

## ***Equifest: The Poulin Sisters and the Lusitano Breed***

Kate Poulin-Neff (25) and Gwen Poulin (24) although young in years have been riding a long time; nearly all of their lives. After all, they are the daughters of Olympic Equestrian Champion Michael Poulin and mother Sharon, a nationally known dressage trainer, rider, instructor and judge.

They watched their parents train many horses and riders and absorbed their uncanny skills for developing each individual horse and rider. The girls were also a part of Michael's competitive campaigns, including the Olympics, which gave them exposure to the highest levels of dressage competition.

In their own competitions they proved how successful their training was by becoming consistent winners. They were able to beat many riders on much fancier horses and when other young riders were still learning the ropes they were training horses for others. By the end of their Young Rider careers (age 21) they were winning everything in sight. They were the anchors of their National Championship teams, riding horses they had trained themselves. They raised money for their team's trips to the National Championship Finals and proved popular and effective spokesman for the program.

They are now both full-time trainers, each having a string of horses and roster of students in training. Their devotion to these students, equine and human, is focused and complete. Kate divides her time between summers in Ohio, where she lives with her husband, Matthew Neff and winters at The Dressage Center in DeLeon Springs. She competes year round and travels many miles for competitions and clinics and to participate in specialized training and exhibitions.

Gwen is a resident of DeLand. She bases her horse training at The Dressage Center but also travels to competitions and clinics.

At Equifest the sisters will be presenting a musical pas de deux, a choreographed performance in which the two riders and their horses ride mostly side by side in harmony with each other and the music. This type of ride is now part of regulation dressage competition at all levels and is always the most exciting and crowd-pleasing part of national, international and Olympic competitions.

They will be riding horses that they have trained themselves and on which they have competed successfully. Both horses have been winners as they have progressed through the more difficult levels of dressage training and competition.

Kate's horse, Brilliant Too, was bred by the Poulins. His sire is owned by Sharon Poulin and has been her much loved mount for many years. Kate has raised this horse from his first days on earth, doing all the training – and producing a winner. They are now serious contenders for a spot on the US team for the Pan Am Games to be held in Brazil in 2008.

Gwen will be riding Marjan, a Lusitano stallion, bred by DeLand's Judy Thompson. His father is Judy's fabulous Lusitano stallion Craque do Rimo. They are compiling an awesomely successful record at shows, with record breaking high scores providing a high national rank.

## ***The Lusitano Breed***

### **Prehistoric times**

Historical sources reveal that the antecedents of the Lusitano horses were primitive relatives of the Sorraia (Portuguese breed), which existed on the Iberian peninsula 25,000 years ago.

After the last ice age, the Sorraia horses remained isolated for thousands of years in the area of the Algarve-Alentejo and Andalucia regions. Historians believe that about 4000 B.C. local people trained their horses for war and thus began historic record of the famous horsemen and horses of the Iberian peninsula.

### **Celtic and Roman times**

About 3000 B.C. Iberians invaded the peninsula that was later named for them. They were followed by Celts and Phoenicians, who took horses to and from the Middle East resulting in the modern Iberian horse. The Celts, like the Iberians before them, were involved in the breeding and riding of horses that soon spread across Europe.

The Greek writers Homer and Xenophon mentioned the Iberian horse and Xenophon, is seen as the founder of classical dressage. The Romans based their cavalry on the Iberian style of war. The Celtiberians, as the Iberian people are referred to now, found their way north up the Atlantic coast where they founded communities during the Bronze Age in Great Britain and Ireland. Many horse breeds, such as the Highland pony, Connemara, Fell and Dales breeds are descendants of Iberian horses.

After the fall of the Roman empire, in 711 the Moors arrived on the Iberian peninsula and occupied it until the 15th century. They brought their Arabian horses with them and most probably mixed them with Iberian breed.

After having driven the Moors from the Iberian peninsula the great explorations began. At the beginning of the 16th century, Iberian horses were transported to the New World to aid the Spanish in their conquests. These horses grounded all North and South American horse breeds as horses had been extinct for thousands of years on the American continent.

The long history of the Lusitano breed has hardly changed over the centuries. Lusitanos display the characteristics of war horses and are used for bullfighting and high-school

dressage. The results are brave horses that concentrate on their rider and their work, and do their work with pleasure.

## ***Glossary Terms***

Dressage

**1. Training a horse to execute precise movements:** The training of a horse to carry out a series of precise controlled movements in response to minimal signals from its rider

**2. Dressage event:** A competitive event in which horse and rider are judged on the elegance, precision, and discipline of the horse's movements

Mid-20th century. From French , literally "training," from *dresser* (see dress).

**Gait:**

The paces at which horses move, usually the walk, trot, canter and gallop.

**Haute Ecole:**

The classical art of advanced riding. See also "high school"- English for Haute Ecole