



Historical Evolution of the American Saddlebred

1600-1850

1600 - 1850
The history of the American Saddlebred began in the 1600's. Through selective breeding of Galloway and Hobbie horses, the hardy, naturally gaited Narragansett Pacer resulted. By 1776, an all-purpose riding horse, commonly called the American Horse, evolved as a definite type through crossing the Narragansett Pacers and Thoroughbreds. The American Horse retained the comfortable gaits and stamina of the Narragansett Pacer, and Thoroughbred blood added size and quality. Pioneers took the American Horse westward in the 1800's. During this era, the Thoroughbred stallion Denmark F.S. (foundation sire) was bred to a gaited mare, producing Gaines' Denmark and establishing the famed Denmark family. Harrison Chief has been designated as a foundation sire alongside Denmark. The Harrison Chief family possesses a preponderance of Thoroughbred blood through a stallion named Messenger. Infusion of Morgan, Standardbred and Hackney blood further defined the American Saddlebred. Horses of Denmark and Harrison Chief breeding trace eight generations to Blaze, a Thoroughbred. When breeders crossed back the two families in the late 1800's, some historians believe the American Saddlebred became a distinct breed.

1824
Kentucky horsemen quickly became commercial breeders. They continued to add Thoroughbred blood to their easy-gaited horses and developed a larger, prettier all-purpose animal, setting fast the "Kentucky Saddler" as a breed. Each year, hundreds of these horses were shipped South and East.

1824



General John B. Castleman on Carolina

1856

1856
The first national horse show took place at the St. Louis Fair, although the first horse show on record took place in 1816 near Lexington, Kentucky. After the Civil War, horse shows became an effective promotional tool for breeders and a popular form of entertainment for spectators.

1861
During the Civil War, the Saddler demonstrated his superiority on the march and on the battlefield. With better horses, the Confederate cavalry dominated until remounts became impossible to obtain. High-ranking officers from both the North and South rode Saddlebred types. The Saddler quickly recovered from the Civil War because there was such a high demand for the versatile horse.

1861



Rex McDonald.

1890
Rex McDonald was foaled near Mexico, Missouri. Nicknamed "King of Kings," he was a legend in his own time. His name was known around the world, as both presidents and kings visited him. Because of his dominating show record with only three known defeats, Rex McDonald was often banned from competitions. As an influential stallion, his blood continues to flow through the greatest show horses today, and his image is still used as a specimen of ideal conformation for the American Saddlebred.

1891



Bourbon King

1891
What became the American Saddlebred Horse Association and the American Saddlebred Registry was founded in Louisville, Kentucky, as the National Saddle Horse Breeders Association. After 94 years in Louisville, the organizations moved to the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, Kentucky. The Association works to stimulate and promote interest in the breed. The Registry regulates and records the registrations and transfers and maintains the records and integrity of the breed.

1900

1900
Bourbon King was born in Bourbon County, Kentucky, and he became one of the winningest show horses of all time, never meeting defeat while shown under saddle. Bourbon King won the Five-Gaited Championship at the Kentucky State Fair in 1905 and became one of the most influential sires in the history of the breed.

1902

1902
The first Kentucky State Fair Horse Show was held at Churchill Downs in Louisville. It has been held every consecutive year except for 1904 and 1942. It is now the Kentucky State Fair World's Championship Horse Show, and it has been held in Louisville's Freedom Hall since it opened in 1956.

1921

1921
Lady Beautiful won her fifth Fine Harness World's Grand Championship. She won her first in 1916. Interestingly, she was never consecutively owned by the same person for any of her World's Grand Championships.

1938

1938
CHMeadow Vanity won her first of five Fine Harness World's Grand Championships, as she dominated the division between the years of 1938 and 1944. After her show career, she had an outstanding record as a broodmare, and earned a spot in the Broodmare Hall of Fame.



CHWing Commander

1943

1943
CHWing Commander was foaled in Rochester, Michigan, and went on to win six straight Five-Gaited World's Grand Championships between the years of 1948 and 1953. The outstanding show horse went on to have an equally astonishing career at stud, siring 312 horses, including three World's Grand Champions, six members of the Broodmare Hall of Fame and many champions.



CHBlue Meadow Princess

1954

1954
CHBlue Meadow Princess won her fifth straight Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship. CHBlue Meadow Princess and CHSultan's Starina, who later achieved this feat in 1987, are the only two three-gaited horses to do this.

1967

1967
CHMy-My won her third Five-Gaited American Saddlebred Triple Crown, meaning she won the open championships at the Lexington Junior League Horse Show, Kentucky State Fair and the American Royal in the same year, three separate times. Only two horses in any division have achieved this accomplishment (CHBellissima won her third Three-Gaited Triple Crown in 1969). The next year, the talented mare won her sixth consecutive Five-Gaited World's Grand Championship, becoming only the second horse to do so.



CHMy-My

1988

1988
CHImperator and CHSky Watch met once again for their final famous duel in the Five-Gaited World's Grand Championship. After a thrilling class, CHSky Watch emerged victorious. These two exciting horses won eight of the 10 Five-Gaited World's Grand Championships in the 1980s with four titles being awarded to each of them. Their popular rivalry is one of the most celebrated in Saddlebred show horse history.

1997

1997
Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion (SA) Zovoorbij Commander In Chief became the first South African-born horse to win this prestigious title at the Kentucky State Fair. Hundreds of Saddlebreds from other countries have shown at the World's Championship Horse Show for years.



Saddlebreds from Scripps Miramar Ranch

1998

1998
Saddlebreds are displayed to the world as several American Saddlebreds participated in the closing ceremonies of the Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. American Saddlebreds are often showcased in national parades and exhibitions because of their beauty and their "look-at-me attitude."

2005

2005
Fine Harness World's Grand Champion CHCallaway's Copyright became the first gelding to win five World's Grand Championships in any of the three divisions. He is the fourth horse in history to win this title five times and the first to achieve this in consecutive years since CHColonel Boyle, who won his fifth straight in 1964.

Today's Show Ring

The American Saddlebred remains the ultimate show horse, high-stepping and elegant. A show horse is a spectacle of beauty and grace but is also an intense athletic competitor. American Saddlebreds compete in four primary divisions in the show ring: Five-Gaited, Three-Gaited, Fine Harness and Pleasure. Each division has its own "look," and competitors should be groomed to perfection. Five-gaited, fine harness and show pleasure horses are exhibited with full manes and tails. Five-gaited and fine harness horses also wear protective boots on their front feet. Three-gaited horses are shown with roached, or trimmed, manes to accentuate their long, fine necks.

The common denominator for Saddlebreds in the show ring is that they should be alert, showing with neck arched, head up and ears forward, projecting an attitude of "Look at me!" They are judged on performance, manners, presence, quality and conformation.

Winning Characteristics

Saddlebreds come in almost all colors, ranging in height from 14 to 17 hands and weigh 800-1,200 pounds.

The head and eye of the ideal Saddlebred suggest refinement and intelligence. Long, sloping pasterns give a spring to the stride, making Saddlebreds very comfortable to ride. High quality, smoothness and balanced proportions complete an overall picture of symmetry and style.

Perhaps the breed's most distinguishing trait is its mental acumen. Happy, alert and curious, American Saddlebreds possess that people-oriented quality called personality, endearing them to their owners and admirers.

The Versatile American Saddlebred

The characteristics that have contributed to the Saddlebred's reputation as the "peacock of the



Sari photo

show ring" also make him a versatile horse. Smoothness of gaits, speed coupled with intelligence and powerful muscling enable him to do whatever is asked of him. Saddlebreds have excelled in many non-traditional disciplines such as dressage, eventing, show jumping, combined driving, and endurance, as well as recreational and

competitive trail riding. A Saddlebred is capable of almost any task he is asked to perform and will do it with extraordinary style.

Description of Gaits

In the show ring, the Saddlebred is shown at the three natural gaits – walk, trot and canter. Judging at the walk is based on manners, quality and natural action. The trot is a natural, two-beat diagonal gait, in which the front foot and the opposite hind foot take off from the ground in unison and land simultaneously. The canter is relatively slow, lofty and fluid, with a definite three-beat cadence.

The five-gaited horse showcases the three natural gaits as well as two additional trained gaits – the slow gait and rack. The slow gait is a four-beat gait with each of the feet striking the ground separately. It is executed slowly but with true and distinct precision. The rack is a four-beat gait which is highly animated and performed with great action and speed.

The American Saddlebred Horse Association and American Saddlebred Registry

The American Saddlebred Horse Association and American Saddlebred Registry, located at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, Kentucky, are at the heart of all activities involving American Saddlebreds.

The Association supports all of the activities that make Saddlebred ownership pleasurable and exciting, while working to stimulate and promote interest in the breed.

The Registry ensures the accuracy of the records maintained for all pedigreed American Saddlebred horses. To be eligible for registration, a foal must be sired by a registered stallion and out of a registered mare. The Registry makes available to the public a great deal of information concerning pedigrees, show records and produce listings, subsequently identifying outstanding performers and producers and helping breeders make informed decisions.



Avis photo

For more information about the breed or membership, contact:



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