

Lesson 1: Introduction

Fossil remains of the horse family have been found on the Great Plains. These fossils date back to approximately 58 million years ago. When Columbus came to America, the horse had vanished. There are several theories about why the horse vanished, but the exact reason is still unknown. Horses of prehistoric times were quite small—only about a foot in height—as compared to today's horse that can be more than 18 hands. (A hand is equal to 4".) Unlike the modern horse of today, the first horse, eohippus, had four functional toes and one nonfunctional toe on the front feet. On the hind feet, there were only three functional toes and one nonfunctional toe.

Influence of the Horse Throughout History

In prehistoric times, the horse was sought after as a food source. The first to domesticate the horse is thought to have been a group of nomads who roamed the central plains of Asia. The Scythians used the horse as a food source and to wage war on their enemies. It is thought that the Chinese were the first to keep horses in herds for power and transportation.

During the great migration west in the U.S., thousands of people depended on the horse to transport them. Many times, their very survival depended on the horse. The horse was and still is a companion animal, as well. For the American Indians, the reintroduction of the horse meant great changes in their lives. The Indians quickly discovered that horses were a great partner for hunting and in war, and they soon became very skilled in working with horses.

As mentioned earlier, horses were very important in the great migration west. Wagons containing everything the travelers owned were pulled through mountain passes, across rivers and streams, and across deserts. The horse was a vital part of making our country what it is today.

Return of the Horse to the Americas

Horses have populated the earth almost since the beginning of time, but they had vanished from the North American continent. It wasn't until the late 1400s that explorers such as the Spanish Conquistadors reintroduced them to North America. Columbus first brought horses with

him to the West Indies in 1493, while Cortez brought horses from Spain to Mexico in 1519. The Spanish explorer, de Soto, was the first to bring horses to what is now the United States when he traveled from the Florida Everglades to the Missouri Ozarks. Missionaries also brought horses into the U.S. as they traveled to set up missions with the various Indian tribes.

Changing Roles for the Horse

The horse played an important role in early American development. On the second voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus brought 25 horses with him. The Spaniards brought more horses with them in the 1500s to Central America. By the 1600s the colonists were settling in the eastern United States bringing their horses as well. The horse was a valuable commodity used for working in the fields, clearing trees, transporting people and goods, and riding in battles.

In the mid-1800s, thousands of people traveled west by horse-drawn and mule-drawn wagons. The horse's use

Table 1.1 - Horses on Farms

Year	In Missouri	In U.S.
1890	946,401	15,266,244
1900	908,860	18,267,020
1910	1,035,884	19,833,113
1920	906,220	19,767,161
1925	708,122	16,400,623
1930	597,090	13,510,839
1935	523,648	11,857,850
1940	505,073	10,086,971
1945	476,187	8,499,204
1950	326,473	5,409,417
1954	129,495	2,962,220

Horses and Ponies on Farms

Year	In Missouri	In U.S.
1974	58,712	1,595,640
1978	73,283	1,957,028
1982	76,977	2,260,791
1987	79,436	2,456,951
1992	64,628	2,049,522

Source: 1992 Census of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

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and popularity steadily increased until the early 1920s. In 1908, Henry Ford started making automobiles that were economical to produce and affordable to drive. Soon after, trucks and tractors started to replace the horse. The numbers of horses stopped declining in the early 1960s, and they have increased steadily since then. (See Table 1.1.)

Today, the popularity of the horse has made a strong comeback, mostly as a source of recreation. In addition, some people still use the horse as a power source to pull wagons and plows or to herd cattle.

Horse Classification

Horses are classified by size, build, and weight into three types: ponies, light horses, and draft horses. Ponies are

less than 14 hands tall and weigh 500-900 pounds. They are often used to pull small carts. Light horses stand 14-17 hands high, weigh 900-1,400 pounds, and are used for riding, driving, racing, or as general-purpose farm workers. The draft horse stands 14-17+ hands and weighs at least 1,400 pounds. Draft horses are much stockier and are used primarily to pull heavy loads.

Table 1.2 shows the annual registration and total registration for the various breeds of light horses.

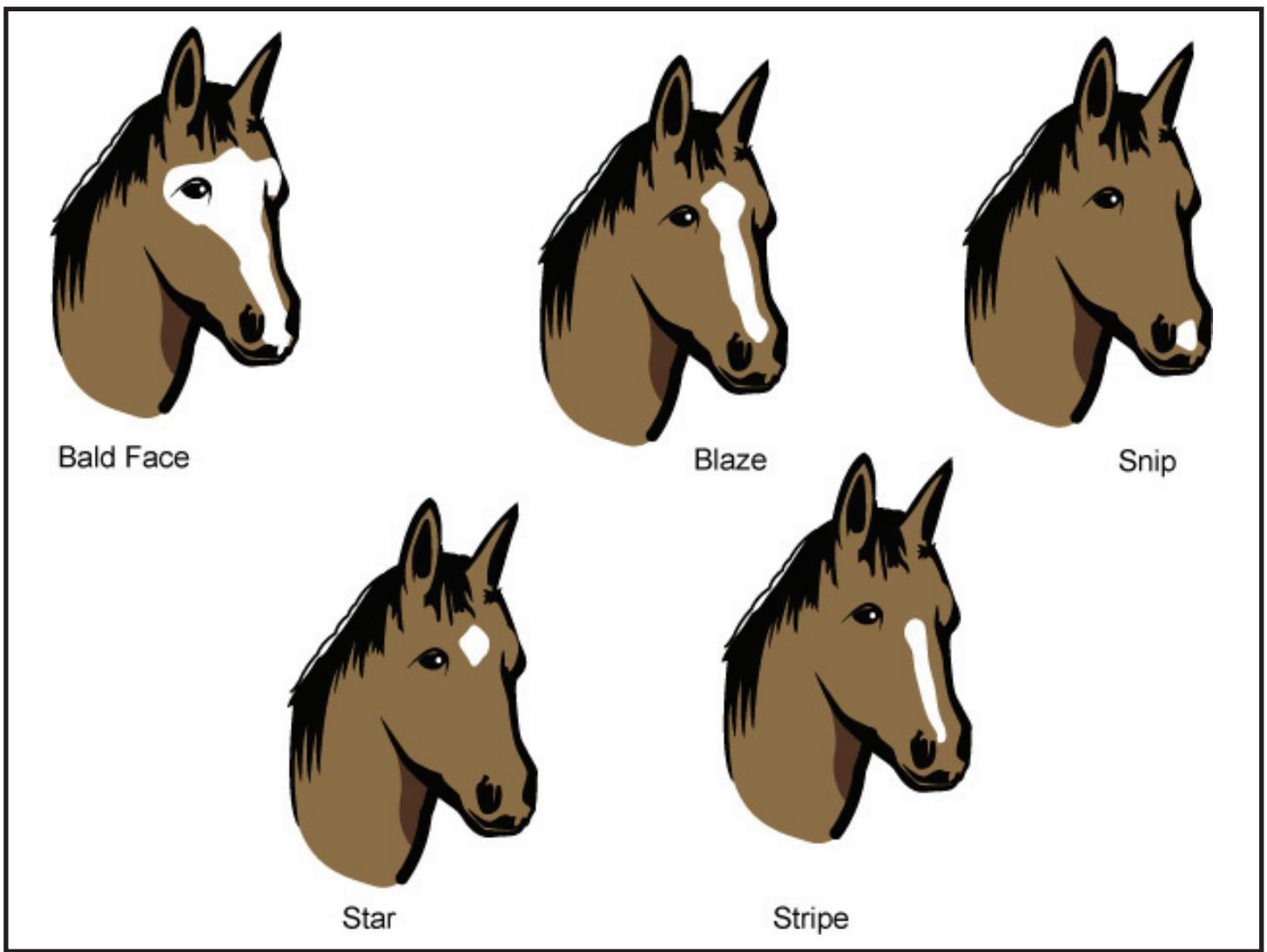
Color – Colors vary a great deal, and certain breeds have special coloring characteristics. Common coat colors in horses are black, brown, bay, and chestnut. From these four, all other combinations are derived, such as white, grey, cream, dun, roan, and pied.

Table 1.2 - Various Breed Registrations (1988-1993)

Breed	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Anglo and Half Arab	6,500	4,775	4,276	4,251	3,834	3,668
Appaloosa	12,317	10,746	10,669	9,902	10,033	9,079
Arabian	24,569	21,723	17,676	12,993	12,544	12,349
Hackney	866	779	809	731	464	701
Miniature Horses	3,986	4,636	5,760	5,278	6,500	6,500
Missouri Fox Trotting Horse	1,649	1,737	1,769	1,867	2,250	2,821
Morgan Horse	3,526	3,732	3,618	3,392	2,408	3,120
National Show Horse	978	919	733	624	557	473
Paint	14,929	14,390	16,153	18,648	22,396	24,220
Palomino	1,747	2,080	1,598	1,564	1,358	1,671
Paso Fino	1,464	1,453	1,550	1,483	1,859	1,640
Quarter Horse	128,352	123,294	110,597	101,390	102,843	104,876
Racking Horse	4,475	3,500	4,500	4,500	4,500	4,500
Saddlebred	3,811	3,708	3,569	3,570	3,048	3,353
Standardbred	17,393	16,896	16,576	13,617	13,029	12,086
Tennessee Walker	8,983	8,850	7,972	7,852	8,123	7,510
Thoroughbred	49,219	48,218	43,571	37,442	37,915	35,405
Total	283,115	269,699	249,627	227,237	231,411	231,151

Source: 1995 Horse Industry Directory, Washington, DC: American Horse Council, Inc., 1995, p. 20.

Figure 1.1 - Face Markings



Chestnuts range from light golden-red to a very dark red that is often called a liver chestnut. Bays can be described as chestnuts with black points (mane, tail, and legs). Browns have brown bodies and very dark manes, tails, and legs. Black horses are black all over. White horses are white all over and may have blue eyes. Most white horses are born grey and become whiter with age. Greys are usually one of the common colors at birth and turn grey with age. A roan horse is a combination of the four common colors, resulting in black (blue) roans, bay (red) roans, brown roans, and chestnut (strawberry) roans. A dun horse is a bay with a dark stripe down its back and can have dark stripes on the knees or hocks. The body of cream-colored horses is cream colored, while a Palomino is a cream-colored horse that ranges from light to dark golden with cream mane and tail. Pied horses have large

white areas that alternate with one of the four common colors, such as pied black, pied brown, pied chestnut, or pied bay. See a chart of breeds and coloring for further identification.

Markings – Along with coat coloring, horses have face and leg markings. On the face, these markings are stars, stripes, snips, lips, blazes, and bald faces. (See Figure 1.1.) The star is a star-shaped area of white hair that is located on the forehead. A stripe is a band of white that runs down the face to the nostrils. A white marking on the nose's end only is a snip. A lip is a white mark on the upper lip that can run down to the lower lip. A blaze is a wide strip that runs down from the star, past the nostrils, to the end of the nose; a blaze is the width of the top of the nose. A bald face is a blaze that goes over the nose's edge and frequently includes the eyes.

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Leg markings include coronet, pastern, fetlock, cannon, and knee or hock. (See Figure 1.2.) The coronet is a stripe of white hair just above the coronet band. Pastern is from the coronet to just below the fetlock. The fetlock is white from the coronet to the top of the fetlock joint. Cannon marking is from the coronet to just below the knee on the front leg. Knee or hock markings are in the region from the coronet to the knee or hock.

Light horse breeds – Each breed has characteristics that make it unique. Some of the more popular breeds and their characteristics follow.

The Saddlebred originated in the U.S. Saddlebreds are either three-gaited or five-gaited and used primarily as pleasure horses. (Gait describes the way a horse moves, such as walking, trotting, and galloping.) The Saddlebreds are noted for their easy ride and head movement as they walk. They have an attractive head set on a long neck; short, rounded back; level croup; and high tail setting. They are very flashy but usually docile and intelligent.

Appaloosas also originated in the U.S. and are noted for their unusual coat coloring. They have many variations of spotting and can be any combination of colors. All have a white circle around the eye and vertical striping of the hooves. They have been used for war, racing, and buffalo

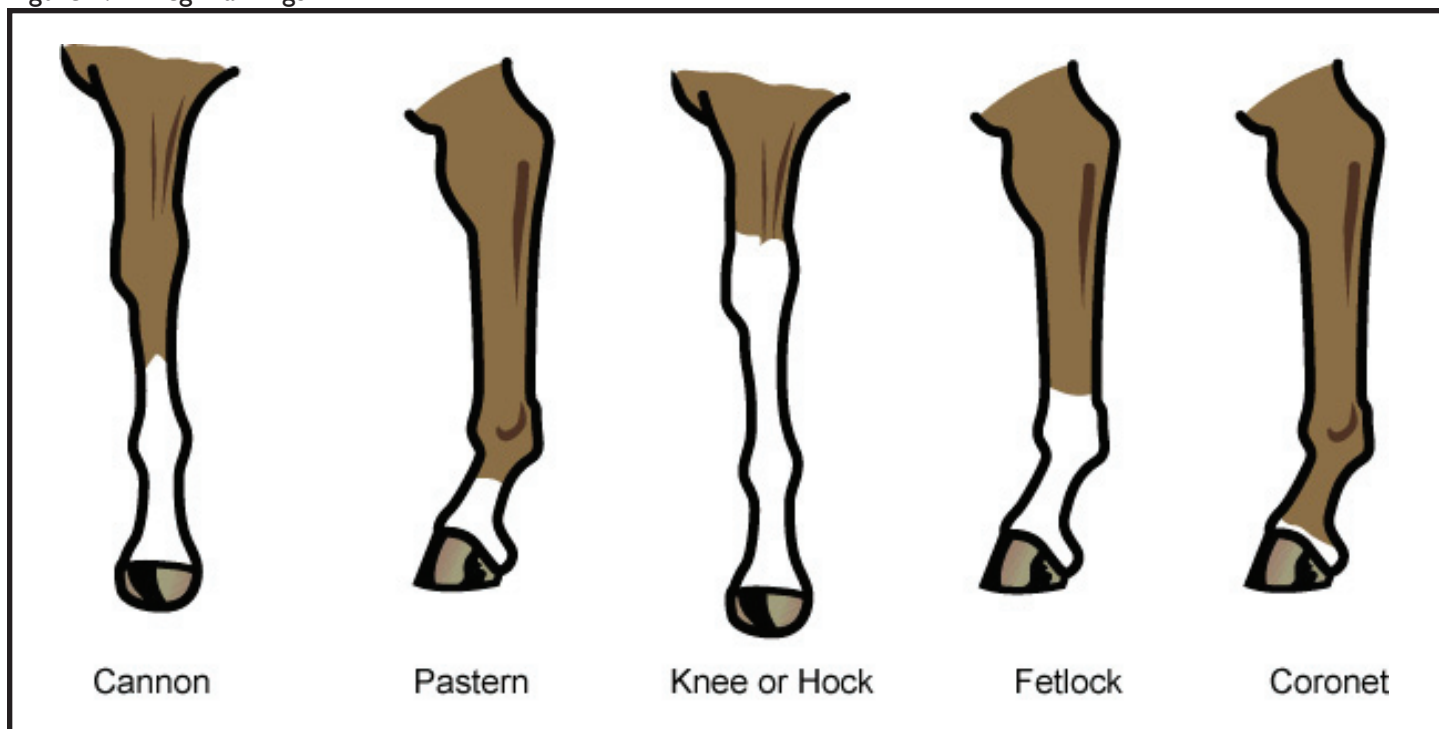
hunting; they played a major role in the development of the early-day livestock industry. Today, they are primarily used as a pleasure horse.

Arabians are credited as the foundation of all light horse breeds. They are noted for having beautiful tapered heads with dished faces; short, alert ears; large, wide-set eyes; large nostrils; and deep, wide jaws. Originating in Arabia, they are primarily saddle horses, but are also used as stock, racing, and pleasure horses.

Another American horse is the quarter horse. They were the earliest U.S. race horse. Quarter horses are noted for their heavy, well-defined muscling; large heads with large, prominent jaws; small, alert ears; well-developed necks; and short, heavily muscled backs. They were developed for racing and ranching. They are fast and very agile with athletic abilities that are unsurpassed.

The Missouri Fox Trotter is a breed that originated in the hills of the Ozarks around Ava, Mo. It is noted for its sure-footed, easy gait and very smooth ride. The breed registry was established in 1948 and is located in Ava. With its smooth ride, poise, and easy manner, the Fox Trotter quickly became known as the common person's pleasure horse.

Figure 1.2 - Leg Markings



Draft horses and ponies – Originating in Europe, draft horses are known for their massive bulk, great strength, and gentle manner. They are used primarily to pull great weight and are still used in some areas to pull plows and wagons.

Most ponies, with the exception of the Pony of the Americas, were developed in Europe. They are small and used as children's horses and to pull small carts.

Summary

The horse has had a large impact on people's lives throughout history and will probably continue to grow in popularity. Horses come in many shapes, sizes, colors, and uses. People today enjoy horses in a variety of activities; their love and fascination of the horse will undoubtedly continue.

Credits

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