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Evaluation of saddle and driving aptitudes in Monterufoli pony

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ABSTRACT - The Monterufoli pony is an endangered Tuscan breed. In the 80's began a project for the conservation of the breed and at present there are roughly 200 individuals. The equine was once utilized for saddle and driving and this study deals with the training for these two aptitudes. The morphologic type of the pony seems suited for saddle, in particular for children and beginners, and driving. The ponies showed developed chest, strong legs with short shanks: all these characters were useful for trot and driving. In this trial 3-4 years old never tamed Monterufoli ponies were opportunely choose and subsequently trained for saddle and driving. The ponies were submitted to the "aptitude test" for the two aptitudes and the results were good both for practical and character sides. The marks for saddle and driving were 8.16 and 8.06 respectively. Also the 3 ponies showed good results for the Aptitude Index: 7.60, 7.87 and 7.89. The results of the trial showed the excellent ability of the Monterufoli pony for saddle and driving. The good results of the test are important for the diffusion of the breed in the territory and in particular in horse centres and in equestrian tourism sites.

Key words: Monterufoli Pony, Horse training, Saddle, Driving.

Introduction - The interest for the re-introduction of the Monterufoli horse, in particular in Tuscany, began in the 80's and at present there are roughly 200 individuals (APA, 2006). A preliminary census of the ponies has been carried out and through the morphological characterization the new "breed standard" was defined. This study deals with the training of the Monterufoli pony for saddle and driving, that were in the past the main aptitudes of the breed. The training activity is included in a wider ARSIA project, which deals with the conservation and the exploitation of the Tuscan endangered equine breeds. The aim of the work is the demographic development and the diffusion of the Monterufoli pony in horse centres and in agritourism.

Material and methods - Three 3-4 years old and never tamed Monterufoli ponies were trained for saddle and driving. The ponies were all females and two of these derived from the province of Siena and one from the province of Pisa. The ponies were trained in Campalto horse centre, near Pisa, for 90 days and at the end of the trial the equines were judged in a final examination, by 6 evaluators. The evaluators were chosen among horse trainers and horse breeders, and they judged the "aptitude test" of the ponies. The evaluations were in a "proof sheet" similar to the official protocol, as expected for other equine breeds (ANACRHI, 2006). The test dealt with the rectangle work in beaten round and in lawn, and the single driving test. The referees considered the attitudinal characters: saddle and driving permissiveness, walk, trot and gallop, performance and endurance (Parameter A), and also the

ethologic-behavioural topics: character, submissiveness, temperament, frankness (Parameter B). The individual score was in “evaluation form” referred to the official “evaluation form” of UNIRE (UNIRE, 2007) and FISE (FISE, 2007); the marks were from 1 to 10. The mark 0 was “not executed” and the mark 10 was “excellent”. The marks under 4 were not sufficient and the first sufficient mark was 5. For every parameter the average and the standard deviation were calculated. The final evaluation of every individuals was evaluated with an “aptitude index” (AI) as follows:

The mean value of every parameter A was multiplied by a “relevance coefficient”, that was 2 for the saddle and the driving ability, 1 for the endurance and the walk, the trot and the gallop. The mean value of every parameter B was multiplied by 2 for the submissiveness, 1 for the character, 0.3 for the temperament, 0.2 for the frankness.

- The average of the “horse riding test” was calculated (sum of the parameter A divided by 6).
- The average of the “ethologic-behavioural test” was calculated (sum of the parameter B divided by 4).
- The sum of the average of the “horse riding test” and of the “ethologic-behavioural test” was divided by 2.

The ponies passed the trial when the aptitude index was at least 6 and in every parameter the sufficiency was reached.

Results and conclusions - The evaluations of the training are showed in table 1 and the results are similar and very positive for the 3 ponies.

The results are fulfilling for saddle and driving and they showed the versatility of the Monterufoli pony for the two aptitudes. **Same trend was observed for the walk, the trot and the gallop. The results obtained for the trot showed the skill of the Monterufolino for this gait. This breed is characterized by a relative short shank, that is a peculiarity of the trotter (Tocci, 2007).**

Table 1. Performances of 3-4 years old Monterufoli pony females.

	Virginia		Nera		Mora	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Parameter A						
Saddle aptitude	8.16 ± 0.40		8.16 ± 0.98		7.75 ± 1.08	
Driving aptitude	7.66 ± 0.75		8.08 ± 0.80		7.83 ± 0.51	
Performance and endurance	7.33 ± 0.68		7.58 ± 1.06		7.75 ± 0.88	
Walk	7.66 ± 0.98		7.75 ± 1.17		7.58 ± 0.49	
Trot	7.83 ± 0.68		7.91 ± 0.80		8.00 ± 0.63	
Gallop	7.75 ± 0.41		8.08 ± 1.15		8.33 ± 0.93	
Horse riding test	7.78		7.98		7.85	
Parameter B						
Character	7.66 ± 0.87		7.75 ± 0.82		8.08 ± 0.73	
Submissiveness	7.33 ± 0.75		7.83 ± 0.68		7.91 ± 0.80	
Temperament	7.41 ± 0.37		7.56 ± 0.87		7.66 ± 0.68	
Frankness	7.33 ± 0.40		7.58 ± 0.66		7.58 ± 1.15	
Ethologic-behavioural test	7.43		7.77		7.92	
Aptitude Index	7.60		7.87		7.89	

Monterufoli pony showed good results also for the character, the submissiveness and the temperament; it has to be pointed out that the temperament is typical of the oriental ancestors, that were introduced for the improvement of the breed (Tocci, 2007). The test showed also that the frankness is another important feature of the Monterufolino. Other peculiarity of the breed is the ability in the endurance. This is a feature that was known in the past and favoured the diffusion of the Monterufolino; appropriate for the endurance is the developed thorax typical of the breed-population (Tocci, 2007). The final results showed the versatility of the Monterufoli pony and its ability in saddle and in driving, that were very important in the past, but not at the present time. Anyway, in these last years the interest for the preservation and the exploitation of the endangered breed increased the interest for this equine. Moreover the Monterufoli pony gives prestige and relevance to the territory and the ability for saddle and driving of this equine plays an important role for its diffusion in horse centres and equestrian tourism sites.

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