

Introduction to
**Classical Spanish
Equitation**

By Antonio Topete Diaz

In countries around the World,
man has been blessed with a noble and powerful creature,
which he has used for pleasure, sport, war, and work
through the ages.

This creature is the Horse.



A flowing Spanish Walk performed by Avi Cohen and Alborozo.
Photo: Patty Wigdhal



Spanish Riding performed by
Tracy Lyn. Photo: Paco Rey

The Three Training Stages of the DOMA CLASICA

1 Nivel de Introduccion (Introductory level) Doma Basica (Basic training)

2 La Escuela de Campana (Campaign School)

3 Gran Premio or Alta Escuela Clasica

To accomplish man's desire and goals however, methods had to be developed to work with horses so that this noble creature would submit willingly to his master's commands, through the subtlest of aids. In Spain, over centuries of interaction with the horse such techniques evolved into what is identified as the School of Classical Spanish Equitation.

The Art of Horsemanship has been documented for thousands of years since before the birth of Christ. Xenophon (Greek Military Commander, philosopher, and historian) wrote "The Art of Horsemanship" about 400 years B.C. His book explained to inexperienced riders how a warhorse should be kept, fed and trained. About two thousand years later, history noted a group of exceptional horse masters. Among them were Federico Grisone, Pignatelli, and William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle. Perhaps the most famous of all during this time was Francois Robinchon de la Guerinere who is credited with the development of the shoulder-in. As a result of the Crusades, many diverse schools of thought developed on how to properly train a horse. King Charles I of Spain, also known as the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, strongly influenced the art of horsemanship during the mid 1500's in Spain and Austria. It is thought that the first Chief Riders of the Spanish Riding School in Vienna were of Spanish origin because of the Spanish names found on the original school records. This was the beginning of Classical Spanish Equitation, which incorporates tried-and-true methodologies and techniques into the three styles of riding found in Spain today.

Doma Clasica is equivalent to Classical Dressage. In this style of riding, the horse is taken through three stages of training.

1. Nivel de Introduccion (Introductory level)
Doma Basica (Basic training)
2. La Escuela de Campana (Campaign School)
3. Gran Premio or Alta Escuela Clasica

A level one horse is taught the basics of energetic forward movement and obedience to the aids. Correct gymnastics are used to develop the horse physically. When he has accomplished these skills, he moves into the second level of training that includes both development of lateral movement and his paces as

well as advanced training designed to increase suppleness and collection. Level three includes training in patterns that are more difficult and exercises such as piaffe and passage, tempi changes and canter pirouettes. The completion of the entire Doma Clasica regimen from beginning to end could take from two to six or more years depending on the physical and mental abilities of the horse, and the skill, expertise, and abilities of his master.

It is easy to see how the stages of Doma Clasica relate to Classical Dressage, which breaks the training progress of a horse into more stages beginning with Training Level and ending with Grand Prix.

An enthusiast of either discipline should be able to follow and enjoy classes at a show that features either school of thought.

Doma Vaquera is the style of riding most commonly used in Spain for cattle work, competition, and exhibition. In this work, the horse is taught a combination of movements from canter pirouettes to sliding stops and could be described as a combination of a western reining class and classical dressage.

In fact, the Spanish Dons brought this style of riding

Doma Vaquera performed by Ami MacHugh.
Photo: Paco Rey

to California where it evolved into the Vaquero Style. In Mexico, Spanish Riding Masters planted the seeds that became the Charrería. Doma Vaquera skills are also basic to the Rejoneadores (Mounted Bull Fighters). Some of the most skilled Doma Vaquera riders will often perform with no hands on the reins to show the perfection of their horse's training. No one will ever forget a garrachista performance if they have the privilege to see one. The horse spinning under the garracha pole, the flamenco music playing, and the rider relaxed in the saddle, one hand on the pole and the other resting on his thigh.

The Doma Vaquera work requires years of patient and systematic work, as does Doma Clasica. Both advanced Doma Vaquera competition, and its actual field application working the bulls, require canter half passes, canter pirouettes, and sliding stops as well as tempi changes and roll-backs. It requires a more intense and speedy skill level than that required in dressage. Since most of the movements are done in walk, canter, and full gallop the rider's seat must be very secure and he must be able to ride on a curb bit alone with just one hand, freeing the other for the use of the Garrocha, Rejones, or Banderillas. Many great Vaquera riders use Doma Clasica in their Vaquera Training regimen. The main goal in the Vaquera style is to produce absolute obedience, lightness and suppleness so the rider can keep the horse fully collected with one hand. The horse must be willing to depart at a canter from a standstill, a walk or a rein-back on any lead required by the rider. The work for Doma Vaquera once again, depending on horse and rider will take anywhere from sixteen months to six years to accomplish a polished and reliable level of performance. Doma Vaquera horses can be seen in exhibition, the bullring, or on a working ranch. This can be dangerous work and requires one hundred and ten percent from both rider and horse.

Alta Escuela literally means High School. This style of riding includes many Grand Prix Dressage movements and beyond. The Alta Escuela Española form also includes the Spanish Walk, perhaps kneeling, laying down, bowing and in the most advanced level Levade, Posadas, Corvetas or Cabriolas in hand or under saddle. This work takes a very long time in addition to a solid foundation in Doma Vaquera or Doma Clasica. The Alta Escuela horse is therefore the most spectacular and beautiful to watch.

In my experience, there is a benefit to combining elements of Doma Clasica, Doma Vaquera and Alta Escuela in a young horse's training regime. It creates a willing, enthusiastic horse that is properly "gymnastized". An additional benefit is the rider more quickly recognizes the natural talent for any one of the disciplines. I like to train youngsters in the open because the horse learns to focus on the riding aids while ignoring external stimulation. Therefore, one of the greatest enemies of progress - boredom, is prevented by avoiding constant repetition of schooling figures in the riding arena.

Just as many top American trainers use cross training to develop all sides of their young horses, combining the three classic forms of Spanish Equitation serves the same purpose. This method will help to discover, more quickly, any young horse's special talents so his future training can be directed towards a specialty. The country of origin for Classical Spanish Equitation is Spain and the original horse trained in this way is the P.R.E., however, in America there is an application for these techniques for many other breeds and disciplines. These three methodologies are tried and true, built on systematic steps designed to strengthen and discover special talents. This is something that can have value in the American market.

Antonio Topete Diaz

Attended the Centaur Institute of Classical Equine Studies (CICES) at Bend, Eastern Oregon from 2006-2008 (A former rider of the Spanish Riding School for 15 years, who also spent 10 years as a professional Rejoneador, developed the program.) Student of the year award at CICES 2006. Oregon Horse Trainers Association Colt Starter's Program 2006. Graduated third in class and performed a Grand Prix musical freestyle at the 2008 spring graduation ceremony. Rider and Trainer of Emperador (5 years old to 8 years old). Emperador had been worked at dressage training level for one year when I was appointed to continue and complete his training as part of my training at the CICES school. Emperador performed

all the classical airs, such as one and two tempi changes, piaffe pirouettes, canter pirouettes, zigzag half pass, canter pirouettes, piaffe-passage transitions, and caprioles in hand. Based on the combination of my personal training experience I have developed a training regime for young horses that combine the principles of Alta Escuela and Doma Vaquera. In Classical Spanish Equitation, this is the equivalent of cross training so often used in the U.S. The reason this works so well, it avoids boring the horse with repetitive exercises, and allows full development of its physical and mental capabilities. The result is a properly "gymnastized" horse ready to specialize in the medium and upper level movement in either discipline.



A la Garrocha

A spectacular Levade performed by the Medieval Times. Photo: Paco Rey