



# Magali Delgado and Frédéric Pignon talk to Equine VIP

by Susan Ashbrook, owner Equine VIP

On a recent Saturday afternoon in the South of France, Magali Delgado and Frédéric Pignon (the founding stars of Cavalia) took a break from training horses at the family's Lusitano breeding farm to speak to Equine VIP and to discuss their new book *Gallop to Freedom* from Trafalgar Square Books ([www.horseandriderbooks.com](http://www.horseandriderbooks.com)).

1 - When did the idea of Cavalia begin?

Magali answers: We knew we wanted to create a special equestrian show with dressage, liberty act, stunts, live music, and incredible costumes, back when we were traveling from France and training for Arabian Nights in Orlando, Florida. During the trips we took to Orlando, we saw Cirque du Soleil's show "La Nouba" many times and were so inspired by it. We even tried to contact Cirque du Soleil about creating a show with them. So it was quite intriguing when a man named Normand Latourelle, who produced big events in Canada, came to France to meet us. He was also dreaming of doing a multimedia equestrian show, but he didn't really know anything about horses. We were especially interested in speaking with him because he was one of the original founders of Cirque du Soleil. After we met, he came to our farm, saw our horses and things started falling into place for Cavalia.

2 - How do you select the horses of Cavalia?

Magali answers: Frédéric and I brought Lusitano stallions from our farm in France to do Cavalia. When they were just babies, we chose the ones we especially wanted to work with because of a special potential, or the mind, or the conformation that we saw in each. It takes a long time to prepare horses for dressage and liberty work. Also, many of our horses already had experience performing before they went to Cavalia, so they were used to the music, the lights, the audience, and other things in a show. However, the draft horses and the horses for trick riding, were all bought in Canada and they all had to be trained before the show began.

3 - How did you manage to write a book on tour? You did seven shows a week on the road with Cavalia. Did you stay up all night or what?

Magali answers: It was not easy. Many times David [co-writer David Walser] could just come for a few days, so we would speak with him during our day off. Then, he usually came to see us working. At night when we came back from the show, we would talk about the book until 3:00 in the morning.

4 - You dedicated your book to Dao and Templado, two of your world-famous Lusitano stallions. Describe what each horse contributed to your philosophy...

Magali answers: For me, Dao opened a door to encourage me to work deeply on the mind and on the body of the horse. It was like a revelation every day I was riding him. It was like, 'Uh-oh, there is another way to work. Open your mind. Open your senses.' Dao showed me that. I also feel that Dao came into my life to help me improve my research and to help me train my young horses better with fewer mistakes.

Frédéric answers: When I started to work with Templado I understood that he was very special. He was one of those horses who makes you understand that every horse is very unique. There is no rule. There are no mathematical ways to understand a horse. Templado was a unique personality. He was not like the hundreds of horses I worked with before and he made me understand that when we work with a horse, we have to adapt ourselves and even adapt everything we've learned [before] to this new unique personality.

5 - Question for Magali: There are some incredible shots of you on the beach in Malibu, California, in the book. You were galloping Dao without a bridle in Paradise Cove! Were you sure he would stop?

Magali answers: At the beginning, I was feeling like he could gallop all the way to Los Angeles and we would both be happy. It was such a special feeling to be free with him on the beach. I didn't care if he was running fast and I don't think he cared either. You know that feeling—the horse starts to run and you don't want him to stop. It's a magical moment in your life.

6 - Question for Frédéric: The book has photos of your two Friesian stallions Phoebus and Paulus when they first arrived on tour at one-and-a-half years old. It also shows them all grown up, performing at liberty. How did you train them on tour, along with performing, rehearsing, moving from city to city, and everything else?

Frédéric answers: That was the difficult part

of having young horses on tour. It was like a work in progress. For me, it was interesting to let them learn how it works with music and a show, but sometimes they were like two Friesian teenagers. They had good experience [on tour] and now they are very professional.

7 - You always look cool and calm in the photos where you're performing. Don't you ever get nervous when you're going on the stage with a horse for the first time or competing?

Magali answers: For me it's not nerves. I'm really excited. When I have a new horse, I'm always really excited by the results of my horse in the show and to see the reactions of the people. I've been in shows since I was very young and I know myself very well. I need that little point of excitement inside when my heart is going boom, boom!

8 - Questions for Frédéric: How do you deal with pressure situations, like when you've got five loose stallions to control?

Frédéric answers: You have to first work on your own stress. It's why I do yoga. We have to first control ourselves and our emotions. If you can control yourself, then you can help the horses.

9 - Your book is the #1 Horse book on Amazon.com. Congratulations! The book will be a great Christmas gift so please tell us how much it retails for?

Magali answers: *Gallop to Freedom* is a hard cover book and it has a lot of incredible photos! Some of them were taken by Gabriele Boisselle and Frédéric Chehu [world-famous photographers], who are friends of ours. One of my favorite photos was taken by Linda Alexander Walton, who lives in California. It's of Templado, Frédéric, and myself and it's right at the beginning of the book. The book sells for \$29.95.

10 - What's next for you?

Magali answers: We are training horses and working on a lot of new projects. We have done some clinics in Europe. My family was one of the first Lusitano breeders in France and we go there everyday to work with the horses. Counting the mares, the foals, and stallions, there are about 100 horses at my parents. Frédéric and I have 30 more stallions on our farm and that's about 20 minutes away, so we're pretty busy. Of course, having our book come out from Trafalgar is very exciting for us. People are already asking to have it translated into other languages, so we hope that will be next too.

Equine VIP is written by Producer/Host Susan Ashbrook who is developing a TV series based on the success of the website [www.equineVIP.com](http://www.equineVIP.com)

Equine VIP interviews celebrities and equestrian VIPs because "If It's About Horses, We Cover It".