

Argentine polo turns to genetics to produce champions

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Scientists want to map the entire genome of the Argentine polo horse in order to create the perfect specimen

Are champions born, or raised? That's the question scientists in Argentina are trying to answer as they look to pinpoint the genes that

make local horses the best in the world for playing polo.

In Argentina, [polo](#) is a big deal, and big business, and to that end, cloning has already been used to reproduce the finest existing mounts.

But scientists want to go one step further and map the entire genome of the Argentine polo horse in order to create the perfect specimen.

From December, a group of five universities will analyze 80,000 horses from the breed as part of a project that will try to identify the ideal genetic balance that makes up a polo horse.

The Argentine horses used to play polo have been bred specifically over decades by crossing a Criollo line descended from the original pure-blooded Andalusian and Arab mounts brought to the New World by Spanish conquistadores, and English thoroughbreds, introduced at the end of the 19th century when British immigrants also imported polo.

For veterinarian Guillermo Buchanan, the Argentine polos "are unique" because of their speed and durability, and because of their mix of explosiveness and docility.

During a polo match these horses, also known as polo ponies due to their agility, "change direction at speed, slow down, turn, accelerate while turning," says admiring horse-breeder Pablo Trigo, who is also co-managing the project.



Researchers at the Genetics Veterinary Institute (IGEVET) at Argentina's La Plata University perform tests as part of a project to find the ideal genetic makeup for a polo horse

The Argentine polos distinguish themselves in their rate of learning and sensibility to their rider's desires. They are the most cloned animal in the world.

At stud farms in the Buenos Aires area they are looked after as if works of art. And now science is being used to figure out how to reproduce the finest animals.

The project is expected to start producing results within three years and will precede the launch of a genetic selection program aimed at

optimizing the horses' physical and temperamental characteristics.

'Cutting edge' research

There's nothing new about using applied research and biotechnology to improve polo ponies but interest in the science is growing, as is the money people are prepared to pay for its results.

The clone of a legendary mare fetched a whopping \$800,000 at auction.

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