

Light Horse Breed Types and Uses

Light horses, also termed "**hot-blooded**" horses, generally weigh under 1,500 pounds at maturity and typically are used as riding horses. Draft horses, also termed "**cold-blooded**" horses, generally weigh over 1,500 pounds and are used more as work horses than as riding horses. Ponies are smaller than horses, but are the same genus and species as horses (*Equus caballus*).

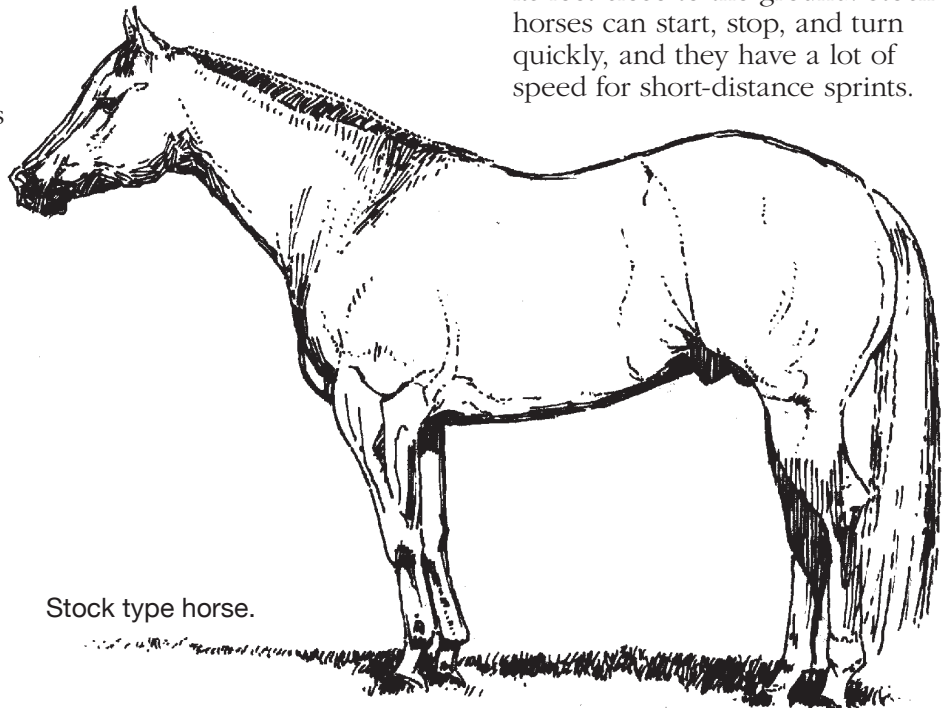
Riding horses are selected from many different breeds. Horses within a breed usually have a common origin and have traits that set them apart from other breeds of horses. Different riding horse breeds have been developed to perform different jobs under saddle. For example, some breeds usually are used as race horses, and other breeds are used as high-stepping show horses. Some breeds are noted for a particular coat color. Certain breeds are known for their superiority in a particular activity. However, this does not prevent individuals from a breed noted for one activity from excelling in an unrelated activity. Most of the horses in a certain breed usually will have the build and temperament to do a particular job. This means that most animals in a breed will follow a certain "type." A horse's type is determined by its build, or conformation, which in turn helps determine what kind of job the horse might perform well.

Stock Type

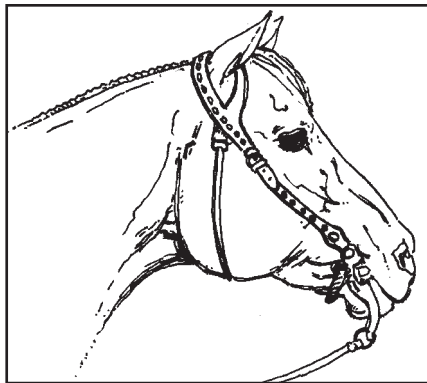
A stock type horse is built for ranch work. Stock horses usually have a muscular build with massive muscles in the shoulders, forearms, and hindquarters. They have

short, strong backs and medium-length legs. The stock horse's neck should come forward from its shoulder (as opposed to upward) so that its head is carried low.

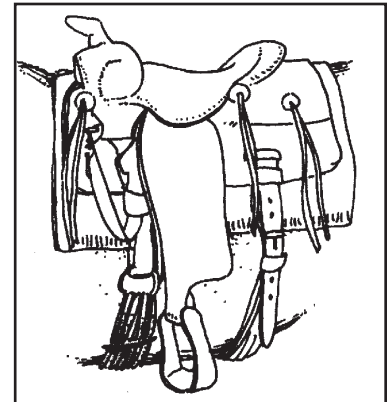
The stock horse should move with a relaxed, soft stride with its feet close to the ground. Stock horses can start, stop, and turn quickly, and they have a lot of speed for short-distance sprints.



Stock type horse.



One ear bridle.



Western saddle.

Stock horses are noted for their calm, quiet dispositions. They are used as ranch horses, trail horses, pleasure horses, and show horses for western events such as Western pleasure, roping, cutting, and reining. They are used for short distance racing and contests that require speed and agility, such as barrel racing (racing around three barrels set in a cloverleaf pattern). Stock horses are traditionally ridden with a western style (or stock seat) saddle and bridle. However, many people are beginning to use stock type horses in sport horse activities with an English saddle (forward seat) today. Typical breeds of stock horses are the American Quarter Horse, the Appaloosa, and the Paint.

The **Quarter Horse breed** was developed in colonial America in Virginia and the Carolinas. The Quarter Horse was developed as a general purpose horse that could be used for riding and farm work. However, the breed name came from the horse's ability to excel in short distance races that were about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile in length. The horse was further developed in the Southwest into a dependable stock horse and it is known for its "cow sense" or ability to work with cattle. Today the Quarter Horse is the most popular breed in America based on the number of horses registered. The Quarter Horse usually has a short, broad head with large jaws and small ears. It is a muscular horse, usually standing 14.3 to 16 hands tall (one hand equals 4 inches; a 14.3 hand horse would be 14 hands and 3 inches) at the withers (top of the shoulders) and weighing 1,000 to 1,250 pounds. Because Quarter Horse racing has become increasingly popular, the breed has developed two distinct types of horses in recent years. The short, stocky typical Quarter Horse is used for ranch work and

pleasure. A taller, leaner horse that is more suitable for racing is the second type. The racing type Quarter Horse has been developed by adding Thoroughbred genes to the Quarter Horse breed.

The **Appaloosa breed** was developed by the Nez Perce Indians in the American Northwest. The body build and size of the Appaloosa is similar to the Quarter Horse, but the Appaloosa has a spotted coat color. The spots may be dark spots on a white coat, white spots on a dark coat, or a dark coat with a white "blanket" over the horse's hips and back. In addition to the spotted color pattern, the Appaloosas have three other distinct characteristics:

- The sclera of the eyes should be circled with white like the human eye.
- The hooves should be striped with black and white vertical stripes.
- The skin should be mottled with irregular black and white spots, especially over the muzzle and genitals.

The color pattern of the Appaloosa does not breed true; that is, foals born to Appaloosa parents do not always have an Appaloosa color pattern. Appaloosas are known for their endurance and surefootedness.

The **Paint Horse breed** also has a spotted coat color. It differs from the Appaloosa in that the paint color pattern (also called pinto) has large spots that often run together where the Appaloosa spots are smaller and separate. The Paint Horse breed was formed to register horses of Quarter Horse breeding with the paint color pattern, so the body build and size of these two breeds are very similar. Like the Appaloosa color pattern, the paint color pattern does not breed true.

Hunter Type

Sport horses typically are developed for activities such as eventing, dressage, show jumping, competitive driving, and fox hunting. Warmblood breeds and Thoroughbreds are commonly used in these sports.

The sport horse or hunter type horse is built to carry riders cross-country and over fences at a gallop. They have a longer, leaner body build, longer legs, and longer necks than stock type horses. The hunter's neck should come forward and slightly upward from the shoulder so that its head is carried higher than that of a stock horse. A hunter will not have the massive musculing typically seen in a stock horse but should have long, smooth musculing.

The sport horse should move with long, low, ground-covering strides. It should have stamina to gallop long distances and the athletic ability to jump fences and shorten or lengthen its stride as needed. Sport horses are usually ridden with English style saddles. Hunters and jumpers are ridden with forward (hunt) seat saddles and dressage horses with dressage saddles.

The **Thoroughbred breed** was developed in England as a race horse for intermediate distances. It was developed by crossing native English horses with Arabians. Most Thoroughbreds can trace their ancestry to three or four Arabian stallions imported to England in the late 1600s and early 1700s. The breed name, Thoroughbred, is often confused with the term "purebred." Purebred refers to any animal whose ancestors are all from the same breed. With horses, Thoroughbred refers to a specific breed. Thoroughbreds are usually between 15 and 16.3 hands high and weigh 1,000 to 1,400 pounds. They are noted for their speed, athletic ability, and desire to win.

Their temperaments generally are considered more nervous than those of stock type horses. Thoroughbreds have been used to increase the speed, athletic ability, and refinement of many breeds of horses in the world and have been used in the development of many other breeds, such as the American Quarter Horse, the American Saddlebred, the Standardbred, and the Morgan.

The term “**warmblood**” generally refers to breeds developed in Europe to provide horses capable of competing in international jumping, dressage, eventing, and competitive driving. Most warm-

blood breeds were developed by crossing native lightweight draft horses with Thoroughbreds and Arabians. Warmblood breeds are named according to their area of origin; for example, Hanovians were developed in the Hanover region of Germany and Dutch Warmbloods were developed in the Netherlands. Typically, warmbloods will be bigger and sturdier than Thoroughbreds and will have more tractable temperaments.

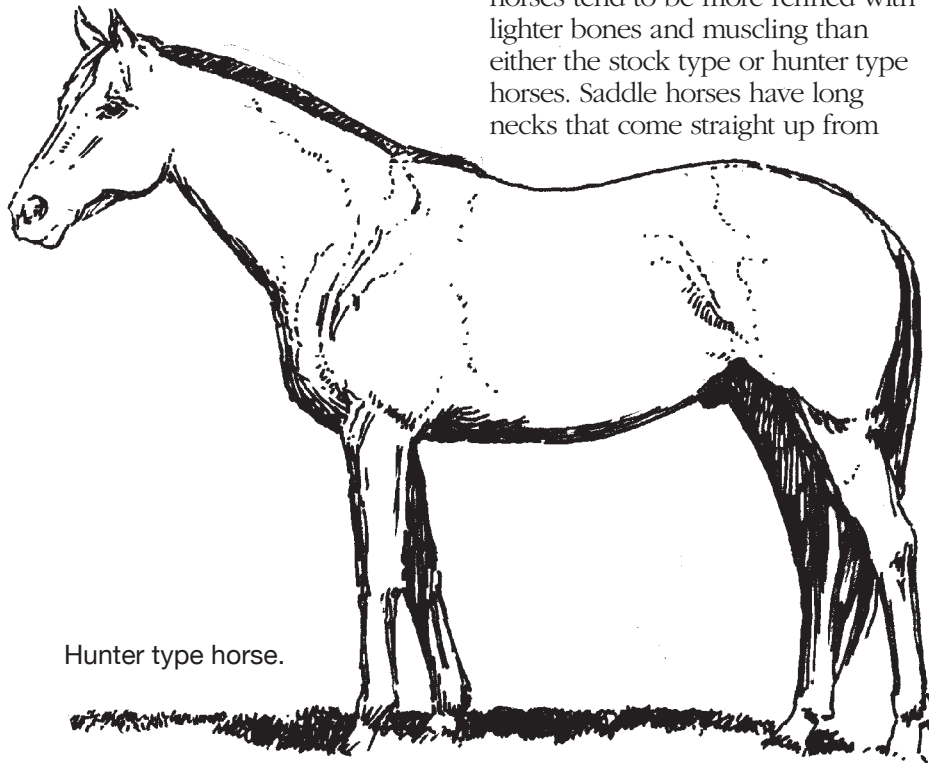
Saddle Type

The saddle type horse is built for pleasure riding and showing. Saddle horses tend to be more refined with lighter bones and muscling than either the stock type or hunter type horses. Saddle horses have long necks that come straight up from

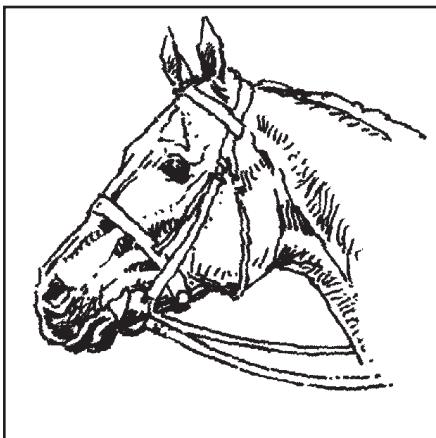
the horse’s shoulder, rather than forward, resulting in a high head carriage. Their legs are long compared to the depth of their bodies.

A saddle horse should have a lively way of moving with its feet lifted high off the ground with each step. The saddle horse should be comfortable and pleasant to ride. It should give the appearance of being a spirited horse that is easily controlled by the rider. Usually saddle horses are ridden in an English style saddle, called a park saddle or flat saddle. For showing, this saddle is modified so the rider is seated farther toward the horse’s hindquarters. The show version of the saddle is called a cut-back or a Lane Fox show saddle. Typical breeds of saddle horses are the American Saddlebred, Morgan, and Arabian. Tennessee Walking Horses and Racking Horses also fit into the saddle horse type, even though their body builds are heavier and their gaits are different from the other saddle horse breeds.

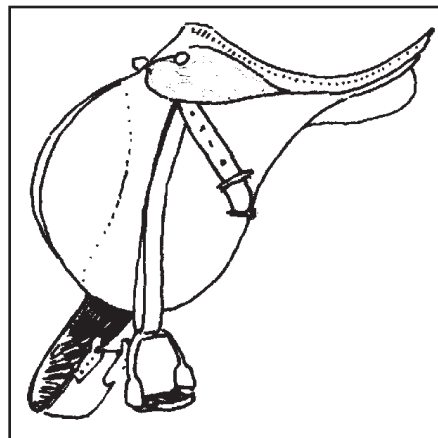
The **American Saddlebred** was developed in the Virginias, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri as an easy-riding, general purpose plantation horse. Thoroughbred, Morgan, Arabian, and trotting and pacing horses were used to develop the breed. The Saddlebred breed is known as the “peacock of the horse



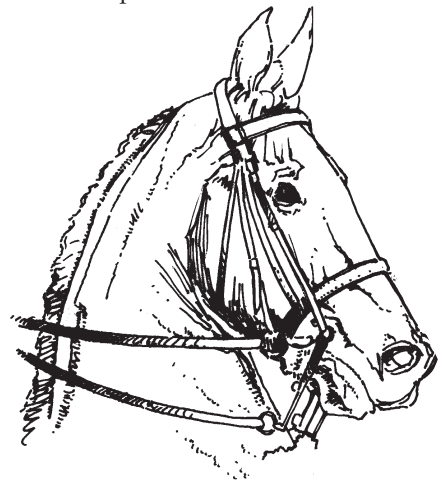
Hunter type horse.



Hunting snaffle bridle.



English saddle.



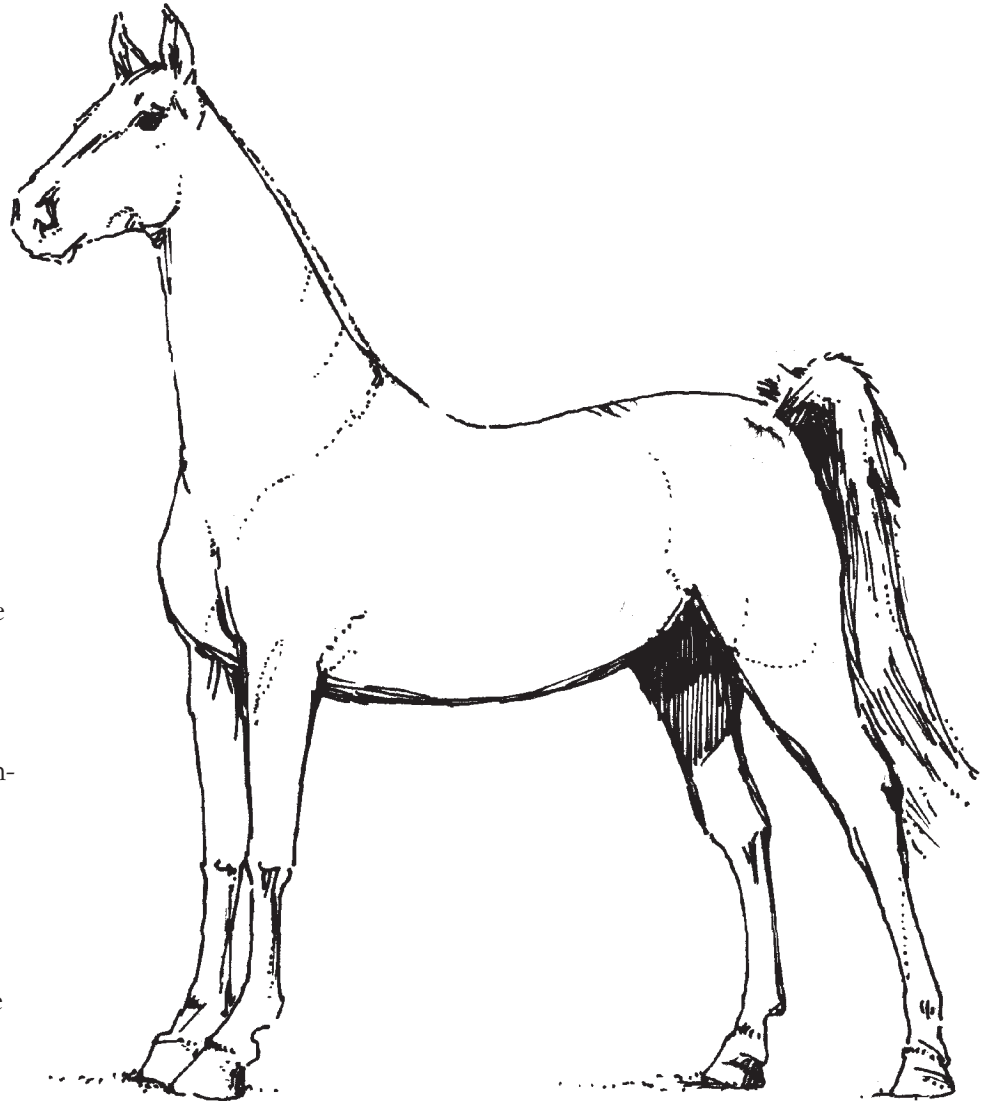
Full double or weymouth bridle, saddle seat show type.

world.” They have long arched necks with a high head carriage, short backs that are level from the withers to the tail, long legs, high tail sets, and flashy gaits. Saddlebreds are usually 15 to 16 hands tall and weigh 1,000 to 1,200 pounds.

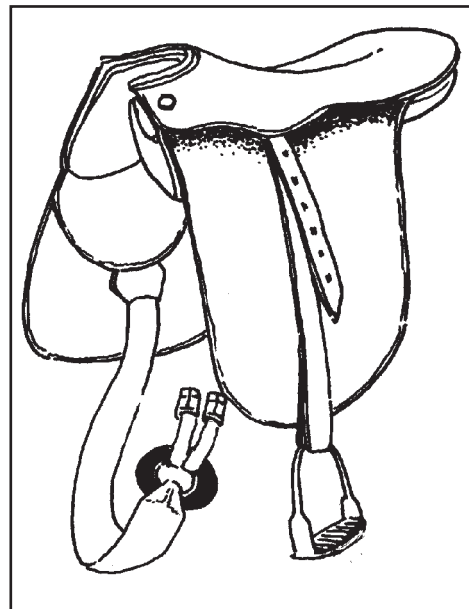
The breed has both three-gaited horses and five-gaited horses. The three-gaited Saddlebred performs a springy, four-beat, flat-footed walk, a high-stepping, two-beat trot, and a slow, smooth, three-beat canter. The five-gaited horse has two additional gaits, the slow gait and the rack. The slow gait is a slow, high action, four-beat gait, and the rack is a fast, flashy, four-beat gait in which each foot supports the horse’s body weight separately. Saddlebred show horses give the appearance of being almost uncontrollable, but they are actually gentle, easily handled horses.

The **Morgan breed** was developed in New England as a general purpose horse that could be used on the farm or as a trotting harness horse and as a saddle horse. The foundation sire for the breed was a horse called “Justin Morgan” after its owner. Today the breed shows more refinement than original Morgans and is mainly used as a pleasure and show horse. Morgans have high head carriage, short backs that are level from the withers to the tail, and long, sloping shoulders. Their necks are wider at the base than the Saddlebred’s, and they are smaller than the Saddlebred. They are usually 14.1 to 15.1 hands tall and weigh 1,000 to 1,200 pounds. Morgans are known for their quiet attitudes and their sturdiness. Morgan horses have been used in the development of the Saddlebred and Quarter Horse breeds.

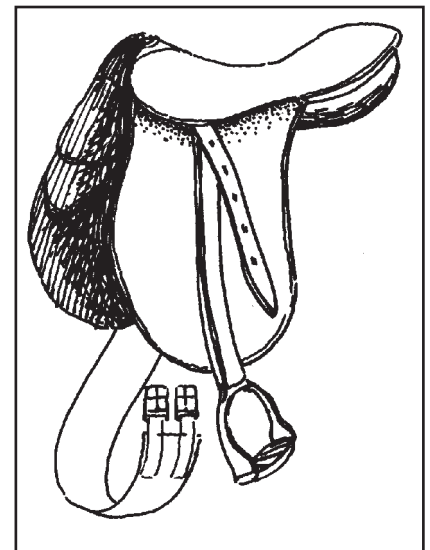
The **Arabian breed** was developed in the deserts of the Mideast and northern Africa and is probably the oldest breed of horse in the world. Many breeds of riding horses have Arabians in



Saddle type horse.



Cut back or Lane Fox show saddle.



Park or flat saddle.

their backgrounds, often through the Thoroughbred breed, which was developed using Arabians. Today the Arabian is used as a show horse, race horse, and endurance horse. Arabians excel at endurance riding, which is long distance cross-country racing. Arabians are smaller than most other breeds of riding horses, standing 14 to 15.1 hands tall and weighing between 800 and 1,000 pounds. Arabians have a distinctive head shape. Their heads should be small, with large eyes, small muzzles, and a “dish” below their eyes, giving the horse a concave profile. The Arabian should have a long, arched neck, a short back that is level from the withers to tail, and a high tail carriage. It is widely believed that Arabians have only five lumbar vertebrae in their backbones, rather than the six found in most horses, giving Arabians a shorter, stronger back. However, research shows that the percentage of Arabians with only five lumbar vertebrae is the same as the percentage found in each horse breed.

The **Tennessee Walking Horse** and the **Racking Horse** are similar in ancestry and body type but have different gaits. The Tennessee Walking Horse was developed in Tennessee as a general purpose plantation horse for riding, driving, and farm work. Thoroughbreds, Standardbreds, Saddlebreds, Morgans, and trotting and pacing harness horses were used in developing the breed. Racking Horses were developed directly from the Tennessee Walking Horse breed. Both breeds are popular as show horses, pleasure horses, and trail horses. Both breeds average 15.2 hands in height and are about 1,000 pounds in weight. They are similar to the Saddlebred in body conformation, but they have larger bones, heavier muscles, and thicker necks than Saddlebreds. They also usually have more sloping rumps and a sharper angle in their hocks than Saddlebreds.

The Tennessee Walking Horse and the Racking Horse have a natural overstride. That is, the hind foot will land in front of the print left by the front foot. In show horses, this overstride can be more than 50 inches. The gaits of the Tennessee Walking Horse are the walk, running walk, and canter. During the running walk, each foot will hit the ground separately at regular intervals. The front feet should be lifted high off the ground and the back feet should stay close to the ground, so that the horse looks like it is pulling with its front feet and driving under its body with its back feet. The breed shows a distinct nodding head action at the running walk. Racking Horses are shown at the walk, slow rack, and fast rack. The footfall pattern for the rack is similar to the Saddlebred's rack; however, the appearance of the gait is different. Racking Horse breeders stress that the rack must be a natural gait with no nodding head motion. The hocks should move forward rather than upward so the hind feet stay close to the ground.

Other Light Horse Breeds

A light horse breed that fits the hunter type body build but generally is not considered a riding horse is the **Standardbred**. The Standardbred is raced under harness at either a trot or pace. The trot is a two-beat gait in which diagonal front and hind legs move together. The pace is a two-beat gait in which the horse's lateral (on the same side of the body) legs move together. The breed name comes from the practice of registering any horse that could trot or pace a mile in a standard time when the breed was being developed. The Standardbred was developed in America from Thoroughbred, Morgan, and

trotting and pacing breeds. Its body build is similar to the Thoroughbred with a larger head, longer body, and shorter legs.

The **Palomino breed** is a color breed in which horses are registered according to their color rather than their type and ancestry. The palomino body color is golden with a white mane and tail. Although the majority of Palominos are stock type horses, hunter and saddle type horses of registered parents with the palomino color can also be registered. Like most color breeds, the palomino color pattern will not breed true.

The **Pinto breed** is also a color breed that will register horses with the pinto body color that are from purebred parents. Pintos can be registered as stock type, sport type, pleasure type (Arabians and Morgans), or saddle type (Saddlebreds and Tennessee Walking Horses). Although pinto and paint refer to the same color pattern, the Paint breed will register only stock type horses.

This is a basic description of the three main types of riding horses found in the United States and popular breeds that fit into each type. However, many other horse and pony breeds can be found in the United States and many foreign breeds are being imported. You should use this information when selecting riding horses for a particular job. Decide what type of riding you are most interested in (stock, sport, or saddle seat) and choose a horse from a breed that usually performs this type of riding well. It does not guarantee that you will have a champion horse, but it will help you select a horse that is suitable for the work you expect it to perform.

A Note on Drafts, Ponies, and Miniatures

Draft and pony breeds are often named for the country or region in which they originated; for example, the Clydesdale horse is from Scotland and the Welsh pony is from Wales. There is a growing interest in draft horse breeds in the United States. They are used in parades, in pulling (strength) contests, as carriage horses and as show horses, and some are still used as work animals on farms. Many are crossed with light horse breeds to result in a large riding horse, which is often more tractable than many of the purebred light horse breeds. Some of the more popular draft breeds in the United States are the Belgian, Clydesdale, and Percheron.

Ponies are popular as children's mounts because their small size makes them less intimidating and more appropriately matched to a child's body build and strength. A well-trained, even-tempered pony can bring top dollar as a child's mount. Generally, equine that are under 14.2 hands in height are considered ponies, although individual breed associations may have different height standards.

Miniature horses are diminutive versions of horses and are no taller than 34 inches at the withers. The breed is defined by this height requirement and resemble miniature versions of light horse and draft horse breeds. They are not dwarves or stunted horses, but are produced through selective breeding of smaller animals.

Donkeys and Mules

Donkeys and mules are growing in popularity. They are used for pleasure riding, as pack animals, show animals, and race animals. Because of their tendency to attack coyotes and dogs, donkeys are used to guard cattle and sheep herds. Donkeys are the same genus as horses (*Equus*), but are a different species (*asinus*). Mules are a cross between a male donkey (jack) and a female horse (mare). The opposite cross, between a female donkey (jenny) and a male horse (stallion), is called a hinny. Donkeys and mules come in all sizes from miniature to mammoth. They generally have docile temperaments, but also are noted for their stubbornness.

Common Horse Activities Primer

Cattle Events were developed to test a horse's ability to perform typical chores on a cattle ranch. In cutting competitions, a horse separates a cow from the herd and keeps it from returning by anticipating and outmaneuvering its attempts to join the herd. Roping events exhibit the horse's ability to track a running calf or steer, allowing the rider to lasso the animal and restrain it momentarily. Working cow horse classes test a horse's ability to work and control cattle and its maneuverability and control by the rider. Team penning is a timed contest in which a team of riders must separate specific cattle from a herd, move them into a pen, and hold them there.

Dressage is a competition that evaluates a horse's training, responsiveness, and obedience to the rider. A prescribed pattern of movements, which increases

in difficulty as the horse reaches higher levels of training, is used to evaluate the precision and smoothness of the pattern, the transitions between movements, and the horse's obedience to and harmony with the rider.

Driving activities can range from simply driving horses in harness for pleasure to international-level competitive driving contests. Competitive driving encompasses a dressage phase, a marathon phase that tests the horses' or teams' fitness and stamina, and an obstacle driving phase that tests the horses' or teams' obedience and suppleness and the horsemanship of the driver. Horse shows also offer various driving or harness classes that judge a horse's movement and obedience.

Equitation and Horsemanship are terms used to indicate a rider's ability to sit on a horse in a balanced, correct, and functional manner and to control a horse effectively. In equitation and horsemanship classes the rider is being judged, but a well-trained, smooth-gaited, and responsive horse contributes greatly to a winning presentation.

Eventing is an equestrian triathlon competition that was developed to test military horses. Horses first must exhibit their ability to respond to a rider through a dressage test. Then their speed, endurance, and cross-country jumping abilities are tested in an endurance phase, and finally, their stamina and jumping abilities are evaluated in a final show jumping competition.

Gymkhana events are games on horseback. These games may highlight a rider's abilities, the horse's maneuverability and speed, or just be for fun. Ride-a-buck (dollar bill), egg and spoon races, lancing rings, and speed events are examples of gymkhana games.

Halter, or conformation, classes evaluate a horse's structure and suitability for a specific use. In these classes, horses are shown "in hand," meaning that they are led

into the ring, rather than ridden, and evaluated against breed standards or against a specific type.

Hunter horses are used to gallop cross-country and over jumps in fox hunting. Show ring hunters are judged on traits needed to perform successfully in the hunt field. Quality and ease of gaits, manners, and form and safety over fences are important judging criteria.

Jumpers are shown in high jumping competitions. Getting over the jump without errors, such as refusing to jump or knocking down the jump, is the primary goal. Quality of gaits and manners are not considered.

Pleasure horses are evaluated on the comfort, quality, and attractiveness of their gaits, their responsiveness to the rider, and their manners. Western pleasure horses exhibit slow, comfortable gaits. English pleasure horses should have animated, flashy gaits, but still should be smooth-moving, calm, and dependable mounts.

Performance classes are similar to English pleasure classes except that more emphasis is placed on the animation and flashiness of a horse's gait and less on its manners. These are true show horse classes. Different types of horses are shown in separate classes, such as five-gaited classes, racking horse classes, and park horse classes.

Racing is a popular spectator sport. Most people are familiar with flat racing, in which mounted horses are raced against each other. Harness racing horses compete while pulling a small two-wheeled vehicle (sulky) and driver. Steeplechasing is racing mounted horses over fences. In endurance racing, mounted horses are raced cross-country over long distances (25 to 100 miles) in which a horse's speed and fitness are tested.

Reining horses perform a set pattern that emphasizes their responsiveness to and control by the rider. Flying lead changes, spinning turns, sliding stops, and lengthening and shortening the stride are maneuvers required to exhibit a horse's ability to respond to a rider.

Rodeo events are often characterized by bucking horses, but horses are used in a variety of other rodeo activities, such as roping and barrel racing. Rodeo horses are also used to track steers for bull-dogging (steer wrestling), in which the contestant drops from a running horse onto a steer to wrestle it to the ground, and as mounts for the "pick-up" riders who assist contestants in gracefully and safely getting off the bucking horses.

Showmanship classes judge the handler's ability to present a horse at its best in a halter competition. Both the horse and handler's turnout is judged as well as the handler's ability to maneuver the horse and present the horse favorably to the judge.

Speed events are tests of a horse's agility and speed. Horses compete against the clock and the fastest time wins. Barrel racing is racing a horse around barrels set in a cloverleaf pattern. Pole bending is weaving a horse in and out of six tightly spaced poles. A stake race is running the horse in a figure 8 pattern around two poles. There are many other speed events for horses.

Therapeutic Riding and **Hippotherapy** activities use horses to assist in the therapy of physically, mentally, and emotionally challenged people. Riding strengthens muscles, improves flexibility, balance, and mobilization, and stimulates emotional and mental activities. There are many types of therapeutic riding activities, which can be tailored for the needs of specific individuals by trained therapists.

Trail Riding is probably one of the most popular horseback riding activities. Most trail riders enjoy the changing scenery and the companionship of other riders and their horses. In trail classes in horse shows, the horse goes over a series of obstacles mimicking those commonly encountered on the trail, which tests the horse's ability to safely, calmly, and willingly negotiate the obstacles. Competitive trail riding is an event in which a horse is judged on condition, soundness, and ability to negotiate natural trail obstacles and the rider is judged on his or her ability to care for and ride the trail horse.

Vaulting is gymnastics on horseback. Both team and individual gymnastic exercises are performed from the back of a cantering horse.

Western Riding horses are evaluated on their ability to perform a set pattern that emphasizes their ability to perform flying lead changes (changing the leading legs at the lope without breaking to a jog or walk). Quality and cadence of gaits, responsiveness to the rider, and manners are also evaluated.

More Information

You can find more information about breeds of horses and ponies on the Internet by typing "horse breeds" into your search engine or by visiting specific breed association sites.



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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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