Spanish Sweep European Endurance Championship for Young Riders and Juniors in Portugal

5 September 2016, Portugal ~ On 3 September 2016, Spanish rider Paula Muntala Sanchez riding 10-year old part-Arabian Echo Falls emerged victorious after the 120 km ride to capture the Gold in the Meydan FEI 120 km European Endurance Championship for Young Riders and Juniors, leading the Spanish team riders to Gold as well.

Held at the **Rio Frio Equestrian Center**, 38 riders between the ages of 14 and 21 from 11 countries streamed from the Vet Gate in a mass start at 06:30. The 120 km competition circled in 4 loops of 40, 30, 30, 20 kms, returning after each loop to the departure/arrivals Vet Gate and the veterinary inspection area.

Young but a seasoned competitor, **Sanchez,** aged 21, completed the ride in a time of **05:14:57 with an average speed of 22.86 kph riding though the heat of the day which reached 33⁰C with 40% humidity**. The **five all-girl Spanish riders** came into each Vet Check within minutes of each other, pulsed down and left in the same fashion, arriving at the finish just after Sanchez, placing **2nd - 5th in this order: Laura Fernandez Pina on Cadigaam, Bruna Pujols Aumatell on Lludriga De Masferrer, Raquel Costa Condina on Kalima Casanova and Naroa Calvo Ibanez on Escarsi.** Sanchez, Fernandez, and Pujols were riding for the team and all five Spanish riders completed the course.

"*The plan was to be strong with all of the team from the beginning to ensure that at least one of the team members could be in the medals*," said Sanchez after the ride.

Although this did not happen to her, Sanchez stated what might have been the biggest challenge on the ride. "*To lose a shoe is a problem, as when you lose a shoe, you lose time, and it is difficult to recover in such flat terrain as the one in Rio Frio. The biggest strength of my 10-year-old Appaloosa is in his character. He saves energy during the competition which allows him to have a quick recovery at the end of each loop.*"

When asked about her future endurance goals, Sanchez replied, "*My goal is to improve my performance and hopefully to continue as a team member of the Spanish Individual team.*" Echo Falls is by the full Arabian stallion Tango D'Ayres by the legendary Persik out of the Appaloosa mare, Song of Wind.

Heading out in the first wave of the mass start on the 4 loops, Sanchez and her teammates blended like a grey cavalry into the low fog of early morning as they led the way for the first 40 km loop. The five riders took possession of the race from the start, never leaving first position throughout the race, but knew they were being chased by French riders **Henriette D Ursel on**

Wloszka Fontanel and **Emma Frances on Quokin De PSA. Maria Moura Joao riding Distinto** for Portugal kept within five minutes of the first seven riders throughout the course and she was followed by **Italy's Costanza Laliscia on Rok and Camilla Coppini on Veinard Secondo**. Great Britain's hopes were dashed early on as they lost all three riders by Vet Gate two.

Besides host Portugal, riders represented Germany, Belgium, Spain, France, Great Britain, Netherlands, Hungary, Italy, Norway, and Sweden.

Seven Teams started and five teams completed. Teams will only count the highest placed three members for classification.

A course completion of 57% finished the last rider, Imke Lamsma from The Netherlands riding Sjacour in the ride time of 07:43:12 with an average speed of 15.54.

FEI Endurance Director Manuel Bandeira de Mello said of the day: "*It was a fantastic day of sport. The Spanish team led the ride from the very beginning showing their supremacy. The high quality of the athletes and the horses proved that even with a very technical track, well over 57% could be achieved. With this quality of sport the future of our discipline is ensured.*"

President of the Ground Jury Rio Frio, Rui Amante (POR) commented, "*The venue is fantastic and the event went very smooth. Only one incident occurred in the Vet gate when a Hungarian horse collapsed. Immediate action was taken by the treating vets and the horse was released from the Clinic by 17:00. However, the most important aspect to enhance is that the fair play of the 37 competitors was truly amazing for Juniors and Young riders. I am very happy with the outcome of this event.*"

The Venue
The trails of mostly sandy soil went through ancient cork oak forest, around thriving vineyards and between irrigated rice paddies, and allowed for many natural water spots and easy access points for crews. The public could also view the riders in viewing areas designated along the national roads. This route has been in use and tested since 2014. The Rio Frio Equestrian Center is located on the southern bank of the Tagus Estuary, 30 km from the Portuguese capital of Lisbon.

The European Endurance Championship for Young Riders and Juniors is an important foundation for future top Endurance riders. The last edition of this Championship was in 2014 in Verona, Italy. To compete, athletes must have successfully completed at least 3 CEI 2* events or higher.

1. Paula Muntala Sanchez, Echo Falls (ESP) - finish time 05:14:57
 2. Laura Fernandez Piña, Cadigaam (ESP) - finish time 05:14:58
 3. Bruna Pujols Aumatell, Lludriga De Masferrer (ESP) - finish time 05:14:59
 4. Raquel Costa Condina, Kalima Casanova (ESP) - finish time 05:15:00
 5. Naroa Calvo Ibáñez, Escarsi (ESP) - finish time 05:15:05

6. Henriette, D Ursel, Wloszka Fontanel (FRA) - finish time 05:34:10
7. Emma Frances, Quokin De PSA (FRA) - finish time 05:34:11
8. Maria Moura João, Distinto (POR) - finish time 05:45:18
9. Constanza Laliscia, Rok (ITA) - finish time 06:08:32
10. Camilla Coppini, Veinard Secondo (ITA) - finish time 06:08:33

Results - top three teams
*Teams count the highest-placed three members for classification
1. Spain - finish time: 15:44:54
2. Italy - finish time: 19:04:10
3. Portugal - finish time: 19:40:47
*Also finished: Belgium (finish time 19:57:53) & Netherlands (finish time 20:42:03).

Report by Pamela Burton for FEI