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November 15, 2025



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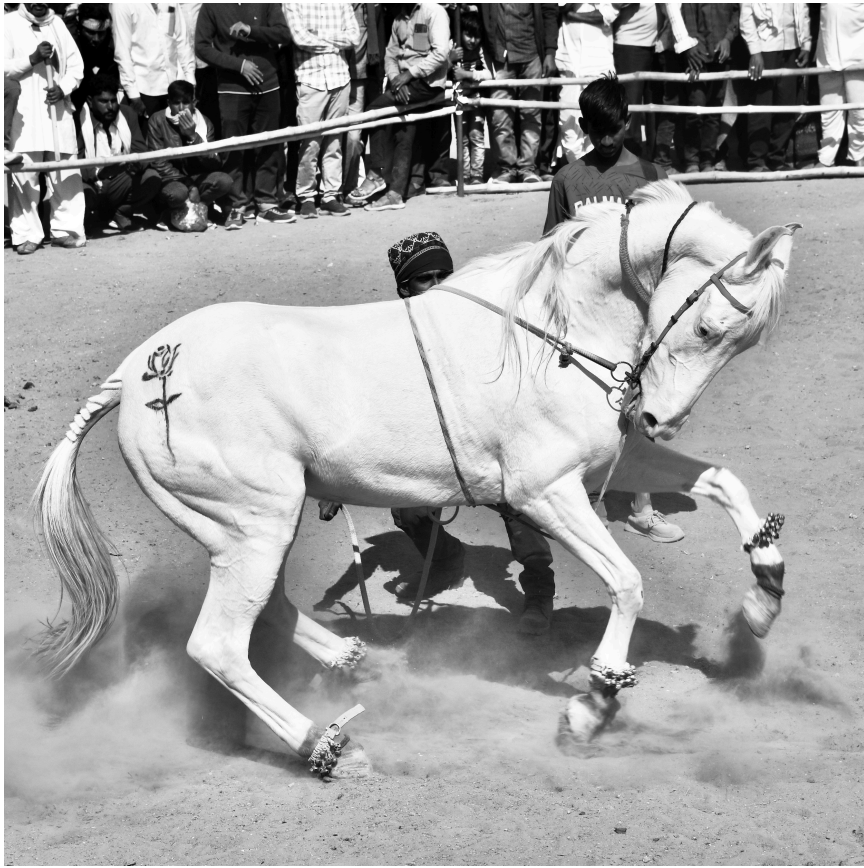
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Rajasthan's Dancing Marwari Horses

In Rajasthan, Marwari horses are trained to “dance” at the many festivals and weddings that take place throughout the year. This dance is an Indian form of “haute école” and is comparable to the dressage performances of the Lipizzaners at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. At the Nagaur Cattle Fair, where the most beautiful Marwari horses from all over Rajasthan are presented, we could attend a dance competition:

The two dhol drums set in, muffled and urgent. Instantly, the Marwari horse's body stretches like a bow. The crescent-shaped ears, inclined towards each other and almost touching turn towards the drum, the horse lifts its first front leg and then the other in synchronization with the beat of the drum. The Marwari prances on the spot, swinging its head from side to side. The handler gives barely perceptible signals with the bridle. The horse does not seem to obey, but to respond: a fine sideways step, then a change, then an advance in tight, elegant circles. Each leg is lifted precisely and with verve.

The rhythm of the drum intensifies. Now the horse moves in a sophisticated sequence of sideways movements, shoulder turns, and tight spins. Then it crosses its front legs, “pushing” itself sideways in a dancing motion, almost like a flamenco dance. As if out of nowhere, it rises onto its hind legs, rears up, pauses for a moment as if looking into the eyes of its invisible opponent, and then lands elegantly again. After a final pirouette, the five-minute performance ends with an abrupt stop, followed by a stamp of the feet. The audience responds with enthusiastic applause.