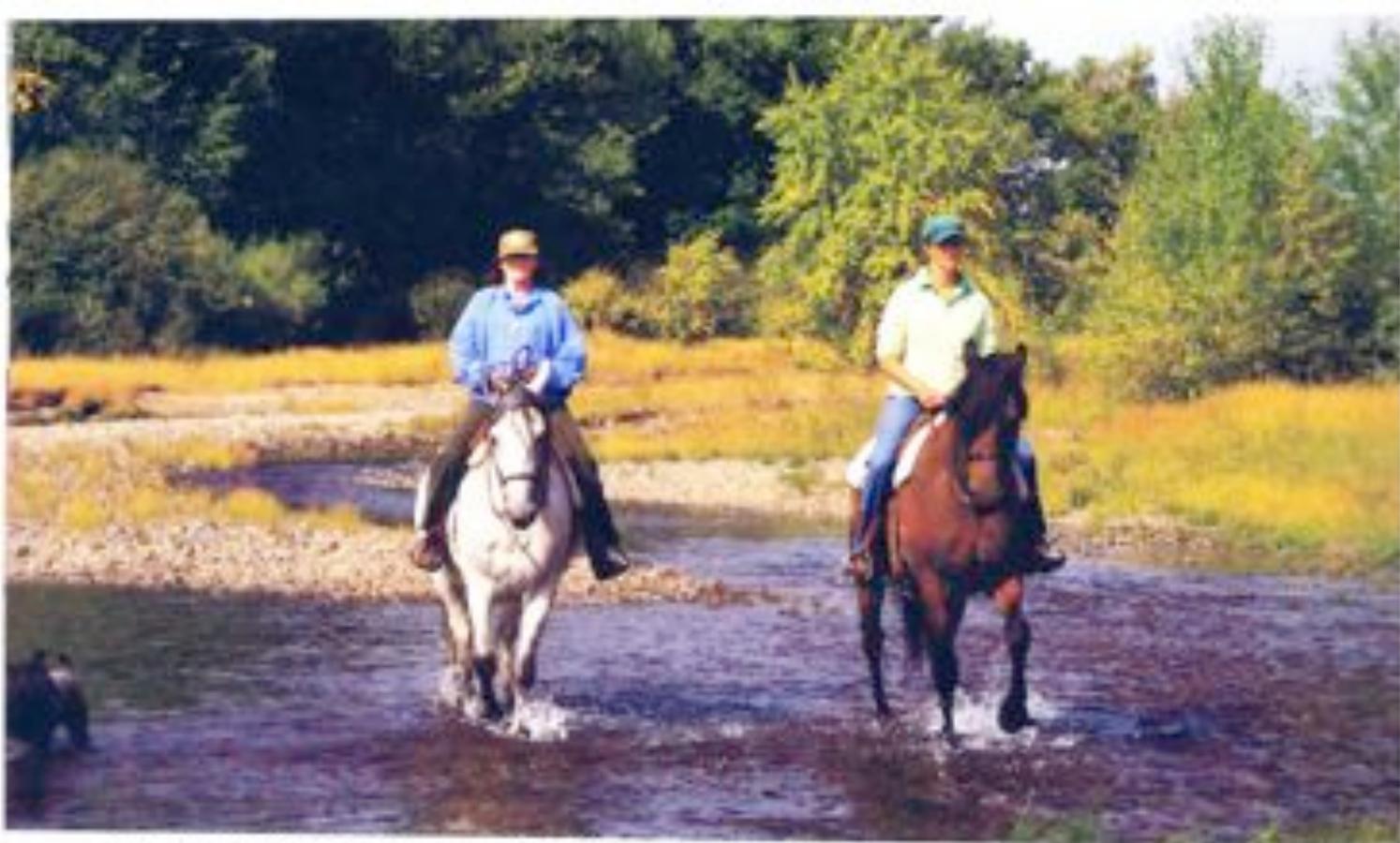
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Tresa Smith and a friend riding her two Marchador stallions. *Courtesy photo*



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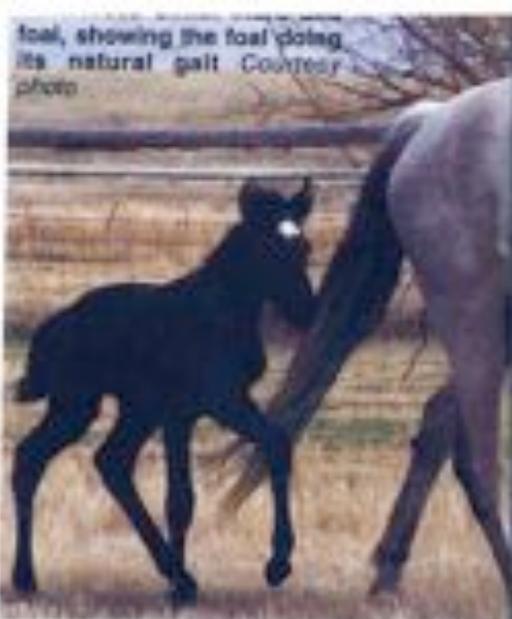
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The head is triangular with large flat forehead and straight profile, tapering to a small muzzle. Withers are high and prominent, the

horses. rumpquarters are well proportioned.

They have very strong, hard feet. "Their feet are like those of good Arabians, with deep heels," Nelson says. "Many of these horses are used barefoot. This breed has some of the most beautiful feet I've seen - short, tidy and round, with robust frogs and good bars - better than most Quarter Horse feet."



foal, showing the foal doing its natural gait. Courtesy photo

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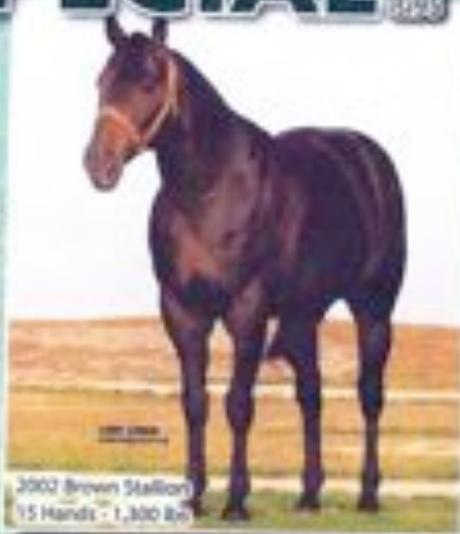


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Marchadors come in every color (including tobiano) except overo paint. Albinos and cremellos cannot be registered. "In Brazil they inspect each foal when it's born, to identify it, note all white markings, and determine base color. Then when he's three years old (at inspection for permanent registration) his official color is noted," says Nelson. By then, any animal that's turning gray will be noted.

"When I was in Brazil I watched these horses at shows, jumping over jumps taller than they were - absolutely bold and fearless and looking like they had a good time doing it," says Nelson. "In Brazil they're also used for anything we'd use Quarter Horses for in the U.S. You name it, they can do it, and they do it with a good attitude.

"A friend of mine, an old cowboy, started a young stallion for me. He'd been riding this colt out in the hills and said, 'I've been around horses all my life, using them for ranch work and showing some of the best

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- and never thought I'd meet a horse that would make me think a Quarter Horse wasn't the best horse on the planet! But this young horse is unbelievable!" He told me the colt was one of the smartest he'd ever started, one of the steadiest and calmest, and one of the most willing to learn. He was also impressed with the horse's walking and gaiting speed. People with Quarter Horses couldn't keep up. He used the colt on cattle and said he was almost as cow-savvy as any Quarter Horse he'd ever ridden."

This is a fantastic combination - to have a gaited horse (smooth, comfortable ride) that's agile enough for cattle work or any other athletic competition. "As I get older I don't like to be bounced around so hard, and I also don't like to fall off," says Nelson. "These horses are just wonderful to ride."

Silcher agrees and says Marchadors are smoother to ride than any other horses she's ever ridden.

"An old trainer here in Montana, Dan Stringari (a rodeo judge who is in the rodeo hall of fame for steer wrestling) is starting my young horses for me now," says Silcher. "He's having both knees replaced, but he can ride all day long on these Marchadors without pain." ♦

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