

Exmoor Ponies

Breed Organization

The Exmoor Pony Society
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North American Exmoors
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Breed Description

All Exmoor ponies are essentially identical, conforming to a natural blueprint. Variation in color and markings which is typical of breeds which man has created is noticeably absent. This suggests that the Exmoor remains more a wild race than a selected breed.

The characteristics of Exmoor ponies are all adaptations to survival: this may be surviving hostile elements or avoiding being eaten by predators.

Coloring: Exmoors are all some shade of brown with darker legs and striking mealy (oatmeal) colored markings on the muzzle, around the eyes and sometimes under the belly. The mane and tail are usually a darker brown than the body, sometimes almost black but occasionally such long hair is lighter, more mouse in color. The shade of brown of the coat ranges from a light rich brown termed "bay" through every shade of brown to almost black in just a few individuals.

This pattern of coloring/marking which is uniform throughout the population is a very primitive design and found elsewhere in the horse family (e.g. Przewalski's Horse) and is displayed by many herbivorous prey animals in other animal families such as cattle, sheep and antelopes. The purpose of this type of appearance seems related to camouflage and the avoidance of predators.

Exmoor ponies blend in very well against the background of mixed heather, grass and bracken in their moorland habitat. The mealy muzzle and mealy eye ring perhaps serve to break up the outline of the head making its movements less obvious to a predator.

Exmoor foals are born with the mealy markings set against a much lighter coat color. This changes as they grow their first winter coat and by six months or so they match the adults in color.

Size: There is relatively little variation in size between adult Exmoors. They naturally range from 11.2hh to 13.1hh (117-135cms, 46-53 inches), with the majority around 12.2hh (127cms, 50 inches). The ponies are very stocky and built with deep chests and large girths; the large capacity of the digestive system is important in winter as they consume large quantities of coarse plant material which provides them with internal warmth. The Exmoor pony presents an example within the horse family of high efficiency in the business of finding, gathering, chewing and digesting food.



Coat Structure: One of the major forces of natural selection is climate and the Exmoor pony's external anatomy is designed to withstand extremes of cold and, most importantly, rain; these are the descendants of a mountain pony prototype which evolved to live in wet upland environments.

The coat grows in two phases giving a summer and winter coat. The winter coat grows in two layers which, in effect, provide "thermal underwear" and a "raincoat". The hairs next to the skin forming the undercoat are fine and springy in texture and form an insulating layer. The outer hairs are coarse, greasy and therefore water-repellent. The efficiency of this double layered coat is evident from the phenomenon of "snow-thatching": snow collects on the ponies' backs as insufficient body heat escapes to melt it. Thus the body is not chilled by melting snow and the snow is just shaken off periodically.

The body hair grows in a surface drainage pattern: it lies in an arrangement of whirls and vortices which maximise water dispersal away from the vulnerable parts of the body and the body openings.

The tail, mane, forelock and, in winter, the beard all show water-shedding specialization. The fan of short hairs near the root of the tail is called a "snow-chute" but its function is more to channel rain water out over the buttocks so that it does not run under the tail. The long fully haired mane and tail, which contrast to the upright mane and partially haired tail of a Przewalski, are adaptations to this prime need of dispersing water from the body.

The Exmoor pony molts out this winter coat by early summer and for a short time, until about mid August, sports its summer coat. This retains the drainage properties but consists of just a single layer, insulation being unnecessary. It is a hard, shiny coat that in some individuals has a slight dappling in appearance.

Eyes: Exmoors are described as having "toad eyes" and this is often erroneously thought to relate to the mealy colored ring. It refers, however, to the raised fleshy rim above and below the eye which the coloring accentuates. This rim serves to protect the eye from rain water and to divert it down the length of the head to run off the lower jaw.

Teeth: The teeth of Exmoors are well adapted to a coarse diet. The incisors (biting teeth) are curved so that they meet vertically like a pair of pliers and therefore cut cleanly and efficiently. The efficiency of the bite does not appear to decline so rapidly with age as is seen in many other horses. The molars (chewing teeth) are very large and set into the jaw so that they maximum chewing pressure is exerted on the tough plants.

Contrary to many publications, Exmoor ponies do not have an extra, seventh, molar tooth. This misconception arose from mistranslation of some German research which in fact referred to an extra branch off the blood supply to the lower jaw which might have been the beginnings of the evolution of an extra tooth. This feature does not seem to be confined to Exmoors and is perhaps simply present in animals with large lower jaws.

Legs and Feet: The limbs of Exmoor ponies are designed for movement over hilly terrain. They are immensely b ponies for their size and can carry up to 170 pounds, making them an ideal family pony not just limited to carrying children. They have outstandingly hard feet, a slate blue/black color.

Rarity: The Exmoor pony is a very rare animal. At the last census in the mid 80's there were just under 800 ponies in total; it is thought that the population has risen to around 1200 since then. This still makes them a tiny part of the British fauna; there are twice as many wildcats in Scotland as Exmoor ponies anywhere, over 5 times as many otters in Britain as Exmoors.

The Rare Breeds Survival Trust has the Exmoor Pony as one of its listed animals; originally categorized as "critical", the population increase since 1985 has led to its reclassification as "endangered". This is based upon the size of the breeding population.

Of course not all the 1200 ponies are bred from - many are geldings and many of the mares are never bred. It is estimated that in the mid 90's the breeding population is still under 500. Of these, probably less than a half are living free in natural habitats. There are about 40 Exmoors in North America, but the numbers are increasing due to recent imports and the work of the Canadian Moorland and Mountain Society, which serves as a breed association for the

Exmoor. The Exmoor can be found in Ontario and Nova Scotia, Canada as well as California, Washington, Virginia and New York in the U.S.

History

The first wild ponies came to Britain between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago, walking across a swampy plain that was later to become the English Channel. They became widespread throughout Britain and were very successful, living alongside Mammoths and preyed upon by saber-toothed tigers, wolves and bears. Their presence in Britain ebbed and flowed with the advances and retreats of many ice ages.

These equine colonisers provided an important resource for Stone Age hunters when they came to Britain; hunting reduced numbers significantly. Climate changes in the Mesolithic period brought a drastic change with trees covering lowland areas. The open grazing habitat of the ponies became available only on the mountains and hills of Britain, and the pony populations consequently became restricted to these.

When the English Channel formed (5,000 - 8,000 years ago) this equine population became isolated on the British Isles with no possible further contact with continental populations in the future other than through man's interference. The British Hill Pony continued to be an attractive prey for hunters, and some scientists theorize that they were hunted to extinction and re-introduced by Celts. Other scientists believe they remained in reduced numbers on the isolated uplands.

When man became a farmer and settled the lowland areas, dividing the land into fields and agricultural holdings, these populations of British Hill ponies became isolated from each other and their destinies followed different paths. This resulted in the nine recognized native breeds of pony in Britain today. In each area, human interference led to the mixing of different genetic ingredients to produce distinctive breeds. As an example, Roman mercenaries introduced Friesian horses to the north of England which blended with British Hill ponies to produce the Fell pony.

On Exmoor a very different story unfolded. While in every other part of Britain other equine blood was introduced to a degree which drastically altered the appearance of the British Hill pony, on Exmoor this did not happen. Most of the changes to ponies elsewhere in Britain took place in the last few hundred years and can be linked to the influences of major trade routes and ports introducing new ideas and new animals or to the influences of landowners doing the same. Exmoor, until very recently, was a forgotten place with no such routes across it or large ports nearby; few landowners feature in its history. It was in effect a social island within the British Isles and because of this the original type of pony survived.

A few people on Exmoor followed the trend for crossing and "improving" the local pony but it is significant that their herds died out and they leave no legacy. The Exmoor ponies of today are descended from stock which was managed on the principle that nature had the best design and introducing other blood led to dilution of hardiness.

Until 1818, most of the open expanse of Exmoor was designated a "Royal Forest". This was not tree covered but "Forest" in this sense meant a hunting ground. A Warden worked for the Crown and managed Exmoor as an upland grazing expanse where farmers from its fringes could graze their stock (ponies, sheep and cattle) upon payment of fees. The Warden alone ran the stallions which it is recorded were of the original native type.

In 1818 the Royal Forest was sold to John Knight, an industrialist who believed he could tame Exmoor and make it a more productive agricultural system. He considered that whatever nature had created he could improve upon, including the ponies.

The outgoing Warden, Sir Thomas Acland, took thirty of the true Exmoor ponies which had run on the forest to his own estate; other local farmers who had worked with him bought up small numbers of ponies at the 1818 dispersal sale and began their own breeding herds. Knight and a few others experimented and produced ponies which could not thrive living out in Exmoor's harsh winters. Acland and his colleagues became perhaps some of the first "conservationists", breeding the Exmoor ponies true to type.

The last of the crossed herds, which had lived separately from the true Exmoors, died out early this century. The Acland ponies continued and their descendants now form the famous "Anchor" herd which runs on Winsford Hill. In

most cases, those farming families which had saved ponies back in 1818 are still involved today in breeding Exmoors.

Having survived the dispersal in 1818 and the fashion for "improvement" which could well have changed them beyond recognition, the Exmoor ponies were nearly exterminated during the Second World War. Exmoor was used for training troops, some of whom practiced on live targets including ponies. Gates were left open and grazing areas were no longer safe for stock. Many ponies were stolen and transported away to cities to feed the hungry people. By the end of the War it is estimated that no more than 50 Exmoor ponies survived.

Mary Etherington, who lived on Exmoor, rallied farmers and landowners to restart pony breeding and build up numbers. She even exhibited two Exmoors at London Zoo to draw attention to their plight. Cattle grids were installed and stock returned to the commons and moors. Steadily the population recovered and started to grow.

Although numbers increased gradually, even by the mid 1970s just around 30 Exmoor foals a year were being registered. However, the early 1980s saw attention once again being focused upon their zoological importance and their rarity. Enthusiasm for breeding Exmoors returned as demand for foals increased. Many new owners at the time bought Exmoors as a commitment to their conservation. However, whilst numbers rose away from Exmoor, the population of ponies living free, roaming the moor subject to the laws of nature remained and remains under 200.

A boost to this free-living population has come in the last decade with the recognition that Exmoor Ponies can be a useful conservation tool themselves. The National Trust, English Nature and several county wildlife trusts have set up small free-living herds on sensitive nature reserves to manage the vegetation. This is proving most successful and benefits the conservation of the Exmoor pony alongside the conservation of whole habitats.

Behavior

Today Exmoor ponies are seldom used for work, but throughout Britain participate in every sphere of equestrian activity, be it showing, riding, driving, jumping, long-distance riding, riding and driving for the disabled. Their considerable strength makes them highly suited to driving but also means that they require a competent child rider rather than a novice.

As well as being able to serve many family members, the Exmoor finds favor because it is economical to keep. In fact, when kept in fields, one of the most important aspects is to ensure that an Exmoor does not get too much food.

Physical Characteristics - General Equine Information

Horses are prey animals with a well-developed fight-or-flight instinct. Their first response to threat is to startle and usually flee, although they are known to stand their ground and defend themselves or their offspring in cases where flight is not possible, or when their young are threatened. They also tend to be curious; when startled, they will often hesitate an instant to ascertain the cause of their fright, and may not always flee from something that they perceive as non-threatening. Through selective breeding, some breeds of horses are quite docile, particularly certain large draft horses. However, most light horse riding breeds were developed for speed, agility, alertness and endurance; natural qualities that extend from their wild ancestors.

Horses are herd animals, with a clear hierarchy of rank, led by a dominant animal (usually a mare). Horses are also social creatures who are able to form companionship attachments to their own species and to other animals, including humans. They communicate in various ways, including vocalizations such as nickering or whinnying, mutual grooming, and body language. Many horses will become difficult to manage if they are isolated. When this behavior occurs while being handled by human, the horse is called "herd-bound". However, through proper training, it is possible to teach any horse to accept a human as a type of companion, and thus be comfortable away from other horses.

When confined with insufficient companionship, exercise or stimulation, horses may develop stable vices, an assortment of bad habits, mostly psychological in origin, that include wood chewing, wall kicking, "weaving" (rocking back and forth) and other problems.

Age: Depending on breed, management and environment, the domestic horse today have a life expectancy of 25 to 30 years. It is uncommon, but a few horses live into their 40s, and, occasionally, beyond. The oldest verifiable record

was "Old Billy," a horse that lived in the 19th century to the age of 62. In modern times, Sugar Puff, who had been listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's oldest then-living pony, died at age 56.

Regardless of a horse's actual birthdate, for most competition purposes, horses are considered a year older on January 1 of each year in the northern hemisphere and August 1 in the southern hemisphere. The exception is endurance riding, where the minimum age to compete is based on the horse's actual calendar age.

The following terminology is used to describe horses of various ages:

Foal: a horse of either sex less than one year old. A nursing foal is sometimes called a suckling and a foal that has been weaned is called a weanling. Most domesticated foals are weaned at 4-6 months of age

Yearling: a horse of either sex that is between one and two years old.

Colt: a male horse under the age of four.

Filly: a female horse under the age of four.

Mare: a female horse four years old and older.

Stallion: a non-castrated male horse four years old and older. Some people, particularly in the UK, refer to a stallion as a "horse." A Ridgling or "Rig" is a stallion which has an undescended testicle. If both testicles are not descended, the horse may appear to be a gelding, but will still behave like a stallion.

Gelding: a castrated male horse of any age, though for convenience sake, many people also refer to a young gelding under the age of four as a "colt."

In horse racing the definitions of colt, filly, mare, and stallion or horse may differ from those given above. In the United Kingdom, Thoroughbred horse racing defines a colt as a male horse less than five years old and a filly as a female horse less than five years old. In the USA, both Thoroughbred racing and harness racing defines colts and fillies as four years old and younger. A very rough estimate of a horse's age can be made from looking at its teeth.

Sleep Patterns: Horses are able to sleep both standing up and lying down. They are able to doze and enter light sleep while standing, an adaptation from life as a prey animal in the wild. Lying down makes an animal more vulnerable to predators. Horses are able to sleep standing up because a "stay apparatus" in their legs allows them to relax their muscles and doze without collapsing. Unlike humans, horses do not sleep in a solid, unbroken period of time. They obtain sleep by means of many short periods of rest. Horses may spend anywhere from four to fifteen hours a day in standing rest, and from a few minutes to several hours lying down. Total sleep time in a day may range from several minutes to a couple of hours. Horses require approximately two and a half hours of sleep, on average, in a 24-hour period. Most of this sleep occurs in many short intervals of about 15 minutes each.

Horses must lie down to reach REM sleep. They only have to lie down for an hour or two every few days to meet their minimum REM sleep requirements. However, if a horse is never allowed to lie down, after several days it will become sleep-deprived, and in rare cases may suddenly collapse as it involuntarily slips into REM sleep while still standing. This condition differs from narcolepsy, though horses may also suffer from that disorder.

Horses sleep better when in groups because some animals will sleep while others stand guard to watch for predators. A horse kept entirely alone will not sleep well because its instincts are to keep a constant eye out for danger.

Size: The English-speaking world measures the height of horses in hands, abbreviated "h" or "hh," and is measured at the highest point of an animal's withers. One hand is 4 Imperial inches, or, as defined in British law, 101.6 mm. Intermediate heights are defined by hands and inches, rounding to the lower measurement in hands, followed by a decimal point and the number of additional inches between 1 and 3. Thus a horse described as 15.2 hh tall, means it is 15 hands, 2 inches, or 62 inches/1.57 m in height.

The size of horses varies by breed, but can also be influenced by nutrition. The general rule for cutoff in height between what is considered a horse and a pony at maturity is 14.2 hands high. (abbreviated "h" or "hh") (147 cm, 58 inches) as measured at the withers. An animal 14.2h or over is usually considered a horse and one less than 14.2h is a pony.

However, there are exceptions to the general rule. Some smaller horse breeds who typically produce individual horses both under and over 14.2h are considered "horses" regardless of height. Likewise, some pony breeds, such as the Pony of the Americas or the Welsh pony, share some features of horses and individual animals may occasionally mature at over 14.2h, but are still considered ponies.

The difference between a horse and pony is not simply a height difference, but also a difference in phenotype or appearance. There are noticeable differences in conformation and temperament. Ponies often exhibit thicker manes, tails and overall coat. They also have proportionally shorter legs, wider barrels, heavier bone, shorter and thicker

necks, and short heads with broad foreheads. They often have calmer temperaments than horses and also a high level of equine intelligence that may or may not be used to cooperate with human handlers.

Light riding horses such as Arabians, Morgans, or Quarter Horses usually range in height from 14.0 (142 cm) to 16.0 hands (163 cm) and can weigh from 386 kilograms to about 540 kg (850 to 1200 lb). Larger riding horses such as Thoroughbreds, American Saddlebreds or Warmbloods usually start at about 15.2 hands (157 cm) and often are as tall as 17 hands (172 cm), weighing from 500 kg to 680 kg (1100 lb to 1500 lb). Heavy or draft horses such as the Clydesdale, Belgian, Percheron, and Shire are usually at least 16.0 (163 cm) to 18.0 hands (183 cm) high and can weigh from about 680 kg up to about 900 kg (1500 lb to 2000 lb). Ponies cannot be taller than 14.2h (147 cm), but can be much smaller, down to the Shetland pony at around 10 hands (102 cm), and the Falabella which can be the size of a medium-sized dog. However, while many miniature horse breeds are small as or smaller than a Shetland pony, because they are bred to have a horse phenotype (appearance), their breeders and registries classify them as very small horses rather than ponies. The largest horse in history was a Shire horse named Sampson, later renamed Mammoth, foaled in 1846 in Bedfordshire, England. He stood 21.2½ hands high (i.e. 7 ft 2½ in or 2.20 m), and his peak weight was estimated at over 3,300 lb (approx 1.5 tonnes). The current record holder for the world's smallest horse is Thumbelina, a fully mature miniature horse affected by dwarfism. She is 17 inches tall and weighs 60 pounds.

Reproduction and Development: pregnancy lasts for approximately 335-340 days and usually results in one foal (male: colt, female: filly). Twins are rare. Colts are usually carried 2-7 days longer than fillies. Females 4 years and over are called mares and males are stallions. A castrated male is a gelding. Horses, particularly colts, may sometimes be physically capable of reproduction at approximately 18 months but in practice are rarely allowed to breed until a minimum age of 3 years, especially females. Horses four years old are considered mature, though the skeleton usually finishes developing at the age of six, and the precise time of completion of development also depends on the horse's size (therefore a connection to breed exists), gender, and the quality of care provided by its owner. Also, if the horse is larger, its bones are larger; therefore, not only do the bones take longer to actually form bone tissue (bones are made of cartilage in earlier stages of bone formation), but the epiphyseal plates (plates that fuse a bone into one piece by connecting the bone shaft to the bone ends) are also larger and take longer to convert from cartilage to bone as well. These plates convert after the other parts of the bones do but are crucial to development.

Depending on maturity, breed and the tasks expected, young horses are usually put under saddle and trained to be ridden between the ages of two and four. Although Thoroughbred and American Quarter Horse race horses are put on the track at as young as two years old in some countries (notably the United States), horses specifically bred for sports such as show jumping and dressage are generally not entered into top-level competition until a minimum age of four years old, because their bones and muscles are not solidly developed, nor is their advanced training complete. For endurance riding competition, horses may not compete until they are a full 60 calendar months (5 years) old.

Skeletal System: horses have, on average, a skeleton of 205 bones. A significant difference in the bones contained in the horse skeleton, as compared to that of a human, is the lack of a collarbone--their front limb system is attached to the spinal column by a powerful set of muscles, tendons and ligaments that attach the shoulder blade to the torso. The horse's legs and hooves are also unique, interesting structures. Their leg bones are proportioned differently from those of a human. For example, the body part that is called a horse's "knee" is actually the carpal bones that correspond to the human wrist. Similarly, the hock, contains the bones equivalent to those in the human ankle and heel. The lower leg bones of a horse correspond to the bones of the human hand or foot, and the fetlock (incorrectly called the "ankle") is actually the proximal sesamoid bones between the cannon bones (a single equivalent to the human metacarpal or metatarsal bones) and the proximal phalanges, located where one finds the "knuckles" of a human. A horse also has no muscles in its legs below the knees and hocks, only skin and hair, bone, tendons, ligaments, cartilage, and the assorted specialized tissues that make up the hoof (see section hooves, below).

Digestion: a horse is a herbivore with a digestive system adapted to a forage diet of grasses and other plant material, consumed regularly throughout the day, and so they have a relatively small stomach but very long intestines to facilitate a steady flow of nutrients. A 1000 pound horse will eat between 15 and 25 pounds (approximately 7-11 kg) of food per day and, under normal use, drink 10 to 12 gallons (about 38-45 litres) of water. Horses are not ruminants, so they have only one stomach, like humans, but unlike humans, they can also digest cellulose from grasses due to the presence of a "hind gut" called the cecum, or "water gut," that food goes through before reaching the large intestine. Unlike humans, horses cannot vomit, so digestion problems can quickly spell trouble, with colic a leading cause of death.

Teeth: horses are adapted to grazing. In an adult horse, there are 12 incisors (six upper and six lower), adapted to biting off the grass or other vegetation, at the front of the mouth. There are 24 teeth adapted for chewing, the premolars and molars, at the back of the mouth. Stallions and geldings have four additional teeth just behind the

incisors, a type of canine teeth that are called "tushes." Some horses, both male and female, will also develop one to four very small vestigial teeth in front of the molars, known as "wolf" teeth, which are generally removed because they can interfere with the bit.

There is an empty interdental space between the incisors and the molars where the bit rests directly on the bars (gums) of the horse's mouth when the horse is bridled.

The incisors show a distinct wear and growth pattern as the horse ages, as well as change in the angle at which the chewing surfaces meet. The teeth continue to erupt throughout life as they are worn down by grazing, and while the diet and veterinary care of the horse can affect the rate of tooth wear, a very rough estimate of the age of a horse can be made by looking at its teeth.

Hooves: the critical importance of the feet and legs is summed up by the traditional adage, "no foot, no horse." The horse hoof begins with the distal phalanges, the equivalent of the human fingertip or tip of the toe, surrounded by cartilage and other specialized, blood-rich soft tissues such as the laminae, with the exterior hoof wall and horn of the sole made essentially of the same material as a human fingernail. The end result is that a horse, weighing on average 1,000 pounds, travels on the same bones as a human on tiptoe. For the protection of the hoof under certain conditions, some horses have horseshoes placed on their feet by a professional farrier. The hoof continually grows, just like a large fingernail, and needs to be trimmed (and horseshoes reset, if used) every six to eight weeks.

Senses: the senses of a horse are generally superior to those of a human. As prey animals, they must be aware of their surroundings at all times. They have very large eyes (among land animals only the ostrich has a larger eye), with excellent day and night vision, though they may have a limited range of color vision. The side positioning of the eyes gives the horse a wide field of vision of about 350°. While not color-blind, studies indicate that they have difficulty distinguishing greens, browns and grays. Their hearing is good, and the pinna of their ears can rotate a full 360 degrees in order to pick up sound from any direction. Their sense of smell, while much better than that of humans, is not their strongest asset; they rely to a greater extent on vision.

A horse's sense of balance is outstanding; the cerebellum of their brain is highly developed and they are very aware of terrain and placement of their feet. Horses' sense of touch is better developed than many people think; they immediately notice when a fly or mosquito lands on them, even before the insect attempts to bite. Their sense of taste is well-developed in order to determine the nature of the plants they are eating, and their prehensile lips can easily sort even the smallest grains. Horses will seldom eat most poisonous plants or spoiled food unless they have no other choices, although a few toxic plants have a chemical structure that appeals to animals, and thus poses a greater risk of being ingested.

Gaits: all horses move naturally with four basic gaits: the walk, trot or jog, canter or lope, and gallop. Besides these basic gaits, some horses pace, instead of trot. In addition, there are many "ambling" gaits such as the slow gait, rack, fox trot running walk, and tölt. These special gaits are often found in specific breeds, often referred to as "gaited" horses because they naturally possess additional gaits that are approximately the same speed as the trot but smoother to ride. Technically speaking, "gaited horses" replace the standard trot (which is a 2 beat gait) with one of the four beat gaits.

Horse breeds with additional gaits that often occur naturally include: the Tennessee Walking Horse which naturally performs a running walk; the American Saddlebred which can be trained to exhibit a slow gait and the rack; Paso Fino, which has two ambling gaits, the paso corto and paso largo; the Peruvian Paso, which exhibits the paso llano, and sobreandando; and Icelandic horses which are known for the tölt. The fox trot is found in several breeds, most notably the Missouri Foxtrotter. Standardbreds, depending on bloodlines and training, may either pace or trot.

Horse Care: horses are animals that were evolved to graze. They eat grass or hay, sometimes supplemented with grain. They require a plentiful supply of clean water, a minimum of 10 to 12 gallons per day. Although horses are adapted to live outside, they require shelter from the wind and precipitation, which can range from a simple shed or shelter to an elaborate stable.

Horses require annual vaccinations to protect against various diseases, need routine hoof care by a farrier, and regular dental examinations from a veterinarian or a specialized equine dentist. If horses are kept inside in a barn, they require regular daily exercise for their physical health and mental well-being. When turned outside, they require well-maintained, sturdy fences to be safely contained. Regular grooming is also helpful to help the horse maintain good health of the hair coat and underlying skin.

Equine Benefits: horses are trained to be ridden or driven in many different sporting events and competitions. Examples include horse shows, gymkhana and O-Mok-See, rodeos, endurance riding, fox hunting, and Olympic-level events such as three-day eventing, combined driving, dressage, and show jumping. Although scoring varies by event, most emphasize the horse's speed, maneuverability, obedience and/or precision. Sometimes the equitation, the style and ability of the rider, is also considered.

Sports such as polo and horseball do not judge the horse itself, but rather use the horse as a partner for human competitors as a necessary part of the game. Although the horse assists this process and requires specialized training to do so, the details of its performance are not judged, only the result of the rider's actions -- be it getting a ball through a goal or some other achievement. Examples of these sports of partnership between human and animal also include jousting (reenacting the skills used by medieval knights), where the main goal is for one rider to dismount the other, and buzkashi, a team game played throughout Central Asia, the aim being to capture a goat carcass while on horseback.

The most widely known use of horses for sport is horse racing, seen in almost every nation in the world. There are three types: "flat" racing; steeplechasing, i.e. racing over jumps; and harness racing, where horses trot or pace while pulling a driver in a small, light cart known as a sulky. Most race horses in the developed world are Thoroughbreds, a breed which can reach speeds up to 40 mph/70 km/h. In the case of a specialized sprinting breed, the American Quarter Horse, speeds over 50 mph have been clocked. In harness racing, performed by Standardbred horses, speeds over 30 mph have been measured. A major part of the economic importance of horse racing, as for many sports, lies in the gambling associated with it.

There are certain jobs that horses do very well, and no amount of technology appears able to supersede. Mounted police horses are still effective for crowd control. Cattle ranches still require riders on horseback to round up cattle that are scattered across remote, rugged terrain. Search and rescue organizations in some countries depend upon mounted teams to locate people, particularly hikers and hunters, who are lost in remote areas.

Some land management practices such as cultivating and logging can be efficiently performed with horses. In agriculture less use of fossil fuels, reduced soil compaction and degrading of soil structure can be seen over time with the use of draft animals such as horses. In forestry, logging can be done with horses and can result in reduced damage to soil structure and less damage to trees due to more selective logging.

Horses can also be used in other areas where it is necessary to avoid vehicular disruption to delicate soil. Examples include areas such as a nature reserve. They may also be the only form of transport allowed in wilderness areas. They are also quieter than motorized vehicles. Peace officers such as rangers or game wardens may use horses for patrols, and horses may also be used for clearing trails or other work in areas of rough terrain where vehicles are less effective.

In less affluent countries such as Romania, Kyrgyzstan, and many parts of the Third World, horses, donkeys and mules are routinely used for transport and agriculture. In areas where roads are poor or non-existent and fossil fuels are scarce or the terrain rugged, riding horseback is still the most efficient way to get from place to place.

People with disabilities obtain beneficial results from association with horses. The movement of a horse strengthens muscles throughout a rider's body and promotes better overall health. In many cases, riding has also led to increased mobility for the rider. Horses also provide psychological benefits to people whether they actually ride or not. The benefits of equestrian activity for people with disabilities has also been recognized with the addition of equestrian events to the Paralympic Games and recognition of para-equestrian events by the FEI.

Hippotherapy and therapeutic horseback riding are names for different physical, occupational and speech therapy treatment strategies that utilize equine movement. In the hippotherapy environment, a therapist uses the horse's movement to provide carefully graded sensory input, whereas therapeutic horseback riding uses specific riding skills.

"Equine-assisted" or "equine-facilitated" psychotherapy uses horses as companion animals to assist people with psychological problems. Actual practices vary widely due to the newness of the field; some programs include Therapeutic Horseback Riding and hippotherapy. Non-riding therapies simply encourage a person to touch, speak to and otherwise interact with the horse. People appear to benefit from being able to be around a horse; horses are very sensitive to non-verbal communication and are an ideal resource for working with individuals who have "tuned out" human therapists.

Equine Assisted Learning (EAL), Equine guided education, or equine assisted professional development, is another relatively new field of experiential learning for corporate, professional and personal development. There also have been experimental programs using horses in prison settings. Exposure to horses appears to improve the behavior of

inmates in a prison setting and help reduce recidivism when they leave. A correctional facility in Nevada has a successful program where inmates learn to train young mustangs captured off the range in order to make it more likely that these horses will find adoptive homes. Both adult and juvenile prisons in New York, Florida, and Kentucky work in cooperation with the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation to re-train former racehorses as pleasure mounts and find them new homes. Horses are also used in camps and programs for young people with emotional difficulties.

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