

# Peruvian

# Cow Horses

By Verne Albright

*Peruvian Pasos prove themselves  
as working cowhorses*

## Cowiness Peruvian Style

DAVE LEEWAYE owns Paso horses from Peru and has helped pioneer a non-traditional activity for this very traditional breed.

When they were first brought to the United States, no one dreamed that Peruvians might be "cowy".

Dave, and others like him, happily made that discovery. Dave is deeply involved in team penning, which requires him to ride into a herd of cows, separate three predetermined (and uncooperative!) calves and drive them into a pen at the opposite end of the arena. It's a timed event, and Dave has done well.

His introduction came about when his son took an interest, and Dave decided that it looked like fun. After observing for a while, he took his horse, GAVILAN DE NOCHE ("Gavie" for short) into the arena to see what he thought about cows. At first Gavie was scared of them, a far-more common reaction than most people might think. However, everything changed when one of the cows ran away from him. "From that moment on, he was hooked!" Dave remembers.

A group of seasoned "penners" had been watching. One might suspect they had seen the potential for a laugh when the Peruvian horse, with all his flair and style and unfamiliar gait, entered the arena, but it never materialized. When Dave left the arena, his audience offered encouragement. They said his horse was "cowy", had a good "handle" on him, "turned well on his hocks" and didn't hesitate to "drill his tail into the ground". "In penning, those are good things," Dave explains.

## On That Horse?

THE PENNERS in Dave's club are rated A, B or C. Dave has worked up to a B rating. In 1997, Dave and Gavie finished in the top third of their classification (for all of San Diego County) in the year-end standings. That was pretty good considering that they've been at it for only five years and Dave is a retired educator without previous experience working cattle.

"It should be noted that as enthusiastic as I am about this little horse, he can't outrun a Quarter Horse. Only another Quarter Horse or a mean grizzly bear can do that. But when we're in competition and don't meet with success, it's usually because I have goofed!" Dave confesses. Dave says that he and Gavie get "strange looks" when they go into the arena to warm up. Gavie looks and acts very differently from the Quarter Horses that dominate the sport. "I warm him up in the paso llano gait [the inborn four-beat gait for which the breed is famous] while the Quarter Horse people are loping or trotting. I'm sure you can imagine the incongruity!"

Dave seldom leaves the arena without being approached by people who tell him how much they



*Dave Leeway and Gavie turn back a determined calf in team penning. They not only enjoy the event, but are serious contenders in their region.*

enjoyed watching Gavie work. But there are usually an equal number who stop him to ask if he is going to compete on that horse. "The question is well-intentioned," Dave insists, "and I'm flattered by them because it means that people notice him."

Dave will be the first to say that Peruvians will never replace Quarter Horses for cattle work. Nonetheless, he and his fifteen-year-old Peruvian Paso, compete successfully. In a sport where the Quarter Horse is king, Dave has been elected president of the San Diego County Team Penning Association, an indication of the esteem in which he's held. His remarkable success was also the subject of a feature story in *The Western Horseman*.

When asked if he thinks gaited horses in general, and Peruvians in particular, have any advantages over Quarter Horses for working cattle, Dave divides a large, general category into its smaller individual parts.

"My personal experience at working cows with Gavie is pretty much confined to team penning and a little rounding up of cows that have escaped from their pens. I don't think a gaited horse would excel at bull dogging or roping because they just can't run as fast as a Quarter Horse. Team pen-

ning, however, is another story because it doesn't require blinding speed." Dave believes that Gavie's success is largely a result of his brio. In his words: "Gavie likes to work cows and will pin his ears if they get too close to him. I really believe that he wants to succeed and win the competition."

## Take Two

DAVE HAS A COUNTERPART in a Texas cowboy and trick rider named Glenn Cochran. Glenn needed a lot of prodding from his wife, Sallie, but he finally tried Peruvians for working their Simmental cattle. He was astounded by the results.

"The Peruvians have good cow sense," he reports. "They'll never put Quarter Horses out of business, but in some ways they're better, comfort, for one."

Glenn likes the size of Peruvians and points out that a lot of ranch horses were once right



*The natural "cowiness" of the Peruvian Paso and the smoothness of his gaits, makes Dave's job easier and much more comfortable!*

around that same size. After all, he points out, it's a lot less strenuous to get on and off a medium-sized horse, and working cattle in a ranch

situation requires a whole lot of mounting and dismounting. Also, he points out that larger horses may be a great deal faster on a straightaway, but aren't necessarily as quick and agile in real-life situations in ungrouted terrain.

Glenn makes an important distinction between the ability of Peruvians to work cattle on a ranch or in a competitive rodeo environment. He prefers them for ranch work, freely admitting that comfort is a big part of that preference. But, he has no illusions that they could compete with Quarter Horses in rodeo arenas.

However, he remembers something that many modern cowboys never knew. **He goes back to the days when most working horses around his part of Texas were a blend of cowhorse, or Quarter Horse, and gaited saddle horse.** "These smooth-gaited "single-footers" were highly esteemed," he remembers. "As late as the 70's, a few of these cross-bred - but registered - Quarter Horses could still be found. Occasionally they could be taught a running walk or a single-foot."



*Dave and Gavie get serious as the calf makes a sudden break.*

