

THE LEADING AUTHORITY FOR DRESSAGE AND COMBINED TRAINING

DRESSAGE & CT

APRIL 1998

OFFICIAL
PUBLICATION
OF THE
UNITED STATES
DRESSAGE
FEDERATION

▶ 4 GREAT VACATIONS

GET AWAY FROM IT ALL
AND TRAIN, TOO!

▶ **FLYING CHANGES**
GEORGE WILLIAMS
TEACHES
YOU HOW

▶ **MAX GAHWYLER**
A LIFETIME
OF DRESSAGE

▶ **YOUR FIRST**
THREE-DAY EVENT
HOW TO PREPARE



\$3.99 US

ROBERT DOVER'S
WORLD CUP
PREDICTIONS



EPONA EQUESTRIAN CENTRE ANDALUSIA, SPAIN

Above: Being lovingly restored by the Garcia family, the 350-year-old Hacienda Epona once billeted Napoleon's troops.

Sun-drenched southern Spain is the epitome of romance. This is the home of the magnificent Andalusian horse, the Iberian warhorse of knighthood. And it's where Jane and Fernando Garcia and their twentysomething daughters, Catalina and Viviana, own and operate Spain's only British Horse Society-approved equestrian facility.

Jane is Scottish; Fernando is Guatemalan. They met in Colombia and moved to Spain because of Colombia's political unrest. The couple bought the abandoned 350-year-old Epona hacienda (which once billeted Napoleon's troops) twelve years ago and are still in the process of restoring it. The hacienda, surrounded by olive groves and grazing sheep, now houses guests and the Garcias in separate wings; a third wing contains a breakfast/family/reading room, and a café and bar are located across a courtyard.

At Epona, you'll ride a total of eighteen to twenty hours over five days — dressage or stadium-jumping instruction plus two- to five-hour trail rides every morning, each to a different spot. (One follows the same road that El Cid took when he was fighting the Moors!) A long beach ride around Cape Trafalgar is the most popular; you can climb up to an old lighthouse and see Africa across the Straits of Gibraltar.

Epona's 52 horses can do Fourth Level dressage and jump about four feet; a few are trained in such movements as the Spanish walk and bowing. Most are Andalusian crosses; there are some Anglo-Arabians and a few fullblooded Thoroughbreds and Andalusians. Three times a week, Spanish national champion combined driver Antonio Pallares comes by to give guests driving instruction at the reins of one of his matched pairs.

Epona's slogan is *Formanos jinetes* ("We make riders"). "We do not train horses for other people," Jane Garcia explains in her lilting Scottish accent. "Our teaching methods are carefully developed. We try to make the pedestrian on foot the pedestrian on horseback. Man

holds himself erect, balanced, and relaxed over his own center of gravity. On horseback, he loses this relaxation and balance; we must help him find it again over the horse's center of gravity. When rider and horse are relaxed, the rider can apply the aids with ease. After that, we have only to teach her to press the right buttons in the right places."

Garcia says she finds most of her American

guests correct in their position but rigid in the lower back and ankles. "We do definitely appreciate their attitude," though, she says. "They are very keen to learn and willing to try our methods."

Second Level rider and horse-vacation veteran Pam Moss, 55, of Newport Beach, California, calls herself a dyed-in-the-wool surfer girl. That's why she picked Epona: "It was getting into fall; I wanted to go on a horse vacation, but I didn't want to freeze or get into the rain. I wanted a comfortable, sunny place. I found Epona to be the most pleasurable and relaxed place — not just a vacation but also a learning experience. I've been to places in Mexico, Arizona, and England, but this was the best.

"You'll benefit more from your stay if you're flexible," Moss advises. "Things aren't rigidly scheduled, but you will get everything that's on the printed schedule and much more. One day I didn't want to go to the bull farm (the planned trip), so Fernando and I took off on a different ride."

Moss says she returned home with a much improved seat, quieter hands and legs, and greater confidence. Even her instructor noticed the difference — so "I'm definitely going back."

THE FINE PRINT

About your hosts: With 26 years of teaching experience, Jane Garcia is a qualified Spanish Federation instructor and has trained numerous Andalusian Championship medalists. She and her daughters are BHS-approved instructors; Jane is also a regional dressage judge. She teaches all disciplines but specializes in dressage and in working with those students who plan to make riding their profession.

Cost: \$1,250, which includes five days of lessons and trail rides plus room and board. Lessons only are \$28 for a private or semi-private (maximum three students) one-hour session. The program runs year-round. Epona also offers a children's camp in July and August; many families come then. Jane Garcia recommends that adults choose alternate months unless you don't mind children and trail-riding in the heat. A covered arena protects riders from the intense summer sun during lessons.

Recommended pre-trip reading: *Centered Riding* by Sally Swift.

Contact: Cross Country International, PO Box 1170, Millbrook, NY 12545; phone (800) 828-TROT (8768).