

Paso Fino, a Breed or a Gait?

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The Colombian Paso Fino, one of the most amazing horse breeds in the world, a perfect mix of strength, versatility, quickness, honesty and beauty. These horses have been around since XVI Century when the Spanish Conquistadors' horses bred with local Criollo horses creating what we now know as Paso Fino.

However, in Colombia they are just gaited horses or “Caballos de Paso”, they have earned this name due to the delicacy of their gait. But, it would be wrong to believe that these animals known worldwide as Paso Finos only do one gait. They are actually born with it, we can't teach them to gait or “the gait”, we can only refine it, control it, enjoy it and watch in amazement as these creatures move in front of us like floating on air.

The Caballos de Paso are born with one of these 3 natural gaits: Trote, Troche or Paso Fino. The “Trotón” horse is easily identifiable as this gait is the harshest of the three. It is executed in a criss-cross action, just like our European counterparts, with a Left Hand – Right Leg action. However, the hands tend to elevate in a vertical manner and it is not as fast as the other two. Most Trotones tend to almost stop for a fraction of a second at the top of this action, while the back legs continue to motor on like a spring, creating the usual 1,2,3,4 steps. Traditionally hand and leg elevation, also known as spring action “Resorte”, and tightness of the legs are signs of a good quality trote horse.

Trote horses would also perform Long Trot (Trote Largo), a majestic gait seen in similar fashion in the Spanish arenas and in dressage horses, however, the Colombian Paso Fino remains smooth and fast while performing this gait. They would also execute a Short Canter and a Long Canter, when these are seen by new comers, normally they resemble a Circus Horse as these carters are so controlled, it would seem impossible for them to be natural.

The Short Canter is my favourite and in my mind the hardest gait to perform as it only requires the release of the hands by a millimetre, the horse will

switch all its power to the back legs and lift itself slightly while moving its hands in the air to imitate what I can only describe a “slow motion” canter. The long canter is more loose and natural, faster and the front of the horse remains lower with the power equally balanced on all legs.

Trote and Galope horses are ideal all round horses, excellent for trail, dressage, pleasure riding, show jumping and western rides. Most Colombian Cowboy farms use trotones to gather their cattle and as their main means of transport.



The next gait is “Trocha”, for the untrained eye troche and Paso Fino would seem the same or at the very least very similar. Trocha is a softer Trote at its rawest state, with the same criss-cross action as trote. Trocha is a faster and smoother gait when compared to Trote. The hands have less vertical elevation and at the same time has further horizontal reach, the back legs should remain with plenty of spring vertical action and tightness. A lot of Trocha horses would canter beautifully, although they are unable to perform that short canter like a trotón due to the hand and leg coordination of the gait.



Troche horses are the simplest to ride and are ideal for trail, pleasure and western style riding.

Finally we come to Paso Fino (Fine Gait or Fine Step), this is the gentlest, smoothest gait ever, so smooth you would be able to serve drinks in your local pub on one of these animals without wasting a drop of the golden nectar. The Paso Fino gait is a lateral movement where the horse executes a complete single side movement, by this I mean, left hand – left leg, rather than the criss-cross movement of the Troche or Trote. This locomotive type action is what makes them so smooth.



The movement is extremely fast with little vertical elevation at the front but remaining springy at the back. Paso Finos can just perform their gait without moving forward, dancing on a penny (“Bailan en un centavo”). Paso Finos would not normally canter, although some do. Traditional breeders would say that cantering a Paso Fino would deteriorate their gait and one could force them to switch from Paso Fino to Trocha.

Paso Finos are the ideal pleasure and trail horses, if you love riding, but have a back injury or are carrying a knee injury a Paso Fino would keep you riding for years.

Generally speaking, Colombian Paso Finos as a breed and if trained properly are very trusting animals, who would put their lives in your hands and would not do anything that would place their rider in danger. They would go where you asked to go without questioning it, due to the softness and responsiveness of their mouth are very easy to control, so, no more bolting back to the stable while you patch up the bruises on your back.

So, based on these short notes, I think we come to the conclusion that in Europe we call all gaited horses Paso Fino. This is only a small misunderstanding and at the same time a way to identify the breed. However, I would like to suggest we change this and begin to call the “Paso Horses” or “Gaited Horses” and as we all become more educated on the breed we can call a Troche Gaited Horse what it is and a Paso Fino Gaited Horse what it is.

If you want to understand more about how to recognise the different gaits and keep your horse “in gait”, you should look at the hand-leg action, the speed, the elevation and take your time as this can only be done successfully with careful examination and experience.