

# JEWELS *of* *the* DESERT

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDRIA HAUTAMAKI



On an isolated ranch in southern Arizona, the Wilbur-Cruce line of Spanish horses defied the odds of history, drought and predation to become a treasure trove of genetic significance.

**LEFT:** Beth Mendivil — Spanish Barb Horse Association president — and her husband, Alfredo, at the Empire Ranch Cowboy Festival with Wilbur-Cruce geldings Lorenzo (overo) and Hermoso (sorrel).

# The Wilbur Ranch Rock Horses



**T**he Spanish horse was made to build the West, and that he did," writes Eva Antonia "Bonnie" Wilbur-Cruce in her memoir. "He was tough like the longhorns.... The Spanish horses were made for the country and were much like the country itself, rugged and beautiful."

A third-generation rancher, Bonnie Wilbur-Cruce was born in 1904 in Arivaca, Arizona, a dusty town with a handful of houses near the Mexico border. At that time, Arizona was still a territory — state-

hood didn't occur until 1912 — and livestock grazed on the wide, open range amidst mesquite and cholla cactus. The Wilbur family, along with Native Americans and a growing number of ranchers in the southwest, depended on their horses to traverse the craggy desert landscape.

"[The horses] carried themselves well and carried their riders with utmost care, placing their small feet on solid ground and balancing themselves as they reached out for better footing," Bonnie writes. "We sometimes called them rock horses because they were surefooted on rocky surfaces, and the Indians called them dog-horses, because of the doglike devotion

they had for their masters."

Throughout her life, Bonnie was a fierce advocate and defender of her "rock horses." Despite her years of caring for and feeding the horses, outsiders often misunderstood the true value of these hard-hooved and lightly-framed animals. Factors such as drought, water wars, the Great Depression and economic recessions nearly led to the demise of the ranch-raised herd.

It wasn't until 1990 that others realized the genetic significance of the Wilbur-Cruce horses, which had been managed in near isolation for more than a century. This is their story.

## The Wilbur Ranch Rock Horses

In the mid-1860s, Harvard Medical School graduate Reuben A. Wilbur, MD, moved from Massachusetts to the Territory of Arizona to work as a physician for the Cerro Colorado Mining Company. When the mine shut down, Wilbur and his newlywed wife, Rafaela Salazar, homesteaded 140 acres near Arivaca Creek. They raised livestock and maintained a bountiful vegetable and herb garden.

In 1877, a Mexican horse trader named Juan Zepulveda rode through the Arivaca Valley with approximately 600 head of horses on his way to sell the animals at

the stockyards in Kansas City. According to Wilbur family oral tradition, the horses in Zepulveda's herd had been gathered in Mexico near Rancho Dolores, the headquarters of 17th century Jesuit priest Father Eusebio Kino, who was known as the "Padre on Horseback."

Between 1686 to 1711, Father Kino founded more than 20 missions in the area now known as Sonora, Mexico, and Southern Arizona. Though he was a priest, Father Kino's contributions to agriculture and animal husbandry are considered some of his most significant accomplishments. In order to achieve his work as a missionary, explorer and cartographer, he

depended on his Colonial Spanish horses to navigate incredible distances. According to Father Kino's diaries and travel logs, he often rode more than 30 miles a day for weeks, or even months, on end.

When Wilbur purchased 25 mares and one stallion from Zepulveda's herd, horses tracing back to the legacy of Father Kino and Rancho Dolores, little did anyone guess that the horses would become a genetic time capsule, maintaining their pure connection with Colonial Spanish blood. These rustic, steadfast horses were the common type of horse used in the Arivaca Valley and became the foundation stock for the Wilbur Ranch.

# La Pistolera



Silke Schneider, author of “Arizona’s Spanish Barbs,” explains that horses classified as “North American Colonial Spanish” maintain a strong genetic tie and physical resemblance to the stock initially brought to the Americas in 1493, during the time of Colonial Spain. The horses are also known as Spanish Barbs, because they are thought to be a blend of indigenous horses from the Iberian Peninsula — Spain and Portugal — crossed with Barb horses from North Africa’s Barbary Coast.

In 1882, Wilbur passed away unexpectedly after a bout of pneumonia. Agustín Wilbur, the eldest of the couple’s three children, took on the responsibility of managing the family operation, and he continued the tradition of raising range-bred ranch horses. They started horses from the herd under saddle only when the vaqueros needed another riding horse.

Agustín described the horses as having “iron hooves.” Natural selection, thanks to the area’s robust population of mountain lions, left only the savviest horses alive.

**LEFT:** The Wilbur Ranch was homesteaded in 1865 by Harvard Medical School graduate Reuben A. Wilbur, MD, and his wife, Rafaela Salazar. **RIGHT:** Bonnie Wilbur-Cruce with two “rock horses.”

## La Pistolera

At the turn of the 20th century, Eva Antonia Wilbur was born to Agustín Wilbur and Ramona Valducea. The eldest of five children, she preferred to be called “Bonnie.” From a young age, she helped her father doctor animals and was given responsibilities beyond her years. Her favorite horse, a surefooted gelding named Diamante, was her companion to work cattle and ride the range.

In her memoir, “A Beautiful, Cruel Country,” Bonnie recounts her childhood along the sandy, cottonwood-lined banks of Arivaca Creek. The Tohono O’odham desert people, previously known as “Papago” Native Americans, visited frequently, bringing news and goods to exchange in the remote desert.

Her early ranch life was characterized by seasonal work, a unique dialect of English and Spanish language, and a desire to be horseback. She remembers her “grandfather Wilbur” as a man with friends everywhere in the valley, who loved birds and spent most of the spring and summer months caring for the family vegetable and herb garden.

Educated at home, at age 13, Bonnie went to boarding school at the Guardian Angel Convent in Los Angeles, California. The transition was challenging for the young girl accustomed to riding the open range with a gun in hand and animals as her chief companions, but she adjusted. She had a passion for words — she’d often crafted short poems on the ranch — and in Los Angeles, she developed her literary interests.

In 1933, her father passed away after being thrown from a horse. Bonnie, 29 years old at the time, was in California studying at Woodbury College. Her siblings were uninterested in running the ranch, so she moved back to Arizona and took over ownership. Later that year, Bonnie met her



“I WATCHED THEM STRUGGLE EVERY WAKING MOMENT TO FEED THE HORSES; THEY SPENT EVERY PENNY THEY HAD.”

— ROBERT ZIMMERMAN

husband, Marshall Cruce, when she purchased a truck from him. Bonnie told Marshall he’d have to teach her how to drive the truck, and they stayed together. After they married, Bonnie, the ranch and the horses took on the name Wilbur-Cruce.

At the time of her father’s death, the ranch had approximately 700 head of horses and 250 cows, but the 1930s were a challenging decade in agriculture. The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl only complicated those trying to eke out a living in an already parched desert.

Her father had been involved in land disputes over water and grazing rights and, when Bonnie assumed ranch ownership, she was thrust into the middle of the conflict. A frontpage story in a November 1933 edition of the *Los Angeles Examiner*

read “MACHINE GUN BANDS BRING REIGN OF TERROR IN ARIZONA.” The article listed recent developments to include the “wholesale slaughter on the August Wilbur ranch of 30 head of valuable range horses.”

In 1934, with the passing of the Taylor Grazing Act, livestock grazing on public lands became regulated. The days of the open range were over, along with the seasonal round ups marked by swirling dirt and stomping hooves when cattle were gathered across the valley.

Over the following decade, the Wilbur-Cruce Ranch entered a drawn-out conflict with neighboring rancher Charlie Boice and the Chiricahua Cattle Company. Bonnie said Boice was trying to drive her off her land because she had access to water along the Arivaca Creek.

Some say she was framed; others say she was guilty, but Bonnie and her long time vaquero, Luis López, were accused of killing another man’s mare and branding the colt as her own. Bonnie claimed that the mare was hers. The jury deemed Bonnie guilty, and she spent 10 months in the Arizona State Prison.

After prison, Bonnie’s protective sense for the home ranch and her horses increased, and she was rarely seen without her gun. This practice earned her the nickname, “La Pistolera.”

Bonnie and Marshall didn’t have children of their own, but they raised their grand-nephew, Robert Zimmerman. Born

**LEFT:** Bonnie, age 12, rides a Wilbur-Cruce “rock horse” near the town of Arivaca. A rope, a gun, and a steady horse were Bonnie’s essential tools. **RIGHT:** In 1933, Bonnie Wilbur met and married Marshall Cruce. Their marriage lasted 56 years until Marshall passed away in 1989. After they married, Bonnie, the ranch and the horses took on the name “Wilbur-Cruce.”

in a family with many siblings, Bonnie asked to care for the young boy, on whom she doted.

In 2021, while walking along the nearly dry Arivaca Creek, Zimmerman recalls his adventure-filled childhood on the Wilbur-Cruce Ranch. He remembers when his great-aunt’s horses graced the mesquite corral and the hand-dug well was filled with water. Now, the old adobe house is but a shell, and the well has run dry.

Zimmerman describes his great-aunt as a private person who fiercely protected those she loved. Bonnie was also exceptionally capable in handling livestock. She carried a .32 caliber Colt and even slept with the revolver under her pillow until she passed away in 1998, at age 93.

“She lived by the rope; the rope was her livelihood — the rope and the gun,” Zimmerman says. “There were a lot of predators, mountain lions and even rabid coyotes. When I was little, and we would brand the horses, she would rope the horse and then wrap the rope on a post, and I’d have to hold the rope. I watched them struggle every waking moment to feed the horses; they spent every penny they had.”



**LEFT & ABOVE:** Robert Zimmerman, grand-nephew to Bonnie Wilbur-Cruce at the old Wilbur Ranch near Arivaca, Arizona.

## Buried Treasure

Growing up, Zimmerman knew all the family stories about the ranch, including that their herd descended from early Spanish mission horses. At first, he thought the oral history sounded far-fetched. But when Bonnie sold the property to The Nature Conservancy in 1989, the impending removal of the horses led to an important discovery for the Spanish Barb horse community.

“My great-aunt and -uncle, they had their feelings and their hunches, but the horses weren’t really recognized for what they were,” Zimmerman says. “It turns out

they actually were from horses that Father Kino had bred — it was true.”

When Bonnie sold her property and grazing leases, more than 1,600-acres, the Wilbur-Cruce Ranch became part of the 112,000-acre Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. At the time of the sale, the horses were still on the property; however, the managing United States Fish and Wildlife Service had no mandate to care for the horses. Within a year, ongoing drought and directives to reintroduce the endangered Masked Bobwhite quail led to the removal of the horses from the property.

Steve Dobrott, a wildlife biologist at the Refuge, happened to read Bonnie’s book,

“A Beautiful, Cruel Country.” He wondered if the horses about to be removed had any historical significance. So, Steve and his wife, Janie, went to a book signing to confirm the stories they heard. The horses on the Wilbur-Cruce Ranch were horses of Spanish descent; they came from Father Kino’s breeding stock.

“Bonnie was spunky, endearing and passionate about the ranch and the horses,” Janie says. “She revered these horses for their value in the rough country they lived in, their temperament and good minds.”

After that meeting, the Dobrotts reached out to the American Minor Breeds Conservancy, now known as The Livestock

Conservancy, a nonprofit organization that works to preserve heritage livestock breeds. The organization’s technical advisor and Colonial Spanish horse expert, Phillip Sponenberg, DVM, PhD, guided the process to verify the Wilbur-Cruce horse’s Colonial Spanish roots. He then provided essential guidance to adopt-out the herd.

Several criteria were used to determine if the Wilbur-Cruce horses were indeed of Colonial Spanish descent: first, consideration of their history and isolation; second, evaluation for Spanish type, conformation and adherence to breed standards; and last, blood-typing and genetic testing. The horses were confirmed to be a unique,

non-feral strain of genetic significance.

Sponenberg credits Gus Cothran, DVM, of Texas A&M University for his genetic testing work to help identify and conserve the Wilbur-Cruce and other horses of Colonial Spanish descent. Sponenberg stresses that, while DNA testing and blood typing are helpful tools, genetic testing is not a one-stop solution for breed identification.

“Horses are the reason we moved from point A to point B for most of our history,” Sponenberg says. “So, they’re actually a bit more [genetically] mixed up than most other species, like cattle or sheep. With genetic testing, it’s not really a case of ‘either-or’ with absolute certainty; it’s more a case of ‘this is more frequent here’ and ‘that’s more frequent there.’”

“Due to the [random] inheritance pattern of genetic markers, it is easily possible for an absolutely pure Colonial Spanish horse to have missed inheriting any of the Iberian markers,” he continues. “It is likewise possible for a crossbred horse to

have inherited several, which is why documented history and adherence to conformation type are also important for breed identification.”

Once established as a unique population of Colonial Spanish horses of genetic significance, the work began to sort the horses by breeding groups and adopt them out.

The Dobrotts remember the months after the discovery of the horses when they would drive to the Wilbur-Cruce Ranch and hike out into the scrub desert to count the horses and record which stallions and mares roamed together.

“It was pretty exciting; it was like a treasure hunt every weekend,” Janie says.

The Dobrotts observed that the horses were well-adapted and resourceful. They easily traversed the rocky slopes and ate mesquite beans and cottonwood leaves; they even dug holes to find water. In total, 77 horses were gathered from the Wilbur-Cruce Ranch.

Robin Collins, who adopted one of the



## Saving the Horse that Discovered America

At the annual Empire Ranch Cowboy Festival, an hour southeast of Tucson, Arizona, visitors explore booths that celebrate Arizona's Western history and culture. One booth is staffed by a dedicated team of Spanish Barb Horse Association members. Nearby, two Wilbur-Cruce geldings — a bay overo named Lorenzo, and his sorrel stablemate, Hermoso — stick their heads over their temporary stall walls and greet passing visitors. Even on this November day in 2021, the temperature still reaches near 90 degrees.

“When the Spanish conquistadors arrived here, they had their full armor, saddle and everything that they needed to live packed on their small horses,” says Beth Mendivil, SBHA president, to the gathering crowd. “These are also the horses that the vaqueros threw those big, heavy Western saddles on, and they rode all day.”

For the SBHA, events such as the Cowboy Festival are an avenue to help people discover the horse that discovered America, by promoting the breed and connecting with potential Spanish Barb enthusiasts.

“We’re a preservation registry,” Mendivil says. “We encourage people to try [to breed] at least one or two foals, or we will not have the next generation. We need to get these horses out there and we need to get them into the hands of people who will help promote them and who will breed them, to preserve these genetics.”

Mendivil describes Colonial Spanish horses as a thrifty, intelligent breed that excels in a variety of disciplines. Versatile, people-oriented and heat-tolerant, they have the stamina and mindset to work all day.

These characteristics attracted Heidi and Jerry Collings to ride Wilbur-Cruce horses on their cattle ranch.

“They’re so cooperative,” says Heidi, who has been an SBHA registrar for more than a decade. “They aren’t a specialized horse, but they do a respectable job at everything. And for a small horse, they have tremendous bone.”

Jerry clearly remembers the first Wilbur-Cruce colt she started under saddle at her New Mexico ranch. Within an hour, she was riding the colt in a halter. Later that day, she tried the young horse on cattle in the corral. The colt handled extremely well and maintained a calm and teach-

initial breeding groups in 1990, continues to care for Wilbur-Cruce horses at her Rancho del Sueño property in California.

“Your working horses that go back into ancient times have a different demeanor, a different character and a different makeup,” Collins says. “The horse had to cohabitate with [people] like a good working dog, like a Border Collie.”

Collins remembers meeting Bonnie in 1990, the week the horses were dispersed. Sitting in a wheelchair with an umbrella for shade, the then 86-year-old Bonnie said to Collins, “I am so concerned; I am so worried they do not know what they’re getting. They have no idea who these horses

are. These are Old World horses, and I’m afraid they won’t be understood and they will be lost.”

In 1992, Wilbur-Cruce horses were accepted into the Spanish Barb Breeders Association under provisional status. The association wanted to be certain that the horses would continue to produce Spanish type and temperament. After this was confirmed, in 2005, Wilbur-Cruce horses were formally accepted as the sixth official foundation strain of the Colonial Spanish horse.

“The Wilbur-Cruce horse represents so much history,” Collins says. “They are history on the hoof.”

able demeanor. After that experience, the Collingses were hooked.

In 2011, the Colonial Spanish horse was named the official Arizona State heritage horse. Despite this designation, total horse numbers are critically low and conservation breeding can be a challenging endeavor. When the Collingses decided to buy a Wilbur-Cruce horse, it took them five years to purchase their first mare, since there were so few horses available.

According to The Livestock Conservancy, the Colonial Spanish horse is currently listed as “critical.” This means there are fewer than 200 annual registrations in the United States and an estimated global population of less than 500.

“WE’VE MADE A TRANSITION FROM LARGE BREEDERS LIKE MYSELF, WHEN WE WERE STILL IN NEW MEXICO, TO SMALL, BACKYARD BREEDERS, SO THERE’S NOT NEARLY AS MANY FOALS COMING ALONG.”

—HEIDI COLLINGS

Sponenberg explains the importance of maintaining as much genetic variation as possible in the process of conservation breeding. When working with horse breeds that are not endangered, breeders can focus on production characteristics, such as more acute cow sense or explosive speed. However, in conservation breeding, when a species or breed of animal is endangered, the focus shifts to maintaining enough viable breeding animals to preserve the integrity of the species.

There are currently 179 horses registered with the Spanish Barb Horse Association. In 2021, three foals were born, and

four are expected this year. SBHA breeders anxiously expect ten foals in 2023.

“We’ve made a transition from large breeders like myself, when we were still in New Mexico, to small, backyard breeders, so there’s not nearly as many foals coming along,” Jerry says.

With so few horses now, even if a demand is created for Wilbur-Cruce and other Colonial Spanish horse strains, there aren’t enough to supply potential buyers. Despite these challenges, a growing number of new Spanish Barb enthusiasts are rallying around the breed and joining the SBHA in their preservation.

Jennifer Racicot and her family farm in the Chihuahuan Desert near Portal, Arizona. They also raise livestock and have a passion for preserving Old World breeds

on their La Buena Vida farm.

When Racicot and her 18-year-old daughter, Catherine, first heard about the Wilbur-Cruce horses, they were immediately attracted to the rarity of the breed along with their history and Arizona heritage. It took more than eight months before they were able to find and buy their first Wilbur-Cruce mare.

The Racicots also breed Nigerian Dwarf goats, a heritage breed once considered rare; they plan to use what they have learned about conservation goat breeding to the preservation of Wilbur-Cruce horses.

LEFT & BELOW: Heidi Collings, SBHA registrar, riding Tildio (black sabino) and with Mirasol (palomino) in New Mexico.





“We sell our best goats. People show them, they’re winning and that helps promote the breed,” Racicot says. “Our goal as preservation breeders is to send our best [animals] out into the world.”

“The difference is that goats have a lot of babies and their gestation is five months,” Racicot continues. “So maybe instead of the 15 years it took to establish the goats, we’re looking at 35 years to develop the Wilbur-Cruce horses.”

La Buena Vida farm currently has four Wilbur-Cruce mares and expect the arrival of two foals this coming year. Rac-

icot describes her horses as hardy, gracious and well-acclimated to the desert with a wonderful temperament. She also notes that some members of the local Cochise County Sheriff’s Office ride Spanish Barbs on the equine search and rescue response team.

“Many people want to experience these horses firsthand, but there aren’t any available,” Racicot says. “First, we need to produce breeding animals to sustain the breed. We can’t sell all our future breeding stock, but we need to breed enough to put [these horses] in the hands of the

public, people that want to use them and promote them.”

SBHA members are working on several new initiatives to help preserve the historic Colonial Spanish horse. The association has a program called Save Our Stallions to raise funds to collect and store semen. Before Heidi castrated her 14-year-old black sabino gelding, Tildio, they collected his semen and added it to the SOS sperm bank to promote genetic diversity within the breed.

The SBHA is also working to send semen to the USDA’s National Animal Germplasm Program, a bank of long-term storage to provide genetic security and increase genetic understanding of United States livestock.

Breeding small groups of numerically threatened horses is a tremendous challenge. Thanks to a dedicated group of conservation breeders devoted to these remarkable horses, Jerry remains optimistic that, as people experience the Spanish Barbs, these horses will continue to defy history and gracefully carry their riders into the future.

“It’s important to do everything we can to preserve Colonial Spanish horses,” Heidi says. “They’re a unique piece of living history that still fits beautifully in today’s world.”

“IT’S IMPORTANT TO DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO PRESERVE COLONIAL SPANISH HORSES. THEY’RE A UNIQUE PIECE OF LIVING HISTORY THAT STILL FITS BEAUTIFULLY IN TODAY’S WORLD.”

— HEIDI COLLINGS

For Bonnie Wilbur-Cruce, the Colonial Spanish horse was the preferred breed for ranching in the arid southwest. Protecting and preserving her family’s herd was her life’s work.

“The Spanish horses thrived in the desert and were the horses of the day,” Bonnie writes. “They were our companions from sunup to sundown and sometimes deep into the night, year in and year out. They had speed, stamina and intelligence, and, strange as it may seem, they had feelings.”

The isolation of the Wilbur Ranch and the harsh landscape challenged the horse’s survival, but also maintained the hardy nature and pure Colonial Spanish type in the Wilbur-Cruce strain. If Bonnie could have looked into the future on the day she adopted out her horses, she would feel the comfort of knowing they continue to be cherished for their thrifty, intelligent nature. Wilbur-Cruce Colonial Spanish horses carry with them the same noble characteristics and legacy of the first horses that shaped the West. 🐾

ANDRIA HAUTAMAKI is a freelance writer and photographer from Colorado. To learn more about the Spanish Barb Horse Association visit [spanishbarb.com](http://spanishbarb.com).

Send comments on this story to [edit@westernhorseman.com](mailto:edit@westernhorseman.com).

## WHAT IS THE NORTH AMERICAN COLONIAL SPANISH HORSE?

**Around the year 1700**, the pure Spanish horse was the most common type of horse in the United States. According to Phillip Sponenberg, DVM, PhD, a professor of pathology and genetics at Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, these horses could be found from the Carolinas south to Florida, west through Tennessee and across the Great Plains to the Western mountain region.

In the “Colonial Spanish Horse Breed Update, 2021,” Sponenberg explains how the Colonial Spanish horse was considered too small for Calvary use by Anglo-Americans, resulting in the horses being supplemented by taller and heavier breeds. The pure Spanish Horse became rare, and it was common even in feral herds to replace a Spanish-type stallion with a Thoroughbred or draft stallion to produce larger horses for remount stock.

However, in isolated mountain pockets, or sometimes due to the breeding of an individual rancher — such as the Wilbur-Cruce strain — the pure type of Spanish Horse was preserved. The Colonial Spanish horse remains a wellspring of genetic diversity among horse breeds.

Today’s North American Colonial Spanish horses maintain strong genetic ties to the those first brought to the Americas by the Spanish conquistadores. The Spanish Barb Horse Association was established in 1972, then called the Spanish Barb Breeders Associations. In 2022, the association celebrates its 50th anniversary. In addition to the SBHA, the Horse of Americas and the Spanish Mustang Registry also recognize Colonial Spanish horse ancestry.

“Colonial Spanish type is very rare among modern feral mustangs; the modern Bureau of Land Management mustangs should not be confused with Colonial Spanish horses, as the two are very distinct with only a few exceptions to this rule,” writes Sponenberg.

Areas in which Colonial Spanish horses have persisted in feral horse populations include **Brislawn horses**, many of which came from the Bookcliffs region of Utah, **Sulphur horses** which came from the BLM Sulphur Herd Management Area in southwest Utah, **Pryor Mountain mustangs** found between Wyoming and Montana, **Cerbat horses** in Arizona and Kiger horses that originated from the Kiger region in Oregon.

Native American tribal strains of Spanish Colonial Horses include both **Chickasaw** and **Choctaw horses**.

Rancher strains include the **Wilbur-Cruce horses** from Arizona, **Belsky horses** from Nebraska and the Romero/McKinley and **Baca horses**, both from New Mexico.

“[Colonial Spanish Horses] are capable and durable mounts for a wide variety of equine pursuits in North America,” writes Sponenberg. “These are beautiful and capable horses from a genetic pool that heavily influenced horse breeding throughout the world five centuries ago, yet today they have become quite rare and undervalued.”

## SBHA Breed Standard

As an open registry, SBHA can register a horse with unregistered parentage if the horse meets the SBHA breed standard. Even when the sire and the dam are registered, each offspring is inspected before the horse can be accepted into the permanent division of the registry.

According to the SBHA breed standard, the overall appearance of the Spanish Barb is one of balance, with a short and well-muscled back, a straight and full loin and round hindquarters. The legs should be clean and proportionate to the body with large joints and bone. Overall, muscling is long and tapering.

The standard height is 13.3 to 15 hands and most Spanish Barb horses weigh between 700 and 900 pounds. All colors, including paint patterns, are recognized. Horses can be gaited.

The head should be lean, refined, well-formed and distinctively Spanish in type. A prominent bone structure above the eye is characteristic and the muzzle is short and tapered.

When viewed from the front, the chest is often muscled in an “A” shape, with a narrower chest than most other modern breeds. This “deep but narrow” conformation provides lung capacity and cooling ability, both of which are important for endurance.

A Spanish Barb Horse should display natural carriage, intelligence and good temperament under saddle as characterized by a quiet, contained energy. 🐾



**ABOVE:** If Bonnie could have looked into the future on the day she adopted out her horses, she would feel comfort in knowing her horses continue to be cherished for their thrifty, intelligent nature. Wilbur-Cruce Colonial Spanish horses carry into the future the same noble characteristics and legacy of the first horses that shaped West.