



## Lusitanos in the Centenary Finale of The London International Horse Show, Olympia 17th – 22nd December 2007

– A Report by *Sherene Rahmatallah*

2007 had already been a very busy year at Sussex Lusitanos. First there were the Lusitano displays at Royal Windsor Horse in May, then the huge task of organising the European Working Equitation Championships at Hartpury in August. Surely that would be it for 2007 - but then along came Olympia.

In September we received an email from the Show organisers asking for 6 of the “Windsor” Lusitanos to take part in the special Centenary finale in Olympia’s 100th year. How could I say no? We had no idea what the format would be. Show Director Simon Brooks-Ward already knew the type of crowd-pleasing display the Lusitanos can give. His only specific request was for outfits with more colour than the traditional dark jackets worn at Windsor – Olympia is synonymous with Christmas and sparkle, so when one of the Portuguese riders suggested colourful bullfighting jackets, that was just the ticket.

From an early stage I think we all knew Olympia would be different from any other show we had done with the riders from Portugal – and how right we were! It was to be the most prolific event we have ever undertaken with the Lusitanos in the UK. The six riders who rode in the display were: (photo above: left to right):

**David Duarte Oliveira - Relampago**, bred by Manuel Assunção Coimbra and owned by Luis Silva. **Ricardo Moura Tavares - Violino**, bred and owned by Coudelaria Romão Tavares. **Paulo Santos - Pirata**, bred by D Artur Ervideira and owned by Mrs Natalie Ugland. **Bruno Rodrigues de Silva - Trovador** bred by Haras Vale da Raposa and owned by Alberto Resina Antunes. **Miguel Fonseca - Vermute**, bred by Manuel de Mata Cacaes and owned by Renato Conceição. **David Gomes - Turco**, bred by Mario Alves and owned by Carlos Gomes. Mrs Helen Barlow also kindly lent her stallion Sa Sa as a reserve horse for the display team.

The organisation of a large horse show like Olympia, in the centre of London, is immense. We arrived on Friday 14th December, 3 days before the start of the Show as there were 2 days of rehearsals to attend. The first the Portuguese riders knew of their role in the Finale was at the briefing on the Saturday morning. The room was full of people who had performed the Finale for the past 35 years – that’s when I realised the Lusitano riders were very much “the new kids on the block”. Meeting over, we all moved down onto the arena floor – carriages, heavy horses, side saddle, miniature Shetlands, Household Cavalry, Flying Frogs (they are the French version of the Chippendales who jump the fences without horses), Edwardian figures and clowns on foot, agility dogs, and Lusitanos - not forgetting Father Christmas of course!

Simon Brooks-Ward and production assistant Isobel Hatton came up with the idea of the Centenary Finale; it was to be a journey documenting Olympia through the years from the past through to the future. Actor Simon Cowell (of “Four Weddings and a Funeral” fame) told the story, looking down at the audience from the large video screens in the centre of the arena. Hilarious old Pathe News footage of Olympia on the screens was followed by Victorian scenes in the arena – the military, carriages etc. Other more recent displays from Olympia were then brought in. With the arena full of people and horses, Simon Cowell then raised his glass one more time (by then he had definitely had one too many Christmas tipples!) and wondered what the displays of the future could possibly be. Cue the Portuguese Lusitanos who made a dramatic entry at canter into the arena. Their music was officially “garage” (as described by the musical directors) – it was a techno version of “Pirates of the Caribbean”. And it didn’t stop there .... during their display a DJ and psychedelic turntable, suspended from the ceiling,





The riders with their horses, and also with a couple of the Olympia celebrities - the lady Ukrainian Cossack and World Champion dressage rider Anky Van Grunvsn  
 Photos courtesy of Risto Aaltonen & Kit Houghton

filled the arena with flashing lights and thunderous noise! The other 16 Finale horses and 50 or so participants on foot surrounded the arena during the Lusitano display; some of the other horses found the atmosphere a little “hot” but the Lusitanos were dazzling and took everything in their stride.

Approximately 100,000 people came to watch Olympia. For the first time ever the signs “Full House. No Seats Available for this Performance” went up – not just once, but on several occasions. There were 11 Centenary Finales in total, at the end of every afternoon and evening performance, and the Lusitanos gave shining performances throughout.

The first 2 days of Olympia were taken up with international dressage competition. There were 2 Portuguese dressage riders on purebred Lusitanos – Daniel Pinto scored 65.00% on Galopin de la Font and Miguel Nuno Duarte scored 61.708% riding Oxalis de Meia Lua. Daniel Pinto was placed 16th after the Grand Prix and narrowly missed qualifying for the Grand Prix Kur (only the top-scoring 15 horses went through). Lusitano breeder Dr Pedro Ferraz da Costa, co-owner of Oxalis de Meia Lua, and João Ralão Duarte, General Secretary of the APSL and brother of rider Miguel Nuno Duarte, also travelled to Olympia to watch the dressage.

International show jumping of the highest level followed for the rest of the week., and there was the traditional Olympia entertainment – the Shetland Pony Grand National, Mountain & Moorland Championships, British Riding Clubs Quadrille and the ever popular dog agility. The Ukrainian Cossacks and the

Household Cavalry gave spectacular displays. International violinist Victoria Yellop – tall, blond and very attractive – accompanied the Ride of the Household Cavalry. She stood on a circular stage which was suspended from the ceiling above the horses and riders. The Lusitanos were in fine company - it was showmanship at its very best.

The days at Olympia were long. Our trade stand in the shopping hall opened every day at 9.30am and we left the Olympia building around 11.30pm every night after the last evening performance. Thank goodness for the courtesy cars which ferried people between Olympia and the hotel. As the week progressed the energy levels were certainly tested. Mention must be made of the non-stop social scene at Olympia - this surely is London’s version of Golegã Fair!

We made many new friends whilst at the Show and we shared some exceedingly proud moments which we will remember for a long time. The late Raymond Brooks Ward revived the current Olympia Horse Show in 1972. His son, Simon Brooks-Ward, wrote to us after the Show to thank us, saying: *“The Portuguese Lusitanos made for spectacular viewing, as always, and really brought magic to the Finale. Thank you again for all your help, commitment and passion to a Show that we hope will continue for another 100 years in the Grand Hall, Olympia.”*

Thank you Simon - from us all.



## HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, meets the display team at Olympia

The Show at Olympia has always enjoyed the support of members of the royal family. I had already briefed the riders during our meeting at Golegã Fair in November about possible VIP visits at Olympia, so when we were told of the first one, we all knew the score .....This came on Monday evening when Camilla , HRH the Duchess of Cornwall, visited the stables, accompanied by several Show officials. We were asked to prepare the horses, and for each rider to stand by his horse. Horses were groomed , plaited and ribboned; clean bridles hung by the doors of a super-clean stable block. The riders stood ready in their colourful jackets and tricorn hats. The photographers preceded the arrival of the Duchess – “Back to your stable doors – quick!” We all then cracked up when Ricardo Moura Tavares suggested he offer the Duchess a piece of the chouriço – a regional Portuguese salami that he kept in his tack box for snacking on between displays! Order was restored just in time for the visit to begin.

I introduced every rider and she kindly shook hands with each one and asked them tentatively if they spoke English, what their horses' names were etc etc..... “Interesting” I thought. ....riders who up until that moment, had claimed not to understand or speak the language suddenly succeeded in answering in perfect English!



Top: HRH The Duchess of Cornwall strokes Turco  
Bottom: A royal handshake for Ricardo Moura Tavares

## HRH The Princess Royal Meets the Portuguese Team

The following day came news that we would have another Royal visit that evening – 2 visits in 2 days. This time it was to be HRH the Princess Royal, Princess Anne. The preparation was the same: horses and riders were turned out spick and span. Portuguese dressage rider Daniel Pinto joined the presentation line up. “What do I do?” he said, in a bit of a fluster – “Just stand there and speak English , that’ll be great!” I replied. The Princess Royal arrived with the Show Officials and the riders were presented to her, one by one. As she walked down the line she spoke with several of them and commented on the amount of work involved in plaiting their horses' manes.

On the final afternoon the riders were presented to Lord Vestey DL, President of the Show , who gave everyone a commemorative paperweight and rosette in appreciation of their participation at the Show.

*Reports by Sherene Rahmatallah*



Photos above and right: HRH The Princess Royal with Simon Brooks-Ward, Show Officials and Sherene Rahmatallah

All photos on this page courtesy of Kit Houghton

