

Lifestyle



Caption

At home with El Ruso

Words and photographs by Alice Gipps

Eduardo Heguy, known as 'El Ruso', is arguably one of the world's greatest backs. He is the current holder of the 2007 Criador del Año Trophy in Argentina, which is the equivalent of 'Breeder of the Year'. The horses beneath him are far better than anything most of us could ever imagine or ride. They glide effortlessly over the ground with tremendous power and, in a split second, turn with incredible handle, sharper than most could sit to. **Alice Gipps** caught up with Eduardo at his home in La Pampa, for *Polo Times*

The Heguy family came from Vasco French origin. Eduardo's great grandfather was the first Heguy to settle down in the town of Intendente Alvear, La Pampa, Argentina in 1879. His farm, Santo Domingo is now Nachi Heguy's base, but originally out of thirteen brothers, ten left and this huge farm was split between the remaining three. Today Eduardo's father Alberto Heguy lives at Anay Ruca. Eduardo's brother Pepe lives at Gueya Guey. The third farm is La Gitana which is Eduardo's main breeding farm named after his best mare from his first Argentine Open in 1985. Eduardo and his wife Paz live closer to town at La Paz but most of his horses, of which he owns at least 600, are kept at La Gitana. Between the brothers there are at least 1500 horses and 220 embryos which gives one an idea of the size of the breeding programme.

A typical day in the life of Eduardo and his family may sound relaxing and idyllic but in fact there is far more work than you could imagine going into producing these quality ponies. Getting up 7am and arriving at the stables his grooms all gather round to share mate and croissants whilst planning the day ahead. After singling a couple of youngsters Eduardo may then visit La Gitana or Gueya Guey to see the how the Domador (horse breaker) is getting on with the youngsters or do jobs such as making a note of the brands on the new embryos. Lunch and siesta are important, the siesta especially! In the afternoons he will ride more youngsters and organise at least six chukkas followed by a family asado.



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La Gitana is extensive, with herds of horses divided up into their respective age groups up to three years old. At three they are broken in by Antonio, the Domador. This year in February, nineteen were taken to La Paz and one month later the rest followed totalling 56 altogether. Under the supervision of Eduardo's two excellent 'pilots' Pablo and Boli they continue schooling, being shown the mallet, stick and balling and eventually slow chukkas.

Embryo transfer has rapidly increased the rate of breeding of the Polo Argentino pony but even with as many embryos as 79 this year and 95 planned for next it's not easy and Eduardo says he is happy if two a year make it to his top eight ponies for the Argentine Open. At that level he can trust the older ponies and know how they react under pressure so it takes time for the young ones to become as reliable.

Intuition and years of experience means by watching his 'pilots' work the recently broken 3- year-olds he can take a fairly good guess which ones will make the top level. This comes down to past experience riding their mothers, grandmothers and also spending so much time with them since birth, growing up, being broken, making detailed notes at each stage. He knows each horse by sight as any good horseman would but also keeps track by a vertical number brand on the right-hand side of the tail which is required by the AACCP (Asociacion Argentina de Criadores de Caballos de Polo) and also a DNA swab taken from the embryo foals. Both forms of identification confirm the Dam and Sire and a simple alphabetical naming system Eduardo started in 2000 is a quick way to know each horse and the year they were born.



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Eduardo's family own Polo Nevadito, a famous bay stallion and winner of Ranking Polo Stallions in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. He is now 15 years old but has sired many outstanding offspring including Vasca Chamuyo, a stallion currently in Eduardo's string of Open ponies.

Although they have this very good bloodline from the stallions side the main founders of the family's breed are Polo Pureza and her Dam Polo Purita. Foaled in 1988 Polo Pureza played the Argentine Open with Pepe for 14 years and was the first mare in the Open to play at the same time in a final as her daughter Polo Bailanta and then in 2002 also with her grandson Vasca Chamuyo. Polo Bailanta, Eduardo's best mare in Argentina was recently featured by Polo Times for the Pony Power interview.

Gitana is also a significant mare to his breed and his much-loved pony, Bamba, died only recently having lived long into her happy retirement with the Heguys until the ripe old age of 29. Bamba produced Eduardo's coloured gelding, Piskui, who will be playing the high goal in the UK again this season.

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Eduardo no longer plays the US season as he prefers to stay at home in La Pampa with his family and horses. His love for breeding ponies has almost led to an overflow and he says he must start selling some as it's becoming a question of space! Running through the list of ponies for the coming Argentine season he has 52 ready to play hard and 18 for his string in the Open.

In the future hopefully his children will take advantage of this wonderful breeding but it will be a while yet, although Cruz his four-year-old son is already riding alone - at high speed! - and their two year old daughter Pampa is even more crazy about horses. Eduardo has no intention of pushing them to play polo but it's in the Heguy blood for sure and will be hard to avoid, growing up surrounded by horses. If polo was not played on horses Eduardo says for sure he would not be playing polo but would have followed another way of life involving horses.

Eduardo's ponies will be in action in the UK high-goal this summer. Look out for Piskui - he's an easy one to pick out on the field with his paint splash colouring.



Photographs by Alice Giggs