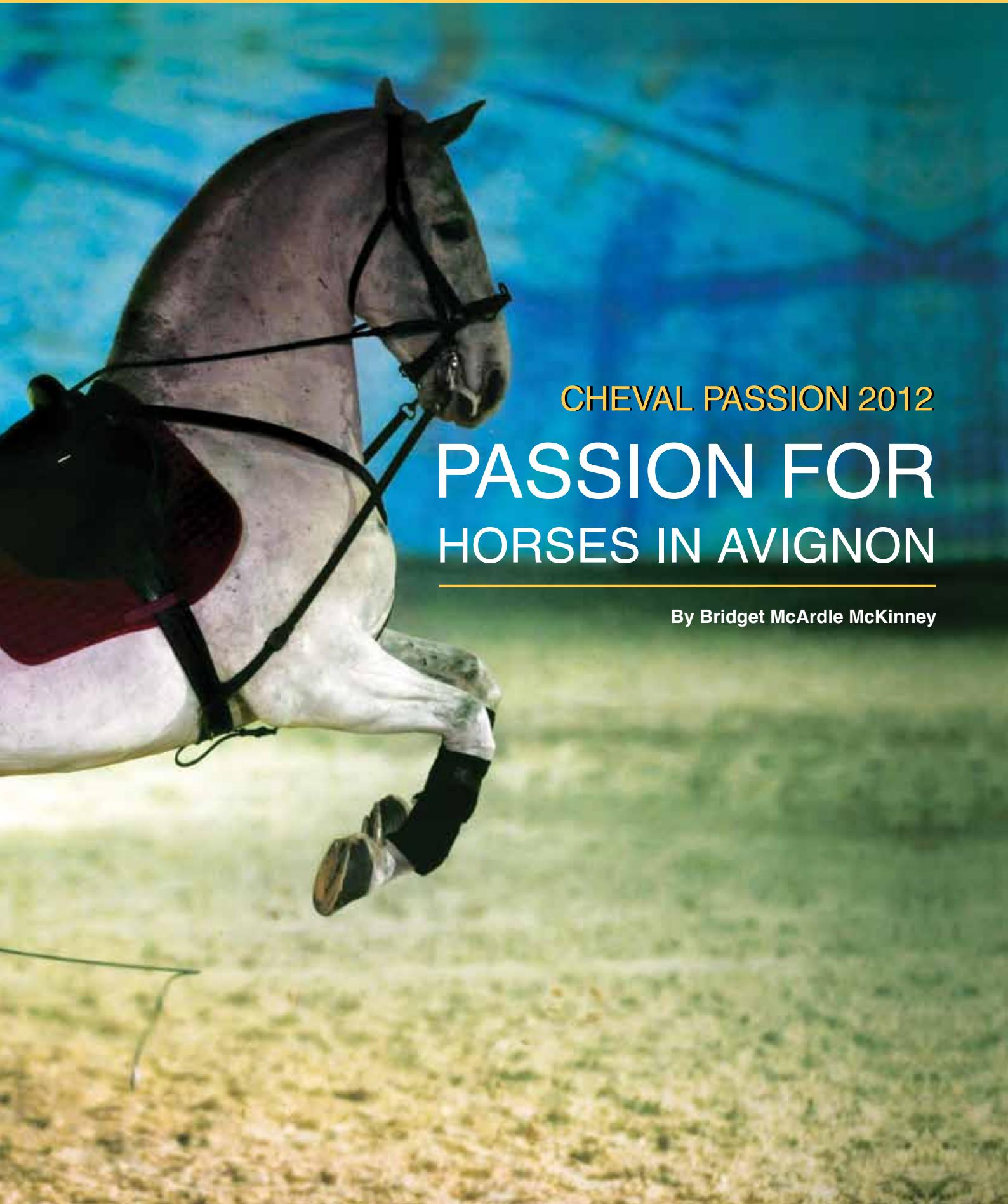




Selyne & Jeremy Gonzales



CHEVAL PASSION 2012

PASSION FOR HORSES IN AVIGNON

By Bridget McArdle McKinney

AN ANNUAL EVENT FOR US IS TO MAKE THE JOURNEY UP FROM OUR LITTLE FISHING VILLAGE ON THE MEDITERRANEAN TO AVIGNON IN JANUARY TO ATTEND WHAT THE ORGANISERS CALL ‘UN RENDEZVOUS EQUESTRE ECLECTIQUE ET CONVIVIAL’; AND THERE IS REALLY NO OTHER WAY TO DESCRIBE THE EVENT. FOR THE PAST 30 YEARS CHEVAL PASSION, A HORSE EXTRAVAGANZA AND EXHIBITION WHICH PAYS TRIBUTE TO ‘L'EQUITATION DE TRADITION FRANCAISE’, OR EQUITATION IN THE FRENCH TRADITION, HAS BEEN HELD IN AVIGNON. THE EVENT CATERSTO THE DELIGHT OF YOUNG AND OLD, WESTERN AND CLASSICAL, PERFORMERS AND AUDIENCE, SPECIALTY BREEDERS AND BUYERS, AND EXHIBITORS.



▲ Horses from the Maremma

Cowboys and ‘cavaliers du grand prix’, horse whisperers and Iberian dressage masters, carriage drivers and barrel racers work and perform side-by-side for four days. Breeds such as Appaloosa, Arab, Moroccan Barb, Camargue, American White/Crème, Spanish, Lipizzan, Lusitanian, Merens from the Pyrenees, Quarter horse, Shagya from Hungary, and Trakehener, as well as the specialty French breeds, including the Breton, Cob Normand, and

L’Ardennaise, among others, were all on display and many available for purchase.

The event compound is large, but very well organised, accommodating over 250 exhibitors, 1,500 horses, and 100,000 visitors and always a performance, a competition, or an exhibition or two taking place somewhere on the grounds.

One of the highlights for us is the

luncheon ‘spectacle’ in an enclosed arena where one can order a full Camargoise meal or assortment of cheeses and saucisson, sitting at long country trestle tables while watching a truly amazing and magical cabaret of equine movement, artistry, and the trusting interaction of human trainers and horses unbridled and free, but attuned to their trainers’ every nuance.

Horse sport is not forgotten; the game of ‘horse-ball’ is something

that must be seen to be believed. A basketball-sized ball with a handle is tossed from rider to rider with the aim of throwing the ball through a hoop on the other team's side. Easy enough, until the ball falls to the ground, in which case one must reach all the way down at a gallop and snatch it from the ground to put it back in play – some feat!

This was a very special year for Cheval Passion - in its November meeting last year in Bali the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) added "Equitation in the French tradition" to its list of outstanding examples of intangible heritage. The list was selected from a pool of 107 nominations by a committee made up of 24 members from different nations which aims to identify and protect unique cultural traditions.

Equitation in the French tradition refers to a style of riding characterised by a sympathetic understanding between horse and rider born of mutual trust and genuine warmth resulting in a teamwork display of intricate movements with beauty and precision. This style originated in the 18th Century in the French cavalry's equestrian school at Versailles created by King Louis XV. By the early 19th Century the reputed Saumur Royal Cavalry School was opened carrying on the training methodologies and philosophies of the original academy. The trainers at Saumur are called the "Cadre Noir" for the black bicorne hats they wear.

The last great trainer in the French traditional academic style is widely thought to be riding master Nuno Oliveira (1925 – 1989) who is credited with the fusion of these traditional academic styles. He is quoted as saying, "Equestrian art is the perfect understanding and harmony between horse and rider."

The UNESCO nomination for Equitation in the French tradition stated:



▲ Camargue horses with La Montagnette



▲ Horse Tango with Magali Delgado and Frederic Pignon

"Equitation in the French tradition is a school of horseback riding that emphasises harmonious relations between humans and horses. The fundamental horse-training principles and processes are guided by non-violence and lack of constraint, blending human demands with respect for the horse's body and mood. Knowledge of the animal itself (physiology, psychology, anatomy) and human nature (emotions and the body), are complemented by a horseman's state of mind that combines skill and respect for the horse. Fluidity of movements and flexibility of joints

ensure that the horse participates in the exercises without coercion."

The organisers and their partners are justifiably proud of Cheval Passion and their continuing support of Equitation in the French Tradition. It is truly an eclectic and welcoming event, as promised. 

*For a demonstration of Equitation in the French Tradition, you are encouraged to go to:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmUZGDcDQPg>.*