

The Clydesdale is a breed of draft horse derived from the very hard-working farm horses of Clydesdale (now Lanarkshire), Scotland and named for that region. Thought to be over 300 years old, the breed was extensively used for pulling heavy loads in rural, industrial and urban settings, their common use extending into the 1960s when they were still a familiar sight pulling the carts of milk and vegetable vendors.

They have been exported in the Commonwealth and United States where they are famous for their use as the mascot of beer company Anheuser-Busch's Budweiser brand.

At one time there were at least 140,000 Clydesdales known in Scotland; by 1949 just 80 animals were licensed in England and by 1975 the Rare Breed Survival Trust had listed the breed as "vulnerable". Clydesdales have since seen resurgence in popularity and population, resulting in the breed's status being reclassified favorably as "at risk" with an estimated global population of just 5,000 individuals. Clydesdales are now most numerous in the United States where recently over 600 foals are reportedly born each year. Today, the Clydesdale's most significant presence is in exhibition and parade

Appearance

Clydesdales are noted for their rugged grace and versatility; they are strong yet amiable animals exceeding 18 hands (1.8 meters or 6 feet) in height and over one ton in weight. A Clydesdale has a large head with somewhat arched profile, or Roman-nose, small ears, intelligent eyes and profuse forelock. The neck is generally straight, the chest deep, the shoulders with a lot of heavy bone. The back is rather short and a little curved, the withers high and the rump presenting a distinctively rounded silhouette. The legs should be long and strong with characteristically large hoof size, being about twice the width of a thoroughbred race horse's. The characteristic action of a Clydesdale is demonstrated at a trot. The horse should pick its feet up very neatly and have a long stride. A Clydesdale should have an eager, happy-go-lucky, "here-I-come" quality that combines well with the brisk clip-clop of metal-shod hooves on cobbles. Despite its huge size, the Clydesdale is often described as "debonaire".

Colour

Clydesdales come in a vast array of color combinations, including various shades of bay, brown, roan/sorrel, chestnut, and black. In Britain, a body of predominantly solid colour, with or without white underbelly, is favoured and bay predominates. Roan varieties are also common, the coat being flecked with white, grey or black.

Clydesdales have characteristic long hair, known as feather (never called feathers), on the lower legs, falling over the hooves. Generally white, the feather can occasionally be black on beasts with black legs. Nowadays chiefly for show, this hair was first a result of native stock and breeding with Flemish horses.

Clydesdales have a range of characteristic white markings which are generally present regardless of the body-colour. These include four white feet and a blaze. The face frequently has a white mark, most often a full blaze which extends to the lips and chin and may also extend to the eye region. The white feet might not extend much above the feather, or it might extend to the greater part of the leg and merge with a white underbelly. They can also have one or more dark legs either brownish mixed with white hairs, grey mixed with white hairs or solid black. White muzzelled horses often have distinct black spots around the lips and chin. Black and white striped hooves is also characteristic of the breed.

Drum horses

When Clydesdales were widely prevalent in Scotland, skewbald and piebald horses were relatively common. Skewbald and piebald horses have traditionally been used by the Household Cavalry (the reigning monarch's mounted guard), as drum horses to carry the 90 pound silver kettle drums which accompany the band. One such horse was "found" by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, pulling a milk cart in Edinburgh and was subsequently trained for his musical career. In the United States such brightly-coloured horses are popular, and are called Drum horses or Gypsy horses. They are bred especially for colour, for feather and for length of mane and tail, and are crossed with other colourful breeds.

Gestation

Foals are born after an 11-month pregnancy and may weigh up to 82 kilograms (180 pounds). They are fast growers and for the first few months gain up to 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) per day; a mother is capable of producing over 25 kilograms (55 pounds) of milk per day in order to support this rate of development.

History

The Clydesdale is thought to have arisen from the mid-18th century cross breeding of local mares with larger English and Flemish stock perhaps originally developed for use as warhorses. They were further developed to meet the practical needs of early 19th century Scotland, where the robust constitution, somewhat shaggy coat, thick mane and feathered legs were suited to the climate.

The breed was well received owing to its agile strength and docility, soon spreading to northern England where it was used extensively to

tow coal skips. In the 19th century Clydesdales were exported to Australia, and New Zealand. In Australia, with British Longhorn Cattle, they were a major draft animal. The Longhorn is forgotten in Australia, but the Clydesdales have survived a period of mid-twentieth century neglect to become regarded with the Merino as an icon of Australian rural industry. The Clydesdale is celebrated in one of the most popular images of rural life, G.W.Lambert's painting "Across the Black Soil Plains" which shows a team straining to pull a wagon loaded with the wool clip which is "up to its axle-trees" in mud. Nowadays they are one of the most popular exhibits at the agricultural shows and the Carlton and United Brewery Clydesdales, which are stabled at the Sydney Showground are visited by many thousands of people in conjunction with the Royal Easter Show each year. In New Zealand, apart from general rural work, the Clydesdale was used extensively in the timber industry, to pull from the forest the valuable logs of kauri pine, highly prized for cabinet making.

Clydesdales were first shipped to North America in 1840, and later to South America, Russia, Austria and Italy. Exports peaked in 1911 with a recorded 1,617 stallions trading hands. According to the Clydesdale Horse Society (formally founded 1887), between 1884 and 1945 20,183 animals were exported. Two stallions are recognized as the foundation of the breed: Lord Darney and Prince of Wales. All Clydesdales horses today can be traced back to these two sires. The development of the breed has come a long way from these two foundation sires. There was a lot of focus on developing the hind leg and quality of hair.

As a beast of labor, Clydesdales had been largely replaced by tractors and other heavy machinery by the end of World War II. Through the determination of many small breeders the breed continued through the lean post World War II era. However, the horses are still used in situations where machines are unwanted or inferior, such as "eco-friendly" farming and logging operations. Clydesdales are now most often seen in competitive agricultural exhibitions such as state, county and national fairs.

The Clydesdale, a gift to the Busch family at the end of Prohibition, has become a symbol of the Anheuser-Busch beer company (makers of Budweiser) and they have appeared in many of their television commercials. Clydesdale hitches have had a long history as advertising and promotion tools of companies. The Wilson Packing Company and Hawthorn Melody Dairy are examples of companies in the past who actively campaigned Clydesdale hitches. The rise of company hitches helped to fuel the Clydesdale market during the post

World War II era. Thus, color became a factor for breeders. The preference for the bay with four whites comes from this.