

The process of buying a PRE from Spain - Important advice, recommendations, preparation and what to look for.

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Aim: To educate/inform about the process, what it requires, involves and what to be prepared for.

Content:

- Initial preparations
- Preferences
- Planning
- Sourcing the horses
- Test riding the horses
- Pricing
- The buying process
- The vet examination
- Transport and paperwork
- Transitioning your purchased horse to a new climate
- Final observations



Initial preparations:

For most buying a PRE is the ultimate dream. A once is a lifetime event. After thirty years residing in Spain and working with this unique breed, I would like to take you through the correct process and divine a few guidelines. An immense amount of work goes behind the scenes in finding the right horse. If you are just window shopping get an idea first of all what is available online. Then find a person you can trust who is Spanish based when you are seriously ready to buy. Be cautious when viewing from webpages and thoroughly check that adverts are legit.

Be clear exactly what you are looking for. Whether it be a horse for competition, a horse for breeding, a family horse, an all round pleasure horse or/and the ultimate companion. I ask clients to write a full list of exactly what their specifics are. If you are new to the breed take the time to learn about it and find someone who has experience around the breed that can guide you. When you encounter horses that appeal be clear what you want in videos so your contact does not have to mess the owner/trainer around. When offering horses contacts should be prepared ahead and have current videos/photos of the horse/s in question.

Preferences:

What do you require: a mare, gelding, stallion, youngster, or, mare with foal. What level of training: unbacked, backed, basic, medium to advance trained. Think of

everything possible in the scenario. Where will you keep the horse? A large stable or private home. This all determines helping to find the correct horse.

We are blessed in Spain with such diversity in the horse World. Some clients come with a clear idea and then fall in love with a completely different horse. Trying horses is an adventure and along the way do not be surprised if you change your mind.

Be open. Horse care, management and training is different here. The tradition is stallions are stabled and worked six times a week. They feed oats and generally forage is straw, hay and alfalfa. Do not be critical. The Spanish take great pride in their horses and have done for hundreds of years. You will see things are done differently. You may not agree with some things however, respect their traditions and cultures.

Planning:

Some clients will buy from long distance due to circumstances. The process is exactly the same. It is vital you do your homework and trust the person who is representing you. Someone that has been in Spain for many years. There are many "tratantes" (dealers) that have not been in Spain long enough to know the horses. They do not have the contacts, or, do not truly respect the people as they should. Many dealers rely on other dealers to find horses. That is why you may see the same horse over several websites.

For long distance buyers select up to four horses depending on the specifics. Any more will become overwhelming. Things can happen. I personally usually have an extra horse as back up, or, gold card as I like to say.

The normal process is the client comes to try horses. I advise a minimum of three days. Two to look at horses and the third to retry those the client has liked.

One of the most important things is knowing the history of the horse. Where he/she was born, how many owners have they been through, how were they fed? Generally if not stud based young horses are purchased by trainers. They are then put through the stages of training and are offered for sale at various levels.

Test riding horses:

Ask to see the horse lunged, or, free in the school. whatever is possible depending on the situation and level of training. Spend time getting to know the horse before riding. Approach them and see how they react. Touch them all over, feel their back and neck and pick up their feet. Check for bumps and scars. If there are some present they may be old insignificant things. Gently ask the horse to move over. How do they handle on the ground. Watch them being tacked up: boots/bandages, bridles, saddle, girth, etc,. A just backed horse may still be a little unsure. Especially with new people around which is totally normal. If you are with a group of people do not overcrowd the horse. Remember this is their environment.

Watch how the horse is ridden. Do not be afraid to ask questions. When you try the horse, or, your rider take it slow! You are not expected to show how well you can ride. Take your time in feeling how the horse responds to your voice and aids.

Tack used: generally, is Dressage, or Doma Vaquera. Doma Vaquera is an art/discipline with in itself. Horses here can be started quite young in a double bridle, pelham, or, vaquera bit. Some people criticize this. In Spain this has been done that way for years. A Spanish horse has a very short mouth. In my experience the snaffle is not comfortable for their conformation. They do not like the nutcracker action.

The prefer stability of a straight bar with low port with room for the tongue. The snaffle action has too much movement. I personally work with a Pelham, Hackamore with short shank, or a Myler low port snaffle with the swivel lozenge in the middle (Dressage competition legal).

I personally do not use double bridles as there is not enough room in the PRE's mouth as explained. However, I do have them here to teach students. In many college courses and competition, it is expected. So, they learn how to correctly work with them.

Pricing:

Varies greatly depending on bloodlines, training, who has trained the horse etc., It is never black, or white! Specific dilute colors are more expensive as this is the fashion now. Be realistic. If looking for a more advance trained horse with a competition background and competition experience it will come at a price. As with everything in life costs have risen. It is no different in Spain. Many studs struggle to find good constant reliable riders. Feed, bedding, and transport costs have shot up. Wages must be paid. All the breeding, training and care adds time and value to a horse.

Considering basic trained horses that have not been rushed will be more low risk in the vet check. More advance trained horses, or older horses will have more risk. The client must be clear with their limit. A higher limit obviously opens more doors. If prices are too high for your budget wait until you can raise them. Do not make the mistake and buy a horse just because it is cheaper or is pretty. I advise not to haggle the price down. This is quite an insult to the Spanish. If you are clear with your budget at the start and are working with a professional, there will be no need to.

ROUGH PRICE GUIDELINES:

Untrained weaned to two year old: €2500.00 to €8000.00

Basic trained three and a half to five year old: €4500.00 to €15.000

Medium trained Dressage or Doma Vaquera: €15.000 to €25.000

Advance trained: €25.000 to €50.000

Advance trained with competition experience: €50.000 plus.

There may be an opportunity to buy a wonderful older schoolmaster which will come at a slightly lower price. They may have a little wear and tear but will have seen and done it all. A horse to enjoy for those looking to learn from the wise.

The buying process:

Be prepared to pay a sourcing fee at the start to the person helping you. To restate it takes a lot of time to find suitable horses and this covers travelling costs and the time it takes to take videos/photos. This also determines the serious buyer. A Spanish based professional will have trusted contacts. These come with time and years!

Traditionally in Spain on choosing a horse 10% commission is paid to the person helping you find the horse. Your contact, or broker should be clear about this at the start. If commission is not included in the price of the horse, then be prepared it will be added on top. If you want import Tax/VAT included specify this. Some excellent horses come from local people that do not own a business. Sometimes clients will pay transfers over several accounts, or a certain percentage in cash.

The Vet Examination:

There are several levels of Vet Pre-purchase examinations. From a basic clinical report (ideal for young horses) to a full five-star vetting. The latter is normally required for Insuring the horse. There is a whole network of experienced vets around Spain that offer this service. Some will offer a package that includes all X-rays. For others it is down to the number of X-rays the client requires.

A vet check is a lottery. You will never know what the findings will be. Keep an open mind. What will be a small thing for one vet may not be accepted by foreign vets. Spanish horses are tough. Their genetics are that of a war horse. I have had horses come to me that failed vet checks and went on into their mid-thirties that were never lame in their lives.

We will be having a separate in depth Zoom class with renowned Vet and surgeon Pedro Amaya on this subject and what it involves. Taking the viewer through the clinical examination, flexions, X-rays, and evaluation. Teeth is something that is not always checked in young horses by breeders, or trainers. During the vet examination these will be looked at. If the purchase is closed and the horse stays in Spain a little longer this can easily be treated/rectified by a Vet or Equine dentist if needed.

Some clients opt for a Stallion and decide on castration before the horse leaves Spain. This is something I strongly recommend. Especially if the horse has a long journey to get to their destination. Meaning that they can have time to settle and not have the added stress of this on arrival. This can either be executed at the stud (many studs will have their own vets very accustomed to this)/ horses present stable, or, preferably at a clinic where the horse usually spends two and a half to three days for observation after. Cost at a clinic is around €1200 to €1500. If at the horse's present stud/stable €500 to €800 but, will require further vet visits for checkups. Plus, it will be required that someone moves the horse for a week minimal to allow for the wound to drain and heal correctly. At the clinic a horse will recover quicker as the surgery is more refined. The horse will need three weeks to recover before travel. Most Spanish stallions are very quiet. Allow for several months after the operation for the hormones to stabilize. This does not happen straight away.

Piroplasmiasis (Piro) a very questionable subject. It is a blood-borne protozoal infection of horses caused by Theileria (Babesia) equi and/or Babesia caballi spread by ticks. Equine Piro is present in horses in Southern Europe and is something that

has been there for hundreds of years. Spanish horses and Lusitano's have been traditionally bred on land alongside cattle and on marshlands. Where there is cattle there will be ticks present. Many horses carry Piro and it never affects them during their whole entire lifetime. Some clients choose to take the blood test others do not. Results take seven to ten days depending on the laboratory sent to. In transportation of horses within Europe it is not required. With America it is and a horse cannot enter if diagnosed. Even though it is present in South and Central America. If you wish to have the blood test this must be asked for before the Vet pre-purchase examination. There have been cases where a horse has become ill, and it has been incorrectly blamed on Piro carriers. This is still not proved and can be down to not allowing the horse sufficient time to climatize, incorrect nutrition, or, if the horse is experiencing stress. Blood tests results of low percentage can be treated. There are many opinions on the subject. There will also be a separate Zoom class on the subject with Vet Pedro Amaya.

Transport and paperwork:

When closing the sale on your chosen horse a Compra/Venta (buyer/seller) contract is of utmost importance and is needed for change of ownership for ANCCE (the Spanish Breed Association) registered horses. For other countries it is also required for importation. If you would like to breed from your horse in the future check if the horse has been basic breeding certified. This is needed to register future foals with the ANCCE. If the horse has not been graded do not panic. If the horse stays in Spain for further training, or will stay a while before being transported there is a possibility this can be arranged before he/she leaves. Your own countries PRE breed association can also help organize this. It is not a reason to disregard a good horse!

When booking transport allow for a minimum of five Spanish working days/mornings. Communication with your contact is of the utmost importance at this point and probably best to put in direct contact with the transportation company. Spanish Government Transport offices determine the paperwork and only work in the mornings Monday to Friday. Check for Spanish holidays. They do not work on these days, or weekends. Paperwork is very strict and takes time. There is no fast track! Make sure you have your farm code, or the farm code where the horse is going for the TRACE papers. Otherwise, the horse cannot leave Spain.

It is requirement that a Spanish Government Vet does an ultimate check and allows the horse to be "Baja de Alta" /released from Spain and once leaving the country is no longer registered in the Spanish system. For further afield such as "The America's". South Africa, Australia, etc., at least a month will be needed in advance. If a stallion, or mare quarantine in your country needs to be included into the travel plan.

Transitioning your purchased horse to a new climate:

On arrival give your new horse time to settle and acclimatize to his/her new surroundings. If going to a cold climate/far North, it is advised to transport early spring/Summer. Introduce a new diet slowly. PRE's are good doers. They need a high fiber, low protein/sugar diet. I advise not to feed haylage as it is too high in sugars. If your hay is rich give the first cut, or, feed last year's hay if in good condition. Remember PRE's from the South of Spain are not used to grass they have evolved on an arid diet. In this case have them on a sand pen/dry corral and only feed hay.

Many owners get relaxed over time and let their horse graze too much leading to laminitis and other metabolic issues long term. A second note if the horse is coming from the South of Spain (dry climate) watch the hooves do not get too humid. Use a dry bedding. Be careful with farriers. Make sure they do not cut too short, or, remove too much heel. PRE's have evolved with upright hooves. Too short it can completely change the angle of the scapula (PRE's have set back shoulder) and long term can cause kissing spine and other biomechanical issues.

Final observations:

Be organized through the whole process.
It can get overwhelming but it's all part of the excitement.
Be prepared to see lots of beautiful horses.
Everybody is different with what they are looking for.
Go with what you want and what your gut tells you.
Long term it's a partnership. You will not get on with every horse.
The more advance trained the more the risk of possibilities of findings in vet. examinations. The more advance trained, the more the athlete! Can you handle that? An older schoolmaster may be more suitable but again may have a few little things come up in the vet check.
Enjoy the experience and seeing the Spanish horse on its home territory.

If you require further advise on any part of the buying process:

- Information on the PRE
- Sourcing horses
- Vet contacts for all regions of Spain for Pre-purchase examination
- Recommended Transport companies
- Paperwork required
- The process of the change of ownership
- Stallion/mare breeding certificate organization
- Castration
- Vaccinations
- Care of teeth
- Further training in Spain
- Organization of correctly fitted tack (saddle/bridle)

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