

El Vicario Ltd.

By Laura Orr



"I rode a little gaited horse on a ranch in Arizona, and after I got off I said, 'This I have to have.' The ranch owner did not know her breeding, but when I returned home I began scurrying around looking for this gaited breed and eventually found what I wanted in Paso Finos." Such are the words of Mrs. Daneen Hitchcock, the breeder and owner of PFHA Hall of Fame stallion and Top 10 Sire, El Vicario Ltd.

Born in 1980, Vicario is the son of El Pastor and Gallopa que tal, a daughter of Hilachas. "Daneen was building her breeding program around good mares. Gallopa had good bloodlines—she was a Hilachas daughter, multi-national champion, and Top 10 Dam—so she was a natural choice to breed to El Pastor," says Robin Ratliff, El Pastor's owner and long-time trainer for Mrs. Hitchcock. As the first foal out of her new breeding program, Vicario stole Mrs. Hitchcock's heart right away with his talent and charisma, and she never looked back.

As a three year old—the only time he was being shown extensively—Vicario won 16 firsts and 16 championships under 14 different judges in the divisions of Fino and Bella Forma. He won back-to-back national titles in Bella Forma in 1981 and '82, and 1983 saw him collect three national placements, his Title of Proficiency, national High Point Three-Year-Old Colt, and a lifetime achievement award. In 1985, Vicario switched divisions to Performance—a feat rarely seen in the Paso Fino breed today due to the modern action of the Fino gait. That same year he continued to prove his prowess by winning 3rd National Champion in Performance Stallions. As Vicario babies began to make their first appearances in the show ring, the next decade saw him honored with a Get of Sire title, a listing on the Top Ten Sires list in 1988, and 15 National Championships won by his foals between 1983-1993, in addition to his Legion of Merit and a plethora of other national placements and awards. Vicario continued to win consistently until he was retired from showing, making his last arena appearance in 2000 at twenty years of age.

Show ring successes aside, Vicario has the proven ability to pass on his excellent gait, refined conformation, and talent to his offspring. Because she wanted to maintain the probity of her breeding program, Mrs. Hitchcock did not seek to make Vicario famous through outside breeding, and only bred one or two of her mares each year. "The problem with breeding a lot is that you always have another baby." Practical words from a long-time owner and breeder who understands the value in breeding quality horses as opposed to focusing strictly on quantity.

Despite having bred less mares than most Hall of Fame stallions, Vicario was seen as an important part of the breed for his ability in the show ring and for his success as a sire. His bloodlines, talent, and ability as a quality producer solidified his spot in the PFHA Hall of Fame in 2007, and for good reason. Lisanna Ltd., a Vicario daughter out of a Hilachas granddaughter, notably won the Reserve Grand National Championship title in the 1994 Performance Division before it was spilt into mares, geldings, and stallions. The following year, she repeated that feat in the championship class, took home first place in the regular and championship classes of Bella Forma Mares, and was High Point Horse of the National Show. Other offspring have won national titles, and even more have individually accumulated over 1000 points in PFHA competition. One of Vicario's



El Vicario Ltd. in 1987 (7 yrs. old)

most recent offspring, according to Mrs. Hitchcock, is the spitting image of his father: "He is jet black, gaits everywhere, and crosses his legs just like Vicario whenever he's bored." Katie Britton, the Castalia Farm manager, says of the colt: "We couldn't have cloned Vicario and produced a more similar horse than Encore. He's a rock star." A 2010 colt that debuted in Bella Forma last year, Encore de Vicario Ltd. won a first place in every regional show he entered, and finished his show year winning 3rd National Champion in Bella Forma Yearling Colts at Nationals. Like Robin says, "That is what proves truly good breeding stock—the fact that horses like El Pastor and other Foundation Sires have offspring that are still producing quality horses this many years down the road."

When asked about Vicario's personality, Mrs. Hitchcock chuckles: "He has always been a character. Once, I decided I was going to wrap his legs to trailer him, and he had every leg wrap completely undone by the time we reached the end of the driveway." Today, at the age of 32, Vicario lives at home in Virginia and can be routinely found gaiting up and down the fence line whenever he gets the notion. Robin describes him as "just a really cool horse to train. He was extremely well gaited," and so are his foals, who hit the ground with their father's signature gait and rarely stop.

There is no doubt that Mrs. Hitchcock found what she was looking for in El Vicario Ltd. His success as a Bella Forma contender is impressive; his natural gait is a given in his offspring; and the fact that he has been owned by the same person his entire life speaks volumes for his personality and congenial nature. Perhaps more than anything, however, is what he has accomplished as a sire of regional and national champions and—more poignantly—naturally gaited horses that continue to maintain the integrity of the Paso Fino breed.



Lisanna Ltd. in 1993 (6 yrs old; ridden by Robin Ratliff)
Larry Williams Photo



Lohario Ltd. in 2011 (7 yrs. old; breeding: Vicario Ltd. x La Malaguena de Casta)



Encore de Vicario Ltd. at 2011 Nationals
(yearling; shown by Katie Britton)