

Habanos

Sancho Panza Molinos

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Sancho Panza is today one of the less popular brands of Habanos S.A.

Its market share is very limited and has only one reference still in production, which name perhaps is not by chance: Campana "Belicoso".

But in a world like cigars Havana, where "popularity" is certainly not the distinctive element, can we say that this is necessarily bad? or rather that feeds the discreet and elitist charm of the niche?

However, this has not always been the case.

The brand, especially at the turn of the 30s and 50s of the last century, has enjoyed widespread popularity, especially in Spain; certainly, in its long history, the moments of difficulty have been very many and have brought the brand almost to the limit of extinction, without however preventing it from reaching our days as one of the oldest still in production.

The Cuban enthusiast knows that the cigar is also culture, both in terms of knowledge of the material, sociological and spiritual life of the environment and of the people who contributed to creating it, both in reference to the intellectual and sensory awareness of the smoker who compares himself with that cigar, sometimes in search of something of himself, sometimes of something that feels missing.

Before going into our smoke it is better to get to know a little more about Sancho Panza and his Molinos (windmills), unfortunately discontinued in 2012. It all started in 1848 when the German Emilio Ohmstedt founded the brand together with another, El Rey del Mundo.

Sancho Panza is the faithful squire of Don Quixote in the famous novel by Cervantes: not a protagonist therefore, but a certainly well-known character, perhaps chosen precisely to pursue that popularity that so much effort will instead cost to achieve.

Upon the founder's death in 1870, the brand is sold and separates its history from its sister El Rey del Mundo (who by the way passes into the hands of Antonio Allones, brother of Ramon founder of the brand of the same name, in one of the many fascinating intertwining of the history of the Cuban cigar).

Sancho Panza continues its life as a small brand supported by local customers, but gradually decreases until 1898, the year in which, perhaps also due to the consequences of the Cuban war of independence, it ceases to exist.

Production resumed shortly after under a new management, which however failed in 1920, and then passed from hand to hand for the whole decade until finally reaching the real rebirth: in 1930 it was purchased by the Rey del Mundo Cigar Company, which in the meantime had become property of american investors, and which at the time produced the most expensive cigar in the world.

Sancho Panza finally has its peak of glory that will last until the Castro era and then remain on good levels for a few decades beyond, before resuming a slow but inexorable descending slope in which it will gradually reduce its references and, perhaps more unique which is rare in the world of habanos, it will not introduce new ones after the Revolution, with the exception of a few regional editions (the latest is 2017 for Belux, the Gran Quixote, a backlash, at least in name).



The birth of Molinos, as well as that of the most impressive Sancho, dates just back to the golden age of the thirties.

It is a Cervantes (42X165), that is a "Lonsdale", at the time a new and "noble" format, since it had been created just in the previous decade by a marquis, Rafael Gonzalez, for a count, that of Lonsdale, and Rafael Gonzalez, intended as a brand, will also enter the Rey del Mundo Cigar Company in 1936, therefore at the time of the birth of our protagonist Molino. The Cervantes's vitola de galera, which has the perfect name for a brand like Sancho Panza, has long been considered a "classic" of the Cuban vitolary and of the humidors of the competent smoker (not surprisingly Robaina calls with this vitola de salida "his Cervantes", discontinued in 2012); today, however, it is unfortunately a format no longer fashionable whose elegance, aesthetics and smoking technique, has been overwhelmed by the more reassuring practicality of the cepongordos of which instead it could represent the right compromise with the most aristocratic and cerebral panetelas.

In fact, the vitola is today represented in the regular Habanos vitolary only by Montecristo No. 1.

Recently I managed to get hold of a 25 habilitada (the only boxing ever made) by Molinos Hunters & Frankau, therefore of English origin; The one has a Netagidocu code "CCUT", that is March '99: 21 years in these days. I already tell you: it will draw perfectly.

When opened, the box returns intense aromas of wood and sweet hay, as if it had just been composed. The cigars inside are square, with a colorado wrapper with an opaque tone, and evoke the solid and nuanced appearance of those who, sculpted and smoothed by time, have much to tell.

I pay particular attention to the awakening of the Molino after such a long sleep proceeding with caution to the combustion; at the end of the operation, the first puffs are immediately repaid with a whisper of delicate cedar wood aromas and a subtle but well-defined herbaceous note; all on a register of sweet sponge cake flavor which, however, almost mysteriously, leaves a slight salty aftertaste.

What is most surprising is what, although hoped, hits the mark: the cigar introduces us aromas and flavors one by one as a jazz group presents its instruments, yet the harmony is immediately recognizable, as in a mosaic in which the tesserae are composed by magnetic attraction.

The first third amalgamates the single elements in a sensorial experience made of ancient woods that blend with the freshness of sweet and aromatic notes of balsamic vinegar and a hint of spiciness from white pepper appears and disappears.

In the second third, the smoke acquires nicotinic strength passing from light to medium and stabilizes, allowing the power of antique walnut wood and pepper to prevail: like those fake old-style taverns that aim to capitalize the "rustic" market, but where instead, everything is well studied. It becomes less complex, but of that simplicity and sharpness of which our Italian traditional cuisine is made so much and, given its historical ties, now I can easily imagine this cigar smoked by someone watching a bullfight in Madrid or in some Andalusian city. The last third surprises me with an unexpected but not unpleasant bitter note that seems to be the natural evolution of ancient wood; then, almost as if they were really the blades of a mill at the end of their journey, the initial sweet notes return, in a new, more pasty form, of honey, helping to create an overall sweet and sour effect of toasted hazelnut.



A Molino of twenty years and more is not a simple cigar: first he amazes you with an effluvium of notes; then it merges them into an almost rustic classicism, and in the last third the first one presents us ... but different, in a romantic symphony made of different themes that converge in their final synthesis.

For these reasons, if you want to drink next to it and not above it, I would propose a champagne in the first third, perhaps even blanc de blancs; in the second, a nice Santiago 20 and in the third a Speyside whisky, but it's just an idea;

In any case, experiment with caution and approach him with respect.

After all guys, our protagonist is a "windmill", but from a Don Quijote novel, always hovering between the solid reality of a rustic windmill and the fantastic dream of a strange giant: in both cases do not go charging into the battle with it if don't want to end belly up.

G.A.

