



## ***A Guide to Doma Vaquera in Competition***

**by John St Ryan**

Doma Vaquera is one of the styles of equitation in Spain, another being Doma Clasica (classical equitation).

Doma Vaquera is a style of horse riding which enables the rider to carry out daily duties on horseback on a working cattle ranch. It was especially developed out of the use of the horse for handling the fighting bulls of Spain and grew out of decades of daily work with them in the open countryside.

The style of riding, tack, dress and discipline of the working horses evolved into what we see today. It is still being used on working ranches, in Doma Vaquera competition and more recently, Doma de Trabajo (working equitation).

Because Doma Vaquera is relatively new to the USA I believe it would be helpful to those interested in the development of the discipline to have the opportunity to have a better overview and understanding of the requisite movements, expression and essence which goes to make a true presentation of Doma Vaquera.

Both horse and rider must be aware of the 'aire vaquero'.

Although the three tests are standardized, there should be a quality of spontaneity and brilliance which flows through horse and rider. In training it is necessary to avoid the horse becoming anticipatory of the movements, otherwise the test can look dull and monotonous.

The rider should present an air of pride and confidence in his performance. The judges look for individuality and flair. Although a high percentage of the score is made up from the basic movements of walk, trot, canter and gallop, a rider can tip the balance in his favor and improve his overall score by his presentation and style.

The walk must be with impulsion. Straightness on a line and with curvature on a circle. The mosquero swinging and moving in rhythm with the horse.

The canter and gallop must be steady and true, with impulsion and cadence.

The reins are held in the left hand with the little finger between them. It is permissible to adjust the rein length with the free hand.

The free hand (right) is place on the thigh with the thumb forward in the walk and the trot. At the canter and gallop the hand is gently closed and placed across the sternum of the rider.

The rider may provide appropriate music (Spanish or Latin guitar without vocals) to be played during the test.

The arena size should be 20 x 60 meters.

The judges sit at the opposite end of where the exhibitor enters.

Junior horses (up to 5 years old) may be ridden in a snaffle with two hands on the reins.

The tail hair is either cut square and short or tied into a field knot.

A gelding or mare would have the forelock shaved. Manes are either cropped or braided in to small tight buttons. No colored ribbon is used only matching colored yarn.

The horse may be shod or unshod.

Martingales, leg protectors and sliding shoes are prohibited.

Any long hairs along the cheeks and jaw line should be removed. The ears should have any long protruding hairs trimmed level with the rim of the ear.

Removal of the long tactile feeler hairs around the muzzle is unnecessary.

### **Doma Vaquera in Competition**

Modern Doma Vaquera competitions provide a challenging test for both the horse and rider. Practicality and precision are married together as the rider must be aware of the true nature of these tests which are performed in a 60mx20m arena. At advanced level the requirements include all the maneuvers a horse would need to make when facing a fighting bull such as explosive gallops from a standing start, skid stops, lateral yielding and canter pirouettes.

### **Garrocha**

The art of running and bringing down a bull using the 'garrocha', (cattle lance). The 'garrocha' is traditionally made of wood but many are now made of fiber glass. The accepted length is 13'1".

'Acoso y Derribo' is currently a competitive sport in Spain. Two 'garrochistas' follow the bull at speed into an open field. Both men carry a 'garrocha', the man who knocks the bull down is known as 'el que suelta', while his accomplice is known as the 'amparador'.

Competitors gain points for knocking the bull down within certain boundaries on the field, and for their horsemanship skills. This is an extremely demanding sport for both horse and rider. The sudden changes in both speed and direction must be coordinated with each rider to prove successful.

### **Movements**

The entrance to the arena is always at a working canter on the right lead.

The subsequent halt is marked according to the straightness and position from the entrance, the weight distribution over the hindquarters and the immobility of the horse.

The walk should be strong and purposeful. Hind hooves passing the print of the fore hooves. The mosquera swinging rhythmically.

The circles at a walk and trot must have regularity of steps and correct curvature.

The half pass should have rhythm and balance with the forehand leading the bend in the direction of the movement.

The full pass is also made with the bend in the direction of the movement but with as little forward motion as possible.

Half pirouette (turn on the haunches) on a straight line without losing impulsion on the turn. No rearward steps of the hind feet as they mark the rhythm in the smallest circle possible. Head curved slightly in the direction of travel.

Reverse pirouette (turn on the forehand) on a straight line without losing impulsion on the turn. Forelegs marking the rhythm in the smallest circle possible with heads held slightly outwards.

Reinback should be made with true straightness and even diagonal steps. A sense of lightness and readiness to either pause or move forward is required.

Half pass at canter should be balanced and with the forequarters leading, bent in the direction of travel.

Flying changes should be straight and smooth.

Counter canter with the head slightly to the outside of the circle. The movement should be even and balanced.

Rollbacks are executed from either, a walk, canter or gallop. The horse should be straight and deep in the hindquarters as he stops to turn 180, leaving with impulsion and no loss of fluidity.

### **The 'arrear'**

From either a stop or canter the horse sprints and gallops forward with great strength and power. The neck should be allowed to extend and the rider show good control and communication as he collects and slows down sufficiently to make a clean 180 turn and gallops again in the opposite direction, repeating the collection and turn.

The fast stop should be made from the 'arrear', with straightness, balance and determination. The hindquarters well underneath and no lifting or jerking of the head.

For more information on Doma Vaquero, visit [www.domavaquerainstruction.com](http://www.domavaquerainstruction.com)