

Little-known marchador has fancy gait, smarts and sweet disposition

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Not many people in North America know about the Mangalarga marchador breed of horse.

With only about 250 horses on the continent, there's not even enough of the horses to hold shows. But those who have discovered the breed have fallen for them, swearing the animals are among the smartest and easiest to train.

In Marion County, Brooke Little is one of those sold on the breed. She is one of a handful of people in the country that has a small breeding operation. Her Marchadors InMotion is based in Ocala.

"You can't understand a marchador until you work with one," Little said. "You put a saddle on one and they blossom. It's really something special."

Little grew up around horses. Her parents operated riding stables and trained thoroughbreds. She showed horses and galloped thoroughbreds. Then she was introduced to the marchador.

"They have exceptional memories and exceptional minds. They are just really fun horses," she said. "I have a full-time job. I don't ride every day, but they don't need to be ridden every day. I can go a week without riding and they will still perform the same way."

The breed comes from Brazil, where they were developed in the early 1800s from a Portuguese Lusitano stallion and colonial-bred mares in Brazil which had Barb and Jennet horse roots.

The combination of the Lusitano, a powerful, war horse, and the smaller, gaited Jennet, as well as the athletic Barb produced a medium-bodied, gaited horse with endurance and a smooth ride.

"In Brazil, the marchadors are like quarter horses in the United States. They use them for everything," Little said.

There are upwards of 400,000 registered Mangalarga marchadors in Brazil and thousands more in Europe.

But in the United States they are still trying to find a foothold.

"There are so few around that many people have never heard of them," said Ellen Farmer, who worked with the first marchadors imported into South Florida in the mid-1990s.



Photo Courtesy of Brooke Little

This is an undated handout photo of Brooke Little competing with one of her marchadors recently.

About 10 years later, she moved just across the Marion County border to DeLeon Springs, where she established a small marchador breeding operation called Lusonatica.

A native of Brazil, Farmer was not deeply involved with horses until working with the marchador.

“I would ride when I got the chance, but I lived in Sao Paulo and there wasn’t a lot of room to ride,” she said.

The name marchador means "marcher" in English and is a reference to the horse’s gait, which looks similar to a march. There are two major gaits. The most common is called the “batida” and is a three-beat gait. The “picada” is a more delicate gait with four beats.

There is little neck movement and bounce in both gaits, though the picada is the smoother of the two. Unlike the short choppy steps of the Paso Fino, the picada gait is longer. Like all other gaited horses, the movement is genetic and cannot be taught.

“There is a third one that is becoming popular. It’s not official but it’s a combination of the two. They call it “centro,”” Farmer said.

Whatever gait the horses have, they are versatile and used for everything from cattle herding to dressage.

“They can do anything and accept you like one of the herd,” Little said. “When I get home from work. They come to the fence to greet me. They are like pets. It’s why I have trouble selling them once I have trained them. You really get attached to them.”

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