

# PASO FINOS

# Ireland's Best



*In Ireland, the land of the horse, Paso Finos are still a relatively unknown breed with a very small circle of enthusiasts.*

The name Paso Fino translates literally as 'fine gait'. The natural 4-beat gait is innate to the breed and can also be seen in foals when running free beside their dams. At least one hoof is always in contact with the ground, which means that the Paso Fino is never freely suspended. Their movements are smooth, which means that the riders are not jolted when riding, which makes riding them a very enjoyable experience. It is thanks to this gait that these horses have captured the hearts of horse lovers all around the world.

The Paso Fino originated around the end of the 14th century when Christopher Columbus brought his Spanish horses to Hispaniola, or the Dominican Republic as it is known today. These horses mated with the native horses of the region, thus laying the foundation for the origins of the breed.

A lot has happened since then! The Paso Fino found its way to the American continent by 1979 the breed had begun to be known in Europe and eventually in Ireland. There are 140 registered animals in Ireland and the UK today.

The Paso Fino is of average size and has a height of about 13-15 hands. This makes it an ideal horse for the entire family. They come in all colours, including coloureds piebald and skewbald, which means that you could choose your favourite colour! They have a very correct build with a strong physique, hard but neat hooves and a stable, short pastern. Their good proportions and very good bone density make them very durable horses. They have a very strong willingness to work, which combined with courage, resilience and a cooperative nature make them a delightful animal to own and ride. Moreover, they have a fantastic presence which makes them perfect riding horses. These characteristics are all summarised in the Spanish word *Brio*".

The Paso Fino is a brilliant all-rounder

and has carved out a place in many different categories of riding. It is an excellent trail and hacking horse where its unfailing energy also makes it an excellent distance horse. Its ability to respond quickly along with its agility means that it does well in western disciplines as well as our more conventional riding disciplines. Depending on the ability of its rider, classic dressage lessons can also be implemented. As the rider is not jolted, endurance rides on a Paso Fino are considerably less tiring for riders than with other horses. The tempo of its gait increases gradually from walk to a canter which is extremely comfortable. This unique gait, being perfectly balanced and incredibly smooth, makes the Fino a real alternative for horse lovers who have had to give up riding other breeds because of back or spinal disc problems. Generally speaking, the Paso Fino can be trained in a wide range of different riding manners. However, the most important facet of the ride is the easiness, clarity and purity of the gait.

Marina Ott is Ireland's foremost authority on the breed. She arrived here from Germany in 2008 and currently has five Paso Finos, four mares and a stallion. Purchasing her original Paso Fino was a decision brought about by the breed's characteristics. As Marina says, "We were looking for a breed of horse that would be able to cope well with the long, to a certain extent clammy, winter months and the autumn storms at the Baltic Coast. Our horse would be kept in an open stable, so it would therefore need a good winter coat. It would have to be a good doer and be able to cope with flexible feeding times," she continues, "We had two

# Kept Secret...

“*Boo is the perfect combination of never-ending enthusiasm, health and tenacity*”

small children. So, for this reason, it was crucial that the horse be family-friendly." But more than that Marina had her own requirements too, "Friends told me that I would have to make my own horse, such was the variety of my demands! However, I knew exactly what I wanted. I was looking for a gaited horse, one with a lot of natural tolt. My dream horse would be full of spirit and untiring, comfortable to ride and docile - a "mind-reader", capable of responding quickly. At the same time, the horse would have to be sensitive enough that it would be submissive. A very good bloodline was also a priority - a gallant, if possible Spanish appearance, characterised by strength, self-awareness and noblesse. Marina found her dream horse in the Paso Fino.

"In 1995," Marina recalls, "I bought my first mare from the the Sternberghof Paso Fino farm. And thus began my passion for Paso Finos. Ribereño Buscavidas, better known as Boo to all who know and love her, became the founder of our little family of Finos." Marina is clearly very fond of the mare that would become the foundation of her small stud. "She has a smooth, rhythmic gait with a lot of ground coverage and moves at a remarkable pace. Boo is the perfect combination of never-ending enthusiasm, health and tenacity. She is beautiful to look at and always willing to cooperate." As with all horse owners... one is never enough! "In June 1996, I decided it was time to breed her. We chose CSR Don Juan for

the pairing and the result was Mercedes del Báltico, who was born in 1997." Marina is clearly delighted with the offspring of her beloved mare, "With Mercedes, we struck gold! I always wanted a dun horse and now I had one! Her almost perfect physique, gait and smart nature make her an impressive horse personality." Marina continues, "In 2007, we registered Mercedes in a quality test for mares. She was given a grade of 8.37 and won the gold medal - something which made us all extremely proud and happy." Eventually, of course, Mercedes became a mother herself, giving birth to her first filly, Donna Isabella del Báltico. The icing on the cake, however, is Isabella's extremely rare colour. Marina is very proud of Isabella "She is a Perlino

and as far as I know the only one in Europe."

Marina has her own web site dedicated to the breed and showcasing her stud. As she says "There is so much more I could tell you about this fascinating breed, please visit our website [www.paso-finos.ie](http://www.paso-finos.ie) if you would like to learn more. Please contact me should you wish to schedule a trial ride on one of these amazing horses.

