



Coral LaCE

By Lindsay Campbell with Barbara Preiss

Coral LaCE was foaled in Medellin, Colombia, South America, on December 23, 1964, at the farm of Alberto Uribe Sierra, a well-known breeder and trainer of Lusitano bullfighting horses and Paso Finos. Coral died in Weirsdale, Florida, on July 19, 1993, at La Caballeriza de Vez, owned by Wayne and Barbara Preiss. In the years between those two dates, the striking mahogany bay stallion lived quite a life. Coral was imported into the USA in 1968, was Grand National Champion in Performance in 1972, sired 181 PFHA registered offspring (before artificial insemination and embryo transfers were available) - many of whom became champions in their own right - and was a PFHA Top Ten Sire 13 times and Number One Sire twice. Coral was also in the first group of Paso Finos inducted into the PFHA Hall of Fame in 1999, six years after his death.

His accomplishments are too numerous to name here, and as impressive as they were, they only touch the surface of what truly made Coral a great horse.

When partners Mr. George LaHood of Valdosta, Georgia, and

Mr. Cese Figueroa of Landrum, South Carolina, purchased and imported Coral into the USA in 1968, Coral's breeder, Sr. Sierra, reportedly told Mr. LaHood, "Coral is the Paso Fino for the American People." Once in Georgia, Coral was ridden in shows, parades, and on rural trail rides. No matter what was asked of him, he was "always a gem." Mr. LaHood described Coral as having "correct conformation, outstanding beauty, and a gentle nature. He was performance in style and of greater substance and body size which met the needs of American riders. He had a super swift largo gait as well." According to Mr. Figueroa, "Coral had more heart than any horse I had ever known. He was a bit over 14 hands tall, had a high, arched neck, elegant head, and a powerful, accurate gait. He had brio, outstanding locomotion, and great beauty." It is from the names of Mr. La Hood and Mr. Figueroa that the suffix "LaCE" came to be added to Coral's name. When the partners decided to go their separate ways, Coral went with Mr. Figueroa.

Mr. Frank Noyes of Brandon, Florida, was Coral's next owner. Mr. Noyes described Coral as "gentle, willing to please, agile, and proud. He handled like a cutting horse and could largo all day long." Eventually, Mr. Bob FaVuzza of Sarasota, Florida,

after seeing Coral's show ring presence and winning ways in performance, persuaded Mr. Noyes to sell him an interest in the stallion. Mr. FaVuzza then rode Coral to the Grand National Championship in Performance in 1972. Later, Mr. Noyes bought back Mr. FaVuzza's interest and remained Coral's sole owner for several more years.

When Mrs. Betty Klein of Mako's Breezy Oaks Farm in Georgetown, Florida, first saw Coral, she stated, "He took my breath away, not just for his physical beauty, but also for his regal presence. He was an absolute gentleman when it came to breeding, responding quietly to voice commands before mounting the mare. Coral also had a great love for people." Mrs. Klein had a difficult time persuading Mr. Noyes to sell his beloved stallion, but in the end she prevailed, and Coral went to Breezy Oaks as senior stallion. While in her care, Coral bred many mares. The resulting foals did so well in the show ring that in 1980 Coral made it to the top spot on the Top Ten Sires list, a place he would reach again in 1986. His offspring would see to it that he made it onto the list in some capacity 11 more times.

While Coral was with Mrs. Klein, several of his offspring caught the eye of Mrs. Barbara Preiss. Mrs. Preiss, her husband, Wayne, and their children were at that time focusing on the Puerto Rican Paso Fino lines with the intention of producing tractable, well-gaited, people-loving horses. They knew little about the horses from Colombia. However, Mrs. Preiss knew quality when she saw it and asked around as to the breeding of the Coral offspring. When she saw the stallion and what he produced, Mrs. Preiss decided to take two of her Puerto Rican mares to him. Soon, Mrs. Klein and Mrs. Preiss became friends. When Mrs. Klein saw how much the Preiss family valued Coral as a breeding stallion and realized their desire to show his offspring to greatness, she decided to sell the horse to the family. Coral arrived at La Caballeriza, his last home (at the time located in Brandon, Florida), in 1981. According to Mrs. Preiss, "We suddenly became known as HIS owners; he was so famous he made us well known just because we purchased him." She also stated, "Coral LaCE was purely gaited, with great heart, presence, agility, courage, beauty, and elegance. Bred to our Puerto Rican mares, he produced exceptional offspring. He was truly the greatest horse I have ever known. In my eyes he was horse of horses."

Others have spoken of Coral as not of the fino type Paso Fino, but rather a horse of forward motion. He was performance type in action and showiness, pleasure type in disposition and responsiveness, and recreation and trail type in agility, range of gait, and endurance. Several of his offspring and grand-get have been National and Reserve Champions in the largo race.

Today, Coral lives on in his many descendants, most of whom are excellent pleasure and trail horses. Several are proving themselves in the distance riding disciplines as well, especially in the Midwest, Northeast, and Southeast. Mares, stallions, and geldings of Coral's line appear to be equally adept at going the distance. One son was recently inducted into the South

Eastern Distance Riders (SEDRA) Hall of Fame, the first Paso Fino ever to be so honored. Others have garnered awards in the American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) and in some of the competitive trail ride organizations. Some have shown serious aptitude for sports such as pole bending, team sorting, team penning, obstacle trail challenges, and hunter paces, to include jumping.

Perhaps the most impressive fact about Coral was his ability to stamp his descendants with his good qualities and to endure, almost 18 years after his death and 20 years after his last foal crop, as a powerfully distinct entity in the bloodlines of the "de Vez" Paso Finos. In addition to several large breeders outside Florida who have focused on the Coral lines for years, there are still new people coming into the Coral fold. Most recently, at least two large breeders in two different states have obtained stallions, mares, colts, and fillies of the Coral line with which to start their operations. There are small herds of 4-10 horses scattered across the country as well. Many other people are purchasing Coral line horses, one or two at a time, for use primarily as pleasure trail and distance horses.

Owners of Coral horses seem to be as happy with them these days as they were 20 and 30 years ago. Frequently heard comments about the line in recent years include, "They have such great dispositions and are people friendly;" "They are the horses that come right up to me in pasture when all the others ignore me or move away;" "There is nothing like these lines for willingness to go and ease of handling;" "They are so fast and lots of fun to ride;" "I can ride my stallion around the place in a halter and lead rope!;" "My stallion is the one I put all the folks new to the Pasos Fino and its gaits on;" "They are nice looking and well-conformed;" "These horses are bred to do what the rider wants, have smooth gait and brio, and will make their owners proud regardless of choice of riding discipline in or out of the show ring."

Coral promises to live on for the foreseeable future. In December 2008, near the day of his birth, several owners of Coral LaCE descendants got together and presented a large plaque to be placed at Coral's grave to Mrs. Preiss and her family. There is talk of a "Coral Reunion" to occur at La Caballeriza de Vez near the 50th year of Coral's birth. Coral even has his own Facebook page. Mrs. Preiss and other Coral line breeders, as well as owners of Coral horses out on the trails, continue to field questions as to the background of their horses and to answer the question, "Where can I get one of those horses?"

The legacy of Coral LaCE is alive and well in the memories of those who knew him personally and in the tangible proof of his existence in his descendants. It is due to the vision, focus, and hard work of one Florida family based upon the love of one extraordinary stallion that so many are now blessed, years later, to own, ride, compete, and make new lifelong friends (more like family!) through the shared love of Coral LaCE line Paso Finos.