

How Our Lipizzan Chose Us

By Jorie Sligh with help from Leslie Sligh and Conversano Blanca I

“For Sale: 15 year old Lipizzan Gelding; delightful attitude, classic training, charming, bombproof, floaty trot.”

My tired eyes tried to focus on the words on the computer screen. It was 2:00 in the morning in late July, 2000. I’d just tucked in my two daughters, Leslie (11) and Laura (9), after returning from a deflating vetting on the other side of the state with a horse for whom we’d had high hopes.

After a 5 month search in five states, I was getting a little discouraged in our quest to find the perfect dressage partner for Leslie and myself. The plan was to start with one horse, as I was getting back into horses after taking 10 years off to spend more time with

four young children at home. We needed a horse who was quiet enough for Leslie to ride, sound so that he’d be with us for a long time, and with good basics in dressage so that we could move up through the levels. And (s)he had to be sweet and have a great



Leslie & Blanca, WMEC 2002. Note: Leslie always wears a helmet and only took it off for this photo.

personality.

It was important to me that our new horse would be a life-long partner, as well as quiet and trustworthy. A horse we’d really liked and tried twice had wiggled out, bucking like a bronco and ripping

around a huge outdoor arena with Leslie hanging on for dear life.

My formerly gutsy daughter, who hadn’t had a nervous bone in her body when it came to riding, had had her confidence shattered. So our new horse had to be quiet and steady.

No White Horses!

Searching for a horse had been fun, at first. With the Internet, I had the world at my fingertips. I narrowed my searches down to five Midwestern states, focused on the keyword “dressage” and in the color category I made sure that “grey” was not selected. I’d owned a grey mare for over 20 years, and I was looking forward to having a horse who didn’t greet me daily with green and yellow stains.

I wanted a horse who would shine in the sun, and who didn’t show every possible speck of dirt that had gotten on his/her coat. No grey or white horses for us!

But I was so tired that I hadn't bothered to select the colors during this particular search. And for the first time in my many searches, which had always excluded white or grey horses, a Lipizzan showed up.

"...delightful attitude, classic training, charming, bombproof..." I found myself clicking on the description that brought up the picture. That was my first look at Conversano Blanca I.

I saw a lovely, white horse trotting, frozen in

and knowing, with its soft eye and smiling mouth? That's how Blanca looked – wise, serene, and so kind.

Who Owns Lipizzans?

He looked wonderful. But – a *Lipizzan*? Average, normal mortals don't own Lipizzans! I'd grown up reading My Horses, My Teachers and My Dancing White Horses, and watching "The Miracle of the White Stallions;" these were magical horses, horses who performed in riding halls with chandeliers. How could I possibly think that we could own

owner and the owner's friend, who was a trainer, we had a date to try Blanca.

Love At First Sight

He was fortunately only about two hours away from us. He'd been owned for two years by Candy Weimer, who was learning dressage but had injured her back (not riding) and had to sell him. Candy was very particular about who would end up with Blanca; during our initial phone conversation, she was a little hesitant about our trying him, since Blanca was used to women and she wasn't sure how he'd be with a child.

After talking with her trainer/friend who was helping her sell Blanca, she called back enthusiastically saying that the trainer thought Blanca would love carrying a child.

Blanca was in cross-ties when we came into the barn. He was steady and very interested in us, especially after he found out that we had brought carrots. I learned later that Lipizzans are extremely bribable, and Blanca is no exception.



Leslie & Blanca – WMEC, 2004

time, with flexed hocks and a curving tail. It was his expression that really caught my eye. You know how a dolphin looks so kind

a Lipizzan?

But still – those eyes!

So the next morning, after talking with the

After tacking up, we headed into the indoor arena where Candy's friend, Linda, rode Blanca around. Then it was my turn – he was quiet, calm, and had the floatiest trot! Candy said riding him was like riding a big marshmallow, and she was right. We did a little walk, trot, canter, leg-yielding, and shoulder-in. His canter was dicey, but I thoroughly enjoyed my ride.

Then it was Leslie's turn. Candy and I stayed in the observation area; Linda adjusted the stirrups and Leslie mounted Blanca.

Candy caught hold of my arm. "He's standing like a statue!" Blanca had wiggled a little bit when Linda and I had gotten on. Leslie and Blanca moved off.

Leslie had been taking hunter lessons up until about two months before trying Blanca. She had quiet legs and hands and a balanced seat, but didn't know anything about encouraging a dressage horse to take connection, much less move laterally, etc.

Blanca didn't care; with Linda's coaching, Blanca trotted around as if Leslie had been at this for years. He was good for the trainer and me, but for Leslie – he was magnificent. Lovely leg yields, round circles... It was love at first sight.



*Jorie & Blanca – Oct 2004
Stephanie van de Ven photo*

Candy and I watched from the sidelines. Candy said, "He's chosen her."

So that was it. I didn't even have him vetted. His feet were huge – beautiful. His legs were wonderful. He would've had to start dragging a leg in order

for us not to buy him – we fell in love with him.

Our Boy Forever

That was 3 and a half years ago. It was a slow start with him – finding the right barn, the right instruction.

He needed strength in his topline so that he

could carry himself correctly; he needed to learn to focus and get over his habit of having to look at *everything* that was going on around him – not spooky, not anxious – just really, really interested; he needed to learn to reach for the bit and take connection from the hand.

He likes the attention he attracts at shows, and loves to be in the spotlight... "It's all about me!" He's not like any other horse I've ever owned or ridden - super smart, super inquisitive, super sensitive, and so sweet. He definitely is The

Drama Queen and will passage and piaffe when he's trying to make a point about something, but he's also such a gentleman and so sensible. We always feel safe with him – on the trail, riding bareback – he's wonderful. He likes me, but he adores Leslie – she is definitely His Human.

We're showing First Level this year, still taking it slowly so that everything is in place and solid before moving up. Actually, Leslie thinks he should be in the Olympics someday. Ah, youth. "Mom, why aren't there more Lipizzans in the show ring?" He's going to be 20 in May but he looks like a 10 year old. With care, attention and a lot of TLC he hopefully has many more years of riding ahead of him.

When it's time for him to retire and for us to get another horse, I can't imagine looking at anything but a Lipizzan. We have completely fallen in love with the breed, and judging from

the experiences shared by other Lipizzan owners on the Yahoo Lipizzan list (which has been a fabulous source of information), Blanca is typical for a Lipizzan – that is to say, not at all like a "regular" horse!

Grey coats and grass stains? We wouldn't have it any other way!

Edited article from the United States Lipizzan Registry News, Spring, 2004 .

Blanca was loved and cherished by Leslie and Jorie until his death on Oct 14, 2008, when he was put to sleep following colic due to a strangulating lipoma. Visit his memorial page at



Blanca & Jorie, Karl Mikolka Clinic 2005

www.dressageclinics.org/blanca.html



Leslie & Santa Blanca, Bliss Stables Halloween Party, Oct 2004