

CABALLOS DE PURA RAZA
MENORQUINA

MINORQUIAN HORSE

The Menorquín or Caballo Menorquín is a breed of horse indigenous to the island of Menorca in the Balearic Islands, from which it takes its name.

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Photos "Supplied"

importance of the horse to the Menorcan people, take part in the Jaleo.

There is a story behind the Jaleo. It is commonly recounted that one year a famous horseback pilgrimage passed in front of a band performing "El Postillón de la Rioja", and the horses were startled and began to rear up. The result of the commotion was pandemonium, and the Spanish word for pandemonium is, in fact, "Jaleo".

This movement of rearing up (es bot) has since become a benchmark in the Menorquin horsemen's festival routines and is performed in the midst of throngs of excited spectators, loud music and wild excitement.

It is considered an act of bravery to touch the horse's chest whilst it is rearing, so as the horses parade the streets and show off their wonderful "bot", the spectators push forward to touch, or even join together to hold up, the rearing black stallion. The riders are applauded the longer the horse stays on two feet, and the music in the background paired with the riders' baroque dress only adds to the distinct medieval atmosphere.

The Menorquin horse is symbolic, not only of the island, but also of a particular form of local horsemanship called Doma Menorquina, which is strongly influenced by the Doma Vaquera and Spanish high school. The Doma Menorquina training is demonstrated in spectacular festivals throughout the island during the year. The signature movement, "es bot" or "es bot de caminar", is performed at the trot, slowly and without tension. The horses rear very high in the air - so much so that it often appears they are about to fall over backwards - and then walk forwards on two legs.

The Menorquin horsemen use voice aids when requesting certain movements, and this is one of the features of their training style. The horses are worked with one hand (the left) in traditional tack, such as a Menorquin saddle and bridle. During festivals, the horses are decorated with ribbons and their riders are dressed in white trousers, three-pointed hats (which they will often hold to their chests) and elegant black jackets.

The history of the Minorca horse is as interesting as that of the islands. Horses have existed on Menorca for centuries. The first Cavalry troops based on the island date back to 1301, and their Iberian war horses were bred to be agile and steady in combat. Menorca was an important strategic point in the Mediterranean sea, occupied by Fenicians, Romans, Turks, Moors, the English, French and of course the Spanish kingdom over

the centuries. King James III of Aragón, who was sick of Menorca's many attacks by sea apparently decreed that by royal law all farmers on Menorca should keep a war horse that was "fast and rustic" to move their troops rapidly from one point of the island to the other in order to fend off enemy attacks. In fact the "camí de Cavalls" (the horse path) was the original trail around the island that these farmer come soldiers used to move about.

The closest relative to the Pura Raza Menorquina is the PRE. Menorquin breeder Francisco (Sisco) Fuster, who is now based in Holland with his dutch wife Jannette Bijsterbosch, outline the main differences between traditional PRE horses and Pura Raza Menorquina horses

At first sight the main difference is that Minorca horses are not as baroque in appearance and their chest, hind legs and back are not as muscled as the PRE's.

The Menorquin horses are always black, no other color is accepted in the stud book and their legs and feet are finer and smaller.

The movement of the front legs is generally not as pronounced as the PRE's. The PRE phenomenon of "campaneo" is not common in Minorca horses.

PRE's are more sensible and easier to offend when ridden by less experienced riders compared to the Pura Raza Menorquina.

Menorquin horses can also be used for all disciplines that PRE horses excell in (Alta escuela, doma vaquero, doma clásica, enganche etc) and interestingly their is now a PRM stallion called Topo used in the Real escuela de Arte Ecuestre de Jerez.

Sisco has long been convinced that Menorquin horses could compete successfully internationally.

Although around 2000 horses live on the island of Menorca, only a few hundred are registered outside of their homeland.

In 2009, in an article written for a local paper called El Menorca, Sisco Marques (Escuela Eqüestre Menorquina) was quoted as saying, "On Minorca, many locals still believe that their mighty black horses

The band plays loudly - a simple, traditional tune that adds to the atmosphere. The streets are filled with throngs of locals and tourists alike. The weather in Spain in late June is warm and balmy; locals sell pomada and traditional Menorcan sweets, and the streets are abuzz with lively excitement.

Menorca is generally known for being a quiet and tranquil holiday destination, but when it comes time to party, this quiet island changes its dynamics very quickly - the shops close early and the streets are cordoned off; it's all about the horses today. These beautiful horses are the main theme of most of the cultural celebrations in Menorca, an indication of the extent to which the horse is important in society and in the traditions of the Menorcan people.

The Menorquin horse is an important symbol of this island's history and cultural traditions, and it is physical evidence of the hundreds of forced domination's the island has suffered since the Bronze age. This magnificent jet black horse has only been recognized as a breed since 1989, although you could hardly call the Menorquin a recent addition to the horse world - its roots are as ancient as this island of Spain that it calls home. One cannot think about Menorca without mentioning their beautiful and symbolic horses, horses that have been infused with

Berber, Arab, Spanish and English thoroughbred blood. Over little more than the 700 square kilometers of terrain that makes up Menorca live more than 2000 Menorquin horses, making the island one of the most densely populated by equines in Europe.

To attend one of the festivals of Menorca is to really experience the culture of the local people. If you truly want to understand the



are only suitable for performances and fiestas and not for dressage. Here we are aware that our horses are still a young breed, but with the right examples and the right training we can achieve excellent results. If the sea between Minorca and the Spanish mainland did not exist, this breed would be far better known."

Sisco tells me. "I'm convinced that, when these horses (the right and selected ones) are matched to someone who can "extract" the best aptitudes, they will show the world that a new breed has come to the scene that has the power to succeed. It's a very difficult task to accomplish without a good budget though".

Sisco's words hit a chord, as here in Italy this year a young rider and his black Menorquin stallion Rencí have made local press due to their upcoming performance in Olympic games in London this August. Rencí will be the first Minorquian horse to take part in the Olympic games, and the interesting twist in this international debut is that Rencí's rider Mattia is only 14 years old.

Rencí was one of Sisco's first horses. A stallion initially purchased to found his Dutch breeding stud and imported to Holland where he lived for 5 years serving mares in the couples farm.

Sisco tells me "Rencí is a horse with a very strong horsenality. He is extremely clever, but once he accepts you as his leader he becomes a partner that will do anything for you. It was always a pleasure for me to work with Rencí and accidentally we learned to work with him at liberty. One day I stepped into the meadow to have him move about for some clients,



and he started following my nearly invisible indications in a positive way, and seemed to really enjoy the experience. From that day on we started working without any kind of tack; and I was always amazed about his cleverness and disposition to work with me or people he liked.

We really enjoyed Rencí during the 5 years he was with us, but we had to sell him to offer him a much better life. The first year he was the only stallion covering the mares. Then in 2008 our second stallion Tirol arrived and we used him to cover the mares. Rencí got very upset, he couldn't handle the presence of another stallion in the stable and even less the fact he was not covering "his mares". At our stables, there is constant visual contact within mares and stallions and Rencí was constantly nervous and upset about the situation so that it became impossible for us to keep him on weight, no matter how much

we fed him."

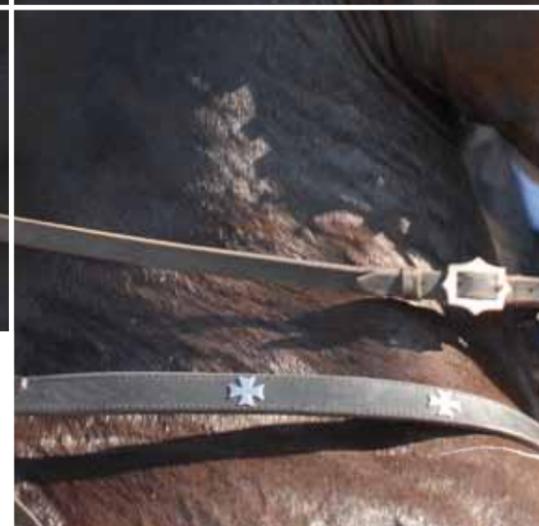
We decided to move him back to our good friend Sisco Marques of Escola Equestre Menorquina in Ciutadella, where he would be further trained in the Menorquin dressage and put for (silent) sale.

Mattia was just nine years old when he first saw a Menorquin horse at the international horse fair at Verona, Italy. The wonderful black horses appeared to Mattia like something out of a fairytale, and the determined boy decided then and there that he would eventually have a Menorquin horse.

In 2009, by chance, he met Sisco Marques who was representing his breeding stud at the Italian fair. What followed really is straight out of a fairytale - Mattia's family flew to Minorca for a holiday to practice Minorcan dressage at Marques dressage school. Marques let Mattia ride on Rencí, and right away he was totally enchanted with him. It was a match. "In the end I didn't choose Mattia for Rencí, but Mattia chose for Rencí (who he nicknames 'Fairy') - Marques told me that the match was very good and therefore we sold him, we have now the proof that this was the right move, as Mattia has worked very hard in Italy with his trainer and they are now achieving important results."

Sisco had already met Mattia at the 2009 Fiera di Cavalli in Verona (Italy's largest horse fair). The 11 year old boy impressed Sisco straight away by his competent riding and handling of different Minorcan horses and stallions at the fair.

"Mattia is a shy and quiet boy, but his interaction with horses even then was



remarkable if not amazing. He just did everything he was asked to do, taking care of the stallions, preparing them, riding them calmly without any words. I could see he enjoyed just being around the horses.

Mattia's mother Laura purchased Rencí in 2010, and since his arrival in Milan both horse and rider have been closely followed by German trainer Fauke Geilhof and Italian Marco Caremi. In 2011, they competed throughout Italy in both dressage and Alta scuola dressage and would have performed at the London Olympics in the Greenwich Park Equestrian Complex if he had not been only 14 years old.

When I ask Sisco how he feels to hear that his founding stallion is going, he tells me that he always knew Rencí was special but that he was just not

in the right environment. Hearing the news of his success was simply confirmation of a vague suspicion that his stallion has something special about him.

Sisco and Janette offer potential buyers information on the breed and have a small but quality selection of horses available for purchase. They also can assist in looking for horses on the island for potential buyers. Many thanks to both Sisco and Janette for this article.

www.menorcahorses.com

