# Paso Finos

By Lynn Gallup

Bob Langrish

Time flies by when you have Paso Fino horses in your life. It seems like yesterday to many of the breed's still active pioneers as they reminisce to each other about the Paso Fino being given provisional breed recognition by the American Horse Shows Association (AHSA) in 1977. For the 1978-1979 competition year, the Paso Fino Owners and Breeders Association (PFOBA) rules first appeared in the then-*AHSA Rule Book*. PFOBA was encouraged to get Paso Fino classes included in as many all-breed AHSA shows as possible during that first year. On April 16, 1979, Piedmont PFOBA region joined hands with AHSA and nine Paso Fino classes were incorporated into the All-Breed Easter Monday Horse Show in Oak Ridge, NC. The show brought together exhibitors to show off their beautiful and unknown breed of horse—the Paso Fino. This supportive affiliation with the USEF and Paso Fino Horse Association (PFHA) continues strong today.

*The Paso Fino, or "horse with the fine walk," exhibits a natural four-beat gait from birth. Performed at three forward speeds, the rider appears motionless in the saddle.*

Over the past 30 years, USEF has helped to elevate equestrians' and the public's view of what a Paso Fino is and its recognition as an established, credible smooth-gaited breed. Today, the PFHA has over 8,500 members represented by 24 regional associations in the United States, Canada, Europe and South America. USEF records show 1,007 memberships with Paso Fino listed as the primary discipline, and with 23 listing Paso Fino as a secondary discipline. Also, 49 out of 58 PFHA judges, and 10 out of 14 stewards are accredited USEF officials. In 2006, out of a total of 50 PFHA shows, 37 were rated AP/USEF with five rated as AB/USEF all-breed shows.

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the Year program to Paso Fino owners and USEF members. In this high-point achievement program, the owner enrolls his horse to earn points at USEF affiliated competitions. Currently, all classes included in the USEF Paso Fino division rules are eligible, except for youth and equitation classes. There are 141 Paso Fino horses enrolled in this program, with 13 of those competing in 2006. To help increase the awareness and participation in the award program for Paso Finos, an informative article on this program was published in the April 2007 *Paso Fino Horse World*—the PFHA membership magazine.

The USEF's Farnam®/Platform™ Horse of the Year (HOTY) Award program recognizes winners for their hard work each year when the title of national champion is awarded. The Grand Champion Paso Fino has the honor of having his name engraved on the Que Tal Trophy, which is on display along with the other USEF breed and discipline trophies at the USEF headquarters at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, KY. The very first Paso Fino's name engraved on the Que Tal Trophy belongs to Dali Sin Par, Paso Fino AHSA Horse of the Year in 1979.

The 2006 USEF High-Point Paso Fino horses were honored in January 2007 as the Horse of the Year awards were given to not only the Grand Champion Paso Fino, but also the Top 10 National Paso Fino competitors and the top breeders and sires in the Paso Fino division.

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The 2006 Grand Champion Paso Fino, Prometheus de La Tierra, owned by Marelyn Valdes of Florida, was awarded a beautiful custom-embroidered wool cooler, crystal trophy and champion ribbon. Prometheus has earned the Farnam®/Platform™ USEF Horse of the Year Paso Fino titles in both 2005 and 2006 with his amateur rider and trainer, 14-year-old daughter Alexandra Klepak. For the 2006 award, this winning team earned 743 points competing in seven PFHA/USEF shows in Florida and Alabama in the open and amateur owner pleasure and performance classes.

Klepak's mother, Marelyn Valdes, spoke positively on their USEF show experience. "We find show points earned through USEF mean more in actual points than those awarded at PFHA-only shows," she said. "USEF awards' points earned towards their high-point awards only when there are a minimum of three horses in a class. Thus, the more competition in a class, and the better you do, the more points you receive. It is good exposure to have your horse named and pictured in an all-breed magazine such as USEF's **EQUESTRIAN** where it reaches people from many different disciplines. As a mother, I was thrilled to have Alex and Prometheus de La Tierra win this award for the second time. Winning the award has helped open doors for both Alex and me with other Paso Fino owners and other breed owners, since many people now recognize Prometheus de La Tierra, nicknamed Batman, and his unique curved ears."

The 2006 USEF Leading Paso Fino Breeder was Dr. Lucy S. Goodenday of Ohio, and the 2006 Leading Sire was Capuchino, owned by Casa de Resorte of Florida.

The Paso Fino USEF committees continue to work hard on maintaining professional standards at PFHA/USEF events, rules clarification, development of prize list requirements and review of current criteria for the Paso Fino division. PFHA's USEF Committee Chair Fred Moretti and committee members include Jose Laracuente, Margaret Fahringer, Roger Cabic and Bea Fedor. USEF's Paso Fino committee members who play an important role are Alex Amador, Mike Cumming, Richard Lockhart, Robin Ratliff, Kathy Williams, Glenda Newland, Angela Ochoa, Alice Page, Edward Smith III, John Tonetti, Elizabeth Uelsmann and Bobby Yunits. Members will also be determining if the needs of the Paso Fino competitors are being met and whether any additional USEF awards should be available. Fred Moretti said, "Robin [Ratliff, PFHA President] shares my interest, and the two of us will start formulating a plan to encourage more [HOTY] participation."

There is another prestigious USEF award that honored one of PFHA's own members. In 2002, Ratliff was proud to receive the Equestrians of Honor C.J. "June" Cronan, Jr., Trophy for excellence within the USEF performance breed disciplines. "It was a great honor that I won't ever forget," said Ratliff. "I consider this one of the most meaningful awards in my career as a horse trainer. I was proud to represent the Paso Fino breed."

A new Paso Fino area of equine sport activity support is within the USEF Youth

Council. Christine Meyer was honored to become an inaugural member of the council and attended its first meeting in Louisville, KY, in January 2007. As the Paso Fino's youth representative, Meyer said, "The Youth Council is trying to bring recognition to all of the USEF breeds by appealing mainly to the youth, but also in part to the adults. However, it is my duty to bring the Paso Fino forward to be as highly recognized as any other breed or discipline."

USEF, being dedicated to horse sports at all levels of competition, has extended a helping hand through its Outreach Grant program. This program granted financial support to these PFHA regions' Paso Fino shows in 2006: Four Beat Jubilee, in Gainesville, GA; Heritage 2006 in Wilmington, OH; Kentucky's Classic 2006 in Shelbyville, KY; and Tennessee's Spring Fling in Shelbyville, TN. The USEF grant money can make the difference between a profit or a loss at an event. Gwyn Wright, Georgia PFHA Region President, said, "The process was quite easy. I explained we were a very small region, constantly struggling to find funding. I gave them a bit of history of the region, its purpose and the extent of the GPFHA activities. It was used mainly for the show; we had to spend it according to the USEF guidelines."

Darlene Wohlart

*Marelyn Valdes' Prometheus de La Tierra, otherwise known as Batman, has been named Farnam®/Platform™ USEF Horse of the Year Grand National Champion and National Champion Paso Fino for the past two years.*

The PFHA/USEF partnership continued by co-sponsoring a licensed officials' clinic in Ocala, FL, in February 2007. There were eight applicant judges, 23 renewal judges, one renewal steward and nine auditors in attendance. Chuck Walker, USEF Assistant Director of Continuing Education, and Lori Nelson, USEF Director of Regulations, contributed to the clinic with applicable credits being earned for USEF licensed officials. The clinic was successful in promoting mutual good will and understanding the benefits of USEF membership, the roles of the various USEF departments, and about the USEF hearing process. "The Paso Fino group is very passionate about its sport and their horse, making these clinics a very educational process on the part of USEF," said Walker. "We are always trying to improve our service and understanding of the breeds and disciplines we represent."

Ratliff positively summed up the USEF experience for Paso Finos, "USEF brings a high status of credibility to the Paso Fino breed within the equine world. USEF helps us to maintain high standards of professionalism and in how our horses are treated at our shows. It's our love of horses and the sport of competition that keeps us all together." ■

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*Since 1975, Lynn Gallup's Paso Fino roles have included breeder, exhibitor, trainer and riding instructor. She is a Senior Paso Fino Horse Association/United States Equestrian Federation "R" Judge and a USEF Lifetime member. Gallup has participated on communications and marketing committees and been a website designer and author. She can be reached at* lynngallup@gracewoodpasos.com.