



Development of the Puerto Rican Paso Fino

Dulce Sueño

The Puerto Rican Paso Fino was developed on the Caribbean island of [Puerto Rico](#) by the isolating factors of island geography over a 500 year colonial period and the desires of a people for hardy, sure footed, comfortable horses.

Frenchman Andres Pedro Ledru, in a notation about horse races held on the 17 of July, 1797 expressed that the speed of these indigenous horses was admirable, "they have no trot or gallop, but a type of pace (*Andadura*). A gait so precipitated that the eye can't follow the movement of the legs."[\[5\]](#) As early as 1849, Paso Fino competitions along with established prizes for winners took place in Puerto Rico for the purpose of improving local horses. In 1882 the first racetrack was built and in every race there were Paso Fino and Andadura categories.[\[6\]](#)

According to Ramirez de Arellano, at the root of the American invasion in [Puerto Rico](#), the Paso Fino played a first order role in transportation as well as agricultural work. One most famous horse of the time, "Manchado" who belonged to Don Nicolás Quiñones Cabezudo of Caguas was said to be "so fine that it gaited at liberty without its rider in the town square when asked."[\[7\]](#)

In 1927 the most influential sire in the modern Puerto Rican Paso Fino breed, Dulce Sueño, was born in Guayama.[\[8\]](#) In 1943, the *Federation of the Sport of Paso Fino Horses of Puerto Rico* and a breed registry were established. Copita Don Q, a Dulce Sueño Grandson, was the winner of the first annual Federation contest in 1943.[\[9\]](#) In an Agricultural almanac published in 1947 Gustavo A Ramirez de Arellano wrote "at present the descendants of the famous stallion "Dulce Sueño" are the ones who have most obtained titles and trophies from the association of owners of saddle horses."[\[10\]](#)

Development of the Colombian Paso

Importation and development in the United States

The rise of the Paso Fino in the [United States](#) began in the [1950s](#) and [1960s](#). The first Paso Finos in the United States were imported by members of the armed services who purchased Paso Finos while stationed in Puerto Rico. Rather than sell their horses when they left, they brought them back with them and this stock provided some of the first Paso Finos bred in the United States.

Colombian Pasos came to the United States beginning with a rancher who visited Colombia and purchased quite a number of Paso Fino horses to work his cattle. This brought the second strain into the USA. While the two strains are still bred individually to retain their purity, they are also crossbred to produce the best of both strains.[\[11\]](#)

Today, the Paso Fino Horse Association (PFHA) oversees and regulates registered Paso Finos in the USA. It was founded in 1972 under the name "American Paso Finos", later changing to its current name. It registers and promotes both Puerto Rican and Colombian horses, and under the PFHA two groups have been frequently [crossbred](#).^[12] However, recent years, particularly as the numbers of Colombian horses has begun to significantly outnumber those of Puerto Rican bloodlines, a trend has developed favoring [preservation breeding](#) to preserve the undiluted bloodlines of each group.

Another spinoff organization, the American Trote & Trocha Association, formed to promote the horses, primarily of Colombian breeding, that perform a diagonal ambling gait known as the "Trocha". The trocha differs from the classic lateral ambling gait of the Paso Fino.

Characteristics



The Paso Fino has several different body types from quite small and refined to very large and powerful. The action of the two strains is somewhat different. The Puerto Rican Paso Fino is prized for its fine or delicate step while the Colombian Paso Fino tends to have more of a rapid, [piston](#)-like action.

This is a lively horse that has a natural drive and willingness, known colloquially as

"brio", and generally a nice disposition. Paso Finos come in a variety of colors, sizes and body types but the even four beat gait and brio are present in all good representatives of the breed.^[13]

A Paso Fino gelding of predominantly Colombian breeding

This horse can easily carry a large rider comfortably for an extended period of time. An 800 lb Paso can easily carry a rider who is over 6' tall and weighing 250 lbs over the worst trails, up and down hills, without a problem. The trick is in how they move and how they are built.

Gaits

See also: [Ambling](#) and [Horse gait](#)

The Paso Fino executes a natural evenly spaced four beat lateral [ambling](#) gait, similar to many [gaited horses](#). Both the Colombian and the Puerto Rican strains of the Paso Fino execute the lateral gait naturally, without the aid of training devices. The term **Amble** or **Ambling** is used to describe a number of four-beat intermediate [gaits](#) of [horses](#). All are faster than a walk but usually slower than a [canter](#) or gallop. They are smoother for a rider than either the two-beat [trot](#) or [pace](#)

and most can be sustained for relatively long periods of time, making them particularly desirable for [trail riding](#) and other tasks where a rider must spend long periods of time in the saddle.

Though there are differences in footfall patterns and speed, historically these gaits were once collectively referred to as the "amble." Today, especially in the [United States](#), horses that are able to do an ambling gait are referred to as "[gaited horses](#)." Some [breeds](#) naturally perform these gaits from birth, others can be trained to do them. Some breeds, such as the [American Saddlebred](#) have individuals who can both [trot](#) and amble.



The Paso Fino's [gaits](#) are performed at varied levels of extension in stride. All four [hooves](#) travel close to the ground while in motion and are lifted equally in height the horse covers ground. At whatever speed the [horse](#) travels, the smoothness of the gait ideally allows the rider to appear motionless with little up and down movement.[\[14\]](#).

Paso Fino performing Classic Fino

- The *classic fino* or *paso fino* is a [collected](#) gait with rapid footfalls that covers as little ground as possible. It requires a high degree of collection. This is show gait reserved for competition. Walking, trotting, cantering or any detected break from the rapid evenly spaced sequence of steps is grounds for disqualification at any time during a fino event.
- The *paso corto* is slightly more extended, and used during [trail rides](#). The speed of this gait is comparable to the speed of a [trot](#) but is much smoother.
- The *paso largo* is a fast, lateral, four-beat gait in which the horse can reach speeds equivalent to a [canter](#) or slow gallop. The paso largo is not just an increase in speed but also shows a distinct extension in stride. The paso largo can be extremely fast, up to 25-30 mph.

Only a few Paso Finos can perform a true classic fino, but the majority perform the other gaits with ease. The correctness of the gait is very important by today's standards, therefore horses with a very even four beat gait are much preferred for professional breeding.[\[13\]](#)

In Colombia, there are related native horses who perform a slightly different, unevenly timed diagonal four beat gait, known as the *trocha*, which is similar to the [fox trot](#), and very smooth. While some Paso Finos will perform the trocha, it is discouraged and considered a fault in the purebred Paso Fino. In Colombia the "trocha" has evolved, becoming a separate genealogical line, and is inherited in a manner similar to the lateral ambling gaits of the purebred Paso Fino. Trocha rivals in popularity with paso fino in Colombia, but crossbreeding is now avoided. Another Colombian breed performs what is known as *trote y galope*. The trote y galope horses

perform an exaggerated diagonal two beat trot and a very collected canter but they do share some common heritage with the Paso Fino. Not as well-known as Paso Fino, these variants are just beginning to be recognized in the United States.[\[15\]](#)

USES

These horses are versatile and can be used in many disciplines. They are often seen competing in Western classes such as trail, barrels, reining, versatility and cow penning, and are also commonly used for trail riding and endurance competitions, driving and gymkhana.[\[11\]](#)