

Augusta Destined for Royalty

by L.A. Pomeroy

In Arthurian legend, the quest for the Holy Grail meant the metaphoric attempt to reclaim what once was lost. It is no small irony, then, that a farm in Westhampton, named for the castle of this British medieval king, is also on a mission to restore a former royal prize — sabino-patterned pinto Spanish horses — with the help of a miraculous mare named Augusta.

All the King's Horses

"A color expert, looking at Gussie's picture, declared her the equivalent of winning the lottery," says her owner and breeder, Sarah Hollis of Tintagel Enterprises. Modern Andalusian horses are primarily gray, bay, or black, but this was not always the case. Museum masterpieces exist to prove it.

"There are paintings by Velazquez," she says, referring to Spanish painter Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velazquez (1599–1660), "depicting sabino Spanish horses."

Sabino, also known as calico paint, refers to an asymmetrical coat color pattern of white patches, varying from distinct sharp patches to small spots or roaning, commonly found on the belly, flank, lips, or legs.

"This pattern for color was popular in Spanish horses of seventeenth-century royal courts and bred extensively by King Philip IV," Sarah explains. "Since then, the Spanish have preferred white or dark horses of black or bay with no, or minimal, white. Sabino color was buried under generations of gray.

"As seen with Gussie, it can crop up, although is considered extremely rare," says Sarah, who served on the board of directors for the International Andalusian and Lusitano Horse Association (IALHA), and is its current USEF liaison and USDF Andalusian Committee member. As of 2004, there are approximately 7,000 Andalusians in the United States.

To Sarah's knowledge, Augusta, born May

1, 1999, is its only purebred pinto mare. "She is a throwback to days past, when color horses were the most popular choice for royalty, and before the gray gene wiped almost all other colors from the Spanish horse."

The bay sabino's beauty is more than skin-deep. The three-time USDF All-Breed Bred Mare Award winner and winner at Dressage at Devon was ranked tenth nationally in 2004 USDF Bred Mare



Augusta with her new colt Tamino.

Sport Horses (against all breeds), third in the USDF Breeders Championship New England Series Mares Final, and fourth in 2003 NEDA Year End Open Mature Mares (against all breeds).

"Augusta is the new cornerstone of my breeding program," Sarah says. "She has led me in a new direction to bring back the Spanish color horse." Is it possible? If Gussie has taught Sarah anything, it is to believe in miracles.

Sparking an Unlikely Match

When Augusta was born, Sarah announced her arrival on the farm's website, www.tintagelandalusians.com, "Tintagel, the legendary birthplace of King Arthur, has brought forth another legend. We are humbled to receive this gift — a miracle filly bearing the honored name Augusta."

The filly was the product of an unlikely match between a Tintagel broodmare, Encina, and an unproven young stallion from upstate New York, Maladante I.

Encina (Relacario x Calafia) was a pure Spanish chestnut sabino under gray, who came to Tintagel in 1996 from the farm of Louis Arenas, in Mexico. Maladante I was at stud with Tina Veder. Already booked to a stallion in California, when Encina came into heat, the stud's owners suddenly informed Sarah that they could not ship his semen.

"I had a 38 mm follicle and had to breed the next day!" Sarah recalls. She did not yet own her stallions, Diego and Regaliz, and with Encina ovulating, she had 24 hours to find an Andalusian stud within driving distance of western Massachusetts. Tina offered Sarah a choice between her established Aureolo VII and the unknown Maladante I. Sarah decided to give the youngster a try.

She drove to New York the next day to pick up the semen: "Encina, whom I had been trying to breed for three years without success, took on the first try. Then she had twins, so we waited a few tense days to see if one of the embryos would absorb on its own. It did and the remaining embryo was Gussie."

Thank You, Auggie

"Gussie's birth may seem like just a rare combining of genes but I feel it has a deeper meaning," says the lifelong horse-woman. "Her story would not be complete without also introducing a special horse named Auggie."

Auggie was the bay spotted Thoroughbred/Appaloosa cross gelding whom Sarah called her best friend and mentor: "He was an old soul who carried such wisdom and energy he influenced all who met him. This beloved farm monarch had the retirement job of babysitting the mares, and when the beautiful, but timid, Encina arrived, Auggie befriended her." Under

his gentle influence, Encina slowly learned to call Tintagel home.

When Encina's breeding to Maladante I took, Sarah joked that Auggie thought he was the father and she would not be surprised if the baby came out with spots. Auggie's health had always been an issue, to the extent that Sarah rode him just two of their 16 years together. Chronic lameness was just one of the challenges they had faced together. But she knew her old friend would not live forever, or even see the birth of Encina's foal. In November 1998, Sarah buried Auggie on the hillside overlooking the mare pasture "where he had grazed with and protected his Encina and could continue his presence there," she says.

The first of May, Encina went into labor. "As I towed the delicate filly dry, I marveled at the amount of white on her," Sarah recalls. "I carefully flipped her over to complete my imprinting and stopped, too stunned to move. There was a set of white spots." Auggie had not left after all. "I believe she was the parting gift to me from Auggie, my guide and friend, then and forever." In tribute, Sarah named her Augusta, a.k.a. Gussie, cryptically describing her as a relic from the past, brought forth by a miracle, to leave a gift to the future.

First Knight

On February 11, 2006, Gussie paid that gift forward, easily delivering her first colt — a bay sabino, with three high white stockings and a white lip patch — and named him Tamino. "Three pushes," Sarah says, "and he was out." Within minutes of his birth, viewed live by website foal-cam worldwide, remarks like "Look at all that chrome!" flooded in from Florida, Germany, New York, and the United Kingdom.

"Tintagel has the only Andalusian breeding program selecting for color genes. With Encina, Augusta's mother, carrying the recessive pinto gene, we wait with much anticipation for future foals as well," Sarah says.

Augusta has always been a horse of a different color. With a playful nod to the memory of Auggie, Sarah concludes, "when people ask me what kind of horse she is, I say she's an AAP: an Andalusian American Princess."

A horse destined for royalty.