



CARTHUSIAN MAJESTY

STORY

Nacho Sánchez

PHOTOGRAPHS

Anna Huix

The exquisite, powerful Carthusian horse has been a long time in the making. Its energy and temperament are the result of centuries of devotion that began with a group of fifteenth-century monks. Today, just outside Jerez de la Frontera in Cádiz, Spain, great care is being taken to sustain this beautiful breed

A mere 48 hours after birth, Jubiloso, a scrawny little colt with a dark coat, is still clumsy on his feet. He doesn't yet dare to leave his mother's side, but his eyes are wide open and his gaze is one of surprise, curiosity, and eagerness. His name means "joyful," and he does seem happy, even though he is oblivious to just how lucky he is. Jubiloso has been born into a legendary family. He is a Carthusian horse, with a lineage characterized by extraordinary poise, intelligence, bravery, nobility, and heart.

His family is one of the select few strains under the Pura Raza Española, the Pure Spanish Horse breed. It is one of the purest equine bloodlines, dating back more than 500 years. He doesn't know it, but Jubiloso might end up serving in the Guardia Real (Spain's Royal Guard) or achieving excellence in dressage competitions. And, with some luck, he could also be a stallion with a critical role to play in securing the future of his kind.

Jubiloso's home is the Yeguada Cartuja – Hierro del Bocado stud farm, a reserve that is dedicated to the Carthusian lineage. Its facilities extend over 540 acres in the historic Fuente del Suero pasture on the outskirts of

Jerez de la Frontera, Spain, an Andalusian city and a breeding ground for arguably the world's most beautiful horses. Now raising more than 300 horses, this farm owns the largest of the 35 herds that form *la asociación Estirpe Cartujana* (the Carthusian breed association), whose main goal is to preserve and improve the Carthusian horse. This breed is distinguished by its elegance, height, and the liveliness of its gait – and, chiefly, by its noble character. "They adapt to any rider, and this, together with their beauty, makes them unique," says Francisco Leal, president of the association, whose members own some 900 examples of the equine dynasty.

To understand this horse's origins, we must look back almost 800 years. In the thirteenth century, Christians captured Jerez de la Frontera from the Islamic caliphate and, to establish control, settled 24 knights in garrisons across the city. One such knight, two centuries later, donated his legacy to establish a monument of extraordinary beauty and the Cartuja de Santa María de la Defensa was built, a Carthusian monastery where monks from Seville took up residence. The monks leased land, owned



wineries, and even administered a fishing port on the nearby Guadalete river. And then, in 1484, they began breeding the very horses to whom they would lend their name.

The monks began with a small selection of Andalusian horses that had been native to the area since prehistoric times and were well adapted to the challenges of the local terrain and the arduous demands of working the land. Guided more by intuition than scientific expertise, the monks crossbred the best specimens in pursuit of perfection.

The monastery cared for these horses with great dedication and devised an iconic bell-shaped brand, a symbol of distinction and luxury that established these animals as fit to serve kings and nobles. The legend of the original monks has been passed down from generation to generation. The monks left the monastery and, in 2000, bequeathed



the branding iron to Yeguada Cartuja – Hierro del Bocado, where it has been preserved as a memento of the breed's history and the stud farm's predecessors.

“For us, it’s an honor. We get to work with five-hundred-year-old jewels,” explains Ignacio Bonmatí, an experienced equestrian. At 32 years old, he has spent the last four years hard at work at this stud farm. He currently oversees the training of eight horses that stand out for “their character and heart.” The former trait can be seen in the breed’s nobility, the latter in its capacity for work. The Carthusian horse develops a unique relationship with its rider that allows the pair to understand one another with the slightest gesture or look.

Observing a training session feels like being at the theater. One is impressed by the natural boldness of the horses, who,

Pages 64–65: the Carthusian horse is one of Spain's most prestigious breeds. It is best known for its excellence in equestrian disciplines such as dressage. Opposite, above: Ignacio Bonmatí, a rider at the Yeguada Cartuja – Hierro del Bocado stud farm, stands with Generoso de Cartuja (left) and Alfarero de Cartuja (right). Opposite, below: an adult bay like Ilicitano II is rare. Most foals are born chestnut (this page, right) but turn gray. At the farm, the foals will remain in their pasture until they are three years old. When he is old enough, Jubiloso will join them. This page, below: Argentino XXV is an older stallion who has sired many offspring



THE CARTHUSIAN HORSE LINEAGE IS CHARACTERIZED BY EXTRAORDINARY POISE, NOBILITY, AND HEART

despite treading powerfully, appear to float over the ground while performing their three gaits: walk, trot, and canter. The sensitivity of the rider is also striking. There is no shouting here, just body language more eloquent than words. Such communication, in which correction is as crucial as praise, is known as “equestrian touch.”

“We are riders but we are also partly psychologists,” explains Juan Bosco. He was born on a horse ranch in Chiclana de la Frontera in Cádiz, Spain, and has been in constant contact with these animals for as long as he can remember. “It’s more than a job,” he emphasizes. “It’s a way of life.”

When they are not training, the horses rest in comfortable stalls with sandy floors surrounded by bright pink bougainvillea. They are stabled near each other, and this contact facilitates communication, with a chorus of neighing to be heard every afternoon. Here, among others, live Ojeador V, Olvidado VII, Encantado XLIX, Osado LXV, Andaluz CLVIII, and Altanero CCIII. Their grandfather is Animoso XXXI. At 30, he has a remarkable physique and energy, despite having exceeded the average horse’s lifespan. “They are a living historical patrimony,” says the ranch’s president, Judit Anda.

A swarm of grooms in heavy boots is always at the service of the horses to tend to their well-being. The daily ritual includes brushing each animal with a currycomb, used to remove dirt from the coat; cleaning and greasing their hooves; and using a dedicated shampoo and even conditioner so their forelocks and manes flow in the wind. Of all the horses, Argentino XXV seems to enjoy his treatments the most. He walks elegantly and poses for photos, proud of his long mane that is braided for competitions.

While the males are trained in dressage and cared for as stallions, the mares are





This page, top: the gait of Altanero CCIII (left) has made him a multi-award winner in dressage. Careful genetic assessment of Encantado XLIX (right) has indicated that his offspring would likely have a great aptitude for dressage. Bottom left: the horses are treated with immense care and have their manes braided in preparation for competitions. Bottom right:

a *mosquero* is a traditional Spanish riding accessory, normally made from leather or horsehair, that consists of tassels called *borlas*. It acts as a bridle decoration and as protection from flies. Opposite: at the Carthusian monastery, Altanero CCIII displays the long, muscular back, sloping shoulders, and high posture that are considered indicative of the Carthusian lineage

mainly devoted to breeding. They spend the morning in the stables and the rest of the day in the pasture, roaming free with their foals.

“The mares are the cornerstone for the preservation of the lineage,” notes the stable master Juan Pedro Aguilar. He started as a stable boy many years ago and eventually took on his uncle’s role on the stud farm. He has inherited the family wisdom and knows every horse absolutely – and by name – because he has been with them since their birth, and many times he has even helped during the mare’s labor. “Look at them! What quality!” he says with satisfaction in his office, which looks more like a museum full of riding accessories, items that, in many cases, he has fashioned by hand. Tradition is important at the farm, but the organization is also very committed to innovation, particularly when it comes to the evolution of breeding techniques, as is evident at the modern on-site reproduction clinic where an experienced team of veterinarians is hard at work using state-of-the-art technology. The farm is deeply proud of the quality of its breeding stock.

Thanks to the efforts of the stud farms under the Carthusian breed association, the new generations of this equine family will still be seen as symbols of prestige and quality. Interest in this bloodline extends far beyond Spain, and the breed has captivated clients from as far away as Brazil, Germany, the US, and Thailand who are keen to improve their standing stocks. But most of the horses stay near their roots in Jerez de la Frontera, acquired and raised by passionate locals who are thrilled to sustain the legend of this majestic, centuries-old breed. ♦

Translated by D.P. Snyder



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