

The Quadrigas Arena in Brazil

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Romans of yore, Romans of all ages, including Romans of our time that, as a mythology, rise from the Arena of Circus Maximus in this land, heart of the red earth of the state of São Paulo, nearby the city of Cravinhos, at the Estrela D' Oeste farm.

In the valley of Pântano, the arena is 333 yards long by 115 yards wide. The central reservation is 2 feet wide in a row of coconut trees dishallowed in a 672 feet partition, dividing the arena in half. At the upper side, a white and purple intermediate forest of Sucupira is the boundary and, on the three other sides, overlooking hills in the background, the arena is surrounded by a greenish reed, biofuel feedstock's, natural energy of the auto racing of Formula 1 that are to come.



Picture 1: Overview of the arena at Estrela D'Oeste farm.

In the 50 meters of the racing track, in its middle position, nine chariots are set for the centenary take-off of the Quadrigas, that has by the south of the Equator, an annual tournament in the dry season since the enthusiast Luis Augusto Mei Alves de Oliveira, in August of 1995, decided to carry this sport that is now starting to be practiced by men and women, which has appraisers of all ages.

The take-off puts us in contact with that immortalized scene from the movie *Ben Hur* (1959), directed by William Wyler, an inter-semiotic translation of the book by Lew Wallace that dissolved the subheading *A tale of the Christ*. We are about to enter a spectacle moved by the power of men and by four horses that pull the light alluminium chariot, with wheels of subtle tires, a local update to redeem its impact on rapid locomotion in an uneven lawn. The interior of the chariot is lined with cotton fibers and ceiled with leather on quilted blanket to smooth the hit in the legs of the leader, whose feet remain stuck on the chariot's floor. Outside, Felipe and Alexander's busts, carved in bronze, takes us to an ancient Greece, place where the sport was originated, and introduced on the Olympic Games in 680 AD.



Picture 2: Chariots' alluminium side with Greek busts carved in bronze with subtle tires to redeem its impact in the uneven land.

Picture 3: The inside views of the chariot show the leather ceiling in quilted blanket that soften the hits. A colored metal rod rises from the bottom center of the chariot up to its height and goes forward in diagonal.





Picture 4: Supported by this diagonal, a horizontal bar measuring the four horses receives the fixation of the pulley system that maintains the reins connected. The leader moves the four horses by the two reins in which he sustains in each hand.

Just like the circus of Monte Olimpo, western region of the Peloponneso, which was considered to be the gods' home, in this paulista's circus, apart from the Quadrigas race, a two horses competition happen, the so-called Bigas. The main differences from the ancestral races are that the men who win, receive their crowns and trophies of third, second and first plane in the festivities of a sharing barbecue between the racers and the fans. Yet another distinctive feature is that, in the current, the horses belong to rural property, and are no longer from other owners, who, on the racing days, would go into the arena moving bets on the Quadrigas that were then coated with financial value. Still, even with no bets, the propagation of the training results circulates between a select audience in a spreading word of mouth trumpeting the chariot and rider leading contender.

However, this announced performance depends, indeed, on what happens on the several stages of the speedway in which come into scene: the luck, that can play a role for or against the favorites to win; the experience of relationship between the rider and the horses, as a crucial factor, in which favors the dribbling of obstacles that can vary thus from an accident with the chariot in front else with the one from behind, when not able to perform a detour because of any blister, a shock that provokes devolution, a bad last minute decision in the lane, amongst many others. With all senses tuned as radar capturing in all directions, the riders take chances to avail the most from the

opportunities of the race, what makes each competition always has a haunting hovering about what is to come. Orders, calculations, but likewise unexpected accidents are faced so much with tactics and maneuvers, as well as refined mesh and tune, molding in their syntagmatic joints the dynamics of the senses, which creates the purpose of the race.

On the speedway recognition turn, the nine chariots, while exposed to the field, put themselves in the search for the position they were drafted to be in the competition, and winning is a matter of knowing the circuit, the horses, the competitors, with their reiterative ways of behaving during the race, and it all adds up with a self-knowledge test that is offered in every dispute.

Enthusiast of horses, both for riding and training, the entrepreneur of this sport is of Italian descent and built this arena right on this vivid reddish land which housed the best Brazilian Arabica coffee up until the 1929 crisis. It was then, in this site that the Italian immigrants coming to Brazil have worked on the cultivation of coffee. Coincidence, but maybe not, it may be that the taste for Quadrigas precisely here, is cultivated because we are in land of ancestral pleasures who taught the locals the taste of feeling with the senses the things from this and other lands. In the beginning, the rainforests, that still watch us from the hills facing the valley ruled everything until, in the late nineteenth century, occur the planting of thousands of coffee trees that made rise the growth of the public's taste for the flavor of the Arabica coffee. Only fanciers of this beverage drink it without sugar for the please of its taste and aroma. These laborious crops were from end to end roamed in the back of this breed of horses, the dray-horse, resulting from a thoroughbred with common mare. The fondness for the dry-horse comes from the fact that he offers one of the best gaits, large roughness and adaptability to the several tasks, which made him the preferred for the long farm work and national livestock. But this fondness for the dry-horse also brought along with him pleasures such as the Quadrigas race.

The four horses paired on the track in their bodies' alike makes them, as they stand shoulder to shoulder, look like one. In the hand to hand between men and horses, bodies fly on the track as pure energy in an exchanged interaction that goes further beyond the command of the racer and the training of the riding horse. In a short, these two bodies are endowed with a sensitive intelligence to the extent of this partnership to

appease that, in a flesh to flesh interaction they learn each other's movements and, in a connection supplied by minimal gestures to each other, they rediscover the impulses that make them even more apiece. A matter of sentiency and aesthesia, to feel the sensitive is an ability developed in the performances pair-wise from the rider and horses that do not only bind for the purpose of winning the task. In their immediate presence, horsemen and horses arrange themselves bodily, in the apprehension of the effects of emanated purpose from one and another, in a total disseminating process of adjustment.



Figura 5: Charlton Heston interpreta a un judío de La aristocracia de Jerusalén, *Ben-Hur* en carrera de cuadrigas. La película de 1959, dirigida por Willin Wyler, en la toma fotográfica frontal se nos permite aprehender el imbricado procesamiento de atrelagem y la sofisticación de los arreos de cuero y de las riendas.

So do the supporters, fans of these chariots' tracks do not like the deceived speculations over the circus established in Rome, the Circus Maximus, arena in which, in presence of emperor, aristocrats, commoners, the race propitiated them all equally a free path for the passions of the soul. In excitement, dispute of power, justice, tyranny, just like the one between Ben Hur and Messala in that of the immortalized audiovisual race. Leaned forward, arms onwards, each of the two reins in each hands of the leader, put the horses to run free. Coupled mouth to mouth, their heads remain unidirectional, at equal height and detachment. The horsehair fluttering in a thrust that cuts the air, with more or less intensity, the leather reins rubs the skin of the horses, rubbing the leader hands' skin.

In the Paulistas' Ben Hur (picture 6), the body's torso is erect, the legs maintain the bending, the also taut arms form an isosceles angle with the forearm and his hand, steady in handling the reins, strains to carry on parallel to the other hand. In the bodies of the leader and horses stand out combined acts of restraint fully visible in the perfectly aligned horses' heads. (Picture 7).



Picture 6



Picture 7



Picture 8



Picture 9

Pictures 6, 7, 8 and 9 are shots of a Quadrigas race in the arena of Estrela D'Oeste farm in passing moments.

The track is the stage for the victory of the skillfulness of the rider and horse's bodies. The art of the reins that the supporters keep up with their binoculars, sensing by the rider's movements the wiles of the chariots. In each hand, only the arms and a rein are in control of the movements. The leader's flexible body goes forward in all sides and, in the inputs and outputs of the curves, his eyes cast to capture the other competitors' situation in a panoramic view. Back to the straight line, the chariot resumes its full thrust. The feet remain steady on the floor, balancing the moving body. Strained, the reins are operated by the hand that accompany the movements of the arms, and align their position and movements to all body parts. In the thrust, the arms rise up

and release several times to let the four horses boost and reach their full speed in the straight line; lowering the arms to the height of the chariot and keeping them stuck to the body, forcing the two horses from the inside to taut while the ones from the outside remain loose pulling the chariot to curve in high speed. Urged to move forward or to taut controlled in the same pace, the conductor's rhythmic is of the greatest thrust. In full acceleration, the chariot reaches a speed of more than 37 mph in the straight line.

However, the intensity in which is lived the minute temporality of the four minutes lasting competition doesn't seem in no way to correspond to the intensity of sequential uncontrolled sights, from jumps that come to the rave in the close race chariots. What covers this pace is a haste of the emotions which makes you think that all timers are false. The supporters want to arrive together with his supporting chariot, and he is there, in it, thrusting the leader and the chariot. On the tracks, some progress more than others and, after some laps, are determined the ones who stand out in front in contention for a place. The champion is not always the one in the best place in the start, or in the first laps. An expert knows how much his chariot can take and explore every breath, both his and the horse's, in the length of the circuit. For each cross of the starting line, another lap is completed, to the public's acclaim, what presents the race as a flow of energy also from the audience bodies.

The combat is even more exciting when there are two or three chariots in the running. In the approach of the competitor to the right (Picture 8), his presence is felt by the chariot in front that is going to run in its full strength. The running match draws everybody's attention, which focuses to the vibrating vestments of the paulistas' runners. By the coloration, the supporters identify the runners in the entire track's extent and it really seems that the audience takes flight and wears the satin vestments from both leaders in over-flight from the other. The finalists meet the late comers that come in lower speed and present as obstacles to exceed. In an escape meander, facing the less speedy ones, the fasters try to complete their seven laps throughout the arena, in a 3200 meters circuit that is accomplished by the triumphant in a little bit more than four minutes. This so expected time of the competition creates expectancies in the race with a length much longer due to the passionate load that surrounds the ambience. Horse and rider perspire seeking an extensiveness of their strength and tense muscles. Only one of them overcomes the others and gets the V for victory. The winner continues quickly and

continues to exceed the chariots as if he still was competing with them. His hands remain in the integrated exercise with the horses and, it is not, therefore, in the track that the two fingers of celebration are raised. The supporters though, celebrate, still shocked, and with discharged bodies and eyes following the race: some slowing down after reaching the finish line and others still speed up to get a classificatory position.

In the shadows of the trees, there is no body relaxed. The privileged thousands of supporters excite. Their entire members hop and each and every one try to retell their supported chariot's steps more accurately. The celebration is a party of the passionate attendants of the sport, whose competition has already been defined.

Soon, together, the celebration is going to be over a barbecue of another joyful competition day. While in this break in which the horses are being collected to chill and have their deserved rest, the riders also chill out their bodies and, especially, their vitality, and emotions in a pulse of twinkles while undressing their ornamental clothes. In their walk from the tracks to the woods, the riders exhibit their jeans, cotton shirts, straw hat, shag, that still make the difference amongst the rural in Brazil and the urban cap wearers. These men will be baffled with others wearing hats with veins that bring their rurality, which makes them unique and tuned in the taste the horses assume in the resizing of their lives. Still, there is no body in relaxation. Inebriated, even after the trial, the comments sip, move after move, the race in their narratives. The prosaic reaches its summit when the riders go into the woods. All the ones explaining what the winner did, or the loser, at that moment, stays quiet into the afternoon to exchange with those winged gods their impressions about the prosaic. The fascination for the horses continues...

The voices in the woods of the brasilis lands eco until the sunset light announces that another day of Quadrigas at Estrela D'Oeste farm is ending. The vans, jeeps, all of them 4x4 traction and so many horse powers, remind of the marveling for speed and power derived from the horse traction. A sport, a practice with self-overcoming trials that enchant and produce enchantment to the Romans of all ages¹.

¹ You can feel this rapture at www.quadrigas.com.br. But the best is to enroll up now to the new season of Quadrigas from April to September. Like any practice, this sport demands a body in full physical condition. The horse is your trial, becoming a practitioner of the equestrian art allows you to reinvent yourself by self-contact, by and with the horse.