

Breeds

Breeds Versus Registries

FROM THE TINIEST SHETLAND TO THE MOST mammoth Percheron, all horses belong to the same species, *Equus caballus*. Within the species, however, the variation among breeds is tremendous: different sizes, shapes, colors, and conformation, and differences in aptitudes and talents to match. Within each breed there are significant variations (a registered Thoroughbred, for example, can be fourteen hands tall or seventeen hands tall, since size is not a distinguishing characteristic of this breed).

Before we look at common breeds, however, let's clarify the distinction between a breed and a registry. Breeds are basically an arbitrary assortment of desirable (from a human point of view) characteristics, including coat color (e.g., buckskin or palomino); size (consider the Shetland pony); and talents or conformation (such as the "inspected" Warmblood breeds, which are evaluated on their jumping ability, among other qualities). Registries are organizations that seek to perpetuate and improve a breed. In the United States, they are nongovernmental organizations. A registry may sponsor horse shows, maintain a record of registered animals, inspect possible candidates for inclusion in the registry, and charge fees for registering eligible animals.

Some breeds owe their existence to geography. Perhaps the horses lived on an island or were confined by rivers or mountain ranges—barriers that limited their gene pool as they evolved to best survive in their native habitats, leading to very distinctive breeds that came about naturally. Other breeds are primarily human constructs, the result of planned and selective breeding to produce a specific type of horse that excels at a particular job. In most cases, a combination of natural and artificial selection has produced the breeds we're familiar with today.

Every horse is an individual, of course. Some defy their breed's reputations, exhibiting a personality or ability that isn't the norm (for better or worse). But "breed" parlance is how many horses are advertised, categorized, and discussed in the horse world. It provides a good starting point in finding a horse of your own who has the temperament and skills you find attractive and avoiding those you find less desirable.

How Breeds Vary

Most of us can tell a Clydesdale (thanks to a famous brewery) from an Appaloosa, but can you discern a Standardbred from a Thoroughbred, or a breeding stock Paint from a Quarter Horse?

Sometimes the differences are quite minor and only visible to the very experienced eye. Many breeds of horses have ancestors in common,



The Belgian is a European draft breed.

as one breed might have been purposely infused with the blood of another to refine or improve it. For example, a specific Trakehner might count many Thoroughbreds among his ancestors and thus might look an awful lot like a Thoroughbred!

One of the more obvious ways in which breeds differ is size. On one end of the spectrum are miniature horses and the pony breeds; at the other, the heavy draft breeds; and in between lie the light riding horse breeds.

Many pony breeds originated in very harsh, inhospitable environments. Natural selection ensured that the native equines stayed small as they eked out an existence where larger horses likely wouldn't have been able to find enough food to survive. (This also explains why many modern-day ponies seem to stay fat on air alone.)

The influence of human hands is prevalent in pony breeds as well—ponies were in demand to work in coal mines, navigating low-ceilinged tunnels that would have been impossible for full-sized horses. And, as in present times, quality ponies have always been sought for children's mounts.

The draft breeds, on the other hand, were selectively bred to increase their size, enabling them to pull heavier loads and be more effective workhorses.

In addition to size, other physical attributes tend to differentiate the various breeds. Each breed has a “type,” an ideal specimen that breeders seek to produce, depending on the horse’s typical use. For example, breeds such as the Saddlebred and Morgan have a very upright head and neck carriage: this is a desired trait and is part of the ideal picture for that breed. Quarter Horses and Paints, on the other hand, are expected to have a low-set neck.

While size and type might be the most noticeable attributes of a breed, something else quickly becomes apparent as soon as you start working with a particular horse—temperament. The horse’s attitude, demeanor, and trainability are often a function of breed. As horses are selectively bred for generations to fulfill a particular job, traits applicable to that job become a hallmark of the breed. These traits can be positive or negative, depending on the owner’s expectations and the role the animal is expected to fill.

Thoroughbreds, for example, are often found to be “hotter” (more excitable) than Quarter Horses or draft breeds, which are known for their very docile, placid natures. Appaloosas are sometimes thought to be quite stubborn, while Morgans are frequently touted for their work ethic.

But what one owner might see as a detriment, another may find attractive. Thoroughbreds excel as event horses because of their boundless energy, and many Appaloosa owners say their horses’ stubborn streaks are just a sign of their exceptional intelligence. Devotees of a breed often find their personality foibles as endearing as their strengths.

Finally, different breeds show marked variations in their movement. Compare the high-stepping, knee-snapping trot of the Saddlebred with the smooth jog of the Quarter Horse and the drive-from-behind movement of the Hanovarian. It’s the same two-beat diagonal gait in all three horses, but it looks vastly different, depending on the breed. Some breeds also have specialized gaits of their own—the Tennessee Walker and Missouri Fox Trotter, for example, as discussed in chapter 6.

Overview of Common Breeds

Arabian

The oldest known breed of riding horse, the Arabian's roots can be traced back thirty-five hundred years to the deserts of the Middle East, where Bedouin nomads carefully protected and tended a breed of horse that was thought to have been a gift from Allah. Known for being fast, hardy, and intelligent, these treasured horses, bred carefully to keep the lines pure, were eventually imported to Europe and elsewhere to improve and refine other breeds. Today, just about every breed of light riding horse has been influenced by Arabian blood, primarily through the Thoroughbred.

Arabians are instantly recognizable by virtue of their delicate, dished faces and wide, expressive eyes. They have graceful, arched necks and long, flowing manes and tails that are never "pulled" (shortened by hand). Arabians are on the small side, usually between fourteen and sixteen hands, and they are unique among horses in that they have one fewer rib and three fewer vertebrae than other breeds.

Although they're prized for their beauty, they are also formidable athletes. Their toughness was established through centuries of survival in the harsh desert. The Arabian horse has found a devoted following among trail and endurance riders who want sure-footed mounts with the energy to go all day long.

In the show arena, you'll be hard-pressed to find a discipline in which the Arabian does not compete—pleasure, trail, dressage, hunter, costume, driving, saddle seat—versatility is the breed's middle name. Arabians are ridden both English and Western and compete in both Arabian-only and open shows.

The Arabian Horse Association, founded in 1908, is the official registry for the breed. It has forty-six thousand members, and currently counts about six hundred thousand full-blooded Arabians, four hundred thousand half-Arabians, and ten thousand Anglo-Arabians (Arabian/Thoroughbred crosses) among its registrants.³⁶



AMY KOLZOW

The AQHA registers Appendix Quarter Horses, horses with one registered Quarter Horse and one registered Thoroughbred as parents.

American Quarter Horse

The Quarter Horse is, by far, the most popular breed in the United States, with more than three million registered with the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA).³⁷

The Quarter Horse is considered the first modern breed native to this country, descending from the Arabians and Barbs brought to the New World by the Spanish conquistadors and imported English horses known as Galloways (the same stock from which the Thoroughbred later developed). These crosses produced a stout, muscular horse who proved very fast over short distances and came to be known as a “quarter-miler,” or Quarter Horse. By the mid-1600s, Quarter Horse racing was a common and popular pursuit in the colonies.³⁸

As pioneers pushed westward, the hard-working Quarter Horses came with them. The breed’s speed and agility made these horses adept at working cattle; since Thoroughbreds and longer-distance races were beginning to eclipse the quarter-mile races in popularity, the ranch and open range gave the Quarter Horse a new opportunity to shine. Today, Quarter Horses are the breed of choice for ranch and cattle work.

Modern Quarter Horses are usually between fifteen and sixteen hands tall and are typically broad, chunky horses with very muscular hindquarters. They are extremely popular in all of the Western disciplines and continue to be raced today, generally against other Quarter Horses. Top racers can reach speeds of fifty-five miles per hour for short distances. Quarter Horses are perhaps most common as pleasure horses. They are known for their easygoing and well-mannered temperament and are easy keepers (able to maintain their weight on a minimum of feed), making them excellent family and children's horses.

Founded in 1940, the AQHA is the official registry of the Quarter Horse. The organization also registers what are known as Appendix Quarter Horses, those with one registered Quarter Horse and one Jockey Club-registered Thoroughbred for parents.³⁹

American Saddlebred

In the days when horses were the primary mode of transportation, they had to fill many roles. They needed to be comfortable to ride over very long distances; strong and sturdy enough to pull a cart or buggy; and attractive and fancy enough to take a well-dressed rider or driver to church on Sundays. The American Saddlebred was developed to fit that bill.

His early predecessor was the Narragansett Pacer, an easy-riding horse developed from imported English Galloways and Irish Hobbies. The Narragansetts were eventually crossed with the early imported Thoroughbreds, leading to a breed that was simply known as the American Horse.

These horses had the Thoroughbred's size and good looks but retained the smooth gaits of the Narragansetts. They were equally at home being ridden, pulling a plow, or trotting smartly into town with a carriage and were known for being strong, willing, and even-tempered.

As settlers pushed west, these horses came along, and Kentucky became a breeding center, leading to the moniker Kentucky Saddler, and eventually, Saddlebred. They served with distinction in both armies during the Civil War and were the mount of choice for high-ranking

officers. Robert E. Lee's Traveler, Ulysses S. Grant's Cincinnati, and William T. Sherman's Lexington were all Saddlebred-type horses.⁴⁰

Typically, Saddlebreds stand between fifteen and sixteen hands high. Their most distinguishing characteristics are their high-set necks, which rise gracefully from prominent withers, giving the breed a regal air, and their lofty and animated gaits, performed with panache and aplomb. Saddlebreds are typically ridden and shown saddle-seat style, although they can also go Western, dressage, or hunt-seat style.

Saddlebreds perform two man-made gaits—the slow gait and the rack—in addition to the traditional walk, trot, and canter. The slow gait is like the walk in that both are four-beat, lateral gaits, and the sequence of footfalls is the same for both. But the slow gait is very collected and restrained, executed slowly and precisely.

The rack is also a lateral, four-beat gait, but is performed with high-stepping action and at great speed. It is smooth to ride and very animated and is typically performed to loud applause in the show ring.

Although the Saddlebred is best known as a gaited show horse, this talented breed can be seen in all disciplines. Saddlebreds are good jumpers, easy to drive, and can excel in dressage.

The official breed registry for Saddlebreds is the American Saddlebred Horse Association, founded in 1891.

The Gaited Breeds

A 2007 *Equus* magazine article listed twenty-six unique gaited breeds found in North and South America, and many more are found around the globe. Here are a few of the more popular North American breeds.

Tennessee Walking Horse

One of the best known and most ubiquitous of the gaited horses in North America, the Tennessee Walking Horse has also been exported for many years across Europe and as far away as the Middle East. The breed was founded in middle Tennessee as a cross of Narragansett and Canadian

Pacer, Standardbred, Thoroughbred, Morgan, and American Saddlebred stock. The Walker was developed for use on southern plantations, providing overseers with an extremely comfortable, hardy mount who could cover many miles without tiring himself or his rider. In his signature gait, the running walk (an extension of the flat walk in both stride and speed), the Walker can travel eight to twelve miles per hour and nods his neck and head in rhythm with his gait.

Several famous movie horses were Tennessee Walking Horses, including Roy Rogers' Trigger and Gene Autry's Champion. The breed is a popular mount of pack guides, park rangers, mounted police, and riding stable strings.

The Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association is the breed registry, established in 1935. There are more than 430,000 registered Tennessee Walking Horses throughout the world, and it is the second-fastest-growing breed in the United States.

Other related breeds that have emerged include the Racking Horse, whose four-beat rack is often called a "single-foot" because only one foot strikes the ground at a time, and the Spotted Saddle Horse, which was developed by crossing Spanish-type pinto horses with gaited breeds (including the Walking Horse) to produce a colorful horse that is smooth-gaited.

Rocky Mountain Horse

According to the Rocky Mountain Horse Association (RMHA), around the turn of the twentieth century, a gaited stallion was brought from the Rocky Mountain region of the United States to the foothills of eastern Kentucky and was referred to by the locals as "the Rocky Mountain Horse." Although little is known of this foundation stallion's background, legend has it he was chocolate-colored with a flaxen mane and tail and had a superior gait, traits shared by many of the breed's specimens today.

The breed is characterized by a medium-size horse of gentle temperament, with an evenly timed, smooth four-beat gait similar to a rack: the Rocky Mountain Pleasure Gait. This gait, which made this breed popular

on the farms and in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, is enjoyed today by trail riders and show ring exhibitors nationwide. In 1986 the RMHA established the breed registry and formed a panel of inspectors to examine all Rocky Mountain Horses before breeding for evidence of breed characteristics.

Missouri Fox Trotting Horse

The Missouri Fox Trotting Horse was developed in the nineteenth century in the Ozark foothills by pioneers who realized that a horse with a smooth four-beat gait would be ideal for the rocky, forested land. Farmers selectively bred for a gliding gait by blending American Saddlebred, Standardbred, and Tennessee Walker stock with that of Morgans, Thoroughbreds, and Arabians.

The horse appears to walk with his front legs and trot with his hind legs. But because the gait has a four-beat motion rather than a two-beat trot, it's easy to sit and can be maintained for long periods, reaching speeds of up to ten miles per hour. The "Fox Trotter" also performs the flat-foot walk and canter.

Recognized in 1958 the Missouri Fox Trotting Horse Breeders' Association (MFTHBA) claims more than fifty-two thousand registered horses in North America and Europe.

Paso Fino

The Paso Fino has a history in the Americas dating back five centuries. A blend of the Barb, Spanish Jennet, and Andalusian, the Paso Fino was bred by Spanish land owners in Puerto Rico and Colombia for use on their plantations, due to his endurance and comfortable gait. The Paso Fino began to be imported to the United States in the 1950s, and while the Puerto Rican and Columbian strains are still bred individually to retain their purity, they are also crossbred to capture the best of both.

The gait of the Paso Fino horse is a natural, evenly spaced, four-beat lateral gait in which each foot hits the ground independently, creating

a rapid, consistent rhythm and exceptional comfort for the rider. It is performed at three speeds, the Classic Fino, Paso Corto, and Paso Largo, with varying degrees of collection, speed, and extension.

The Paso Fino Horse Association registers horses in the United States and serves as the breed's horse show-regulating body.

Peruvian (Paso) Horse

The Peruvian Horse can trace its origins to the horses brought to Peru by the Spanish conquistadors. The Peruvian was bred for gait, conformation, and temperament, resulting in a strong, hardy animal that enabled overseers to traverse their vast plantations.

In addition to its smooth gait, the Peruvian is best known for two unique breed characteristics—brilliant action combined with “termino,” an outward rolling of the front legs and “brio,” an attitude of arrogance, exuberance, and spirit. The signature gaits are the paso llano, a movement and footfall close to that of the rack, and the sobreandando, a faster, slightly more lateral gait.

The North American Peruvian Horse Association was formed in 2006, the result of a merger of the breed's two main U.S. registries.

Morgan

In 1789 a dark bay colt was born in West Springfield, Massachusetts. Over the next thirty-two years, this stout little horse was undefeated in races under saddle and in harness, as well as in pulling contests, and became a prolific and popular sire. The horse's name was Figure, but he was better known by the name of his owner, Justin Morgan.⁴¹

Although his origins are somewhat of a mystery, Figure became the foundation sire for the Morgan breed, stamping his get with his best qualities.

The human Justin Morgan was a Vermont schoolteacher who received Figure as a yearling as partial payment for a debt. The horse was small—no taller than fourteen hands—but muscular and strong and had impressive gaits. Figure was put to work clearing land in Vermont's rolling hills and

became something of a local legend for his ability to pull out tree stumps and haul logs. He could outrun and outpull any other horse in the area.

Figure worked hard his entire life and was also used as a riding and driving horse. He was not only incredibly strong and blessed with great stamina, but he had a wonderful and gentle disposition as well. He was in high demand as a sire, and three of his famous sons—Bulrush, Sherman, and Woodbury—became influential sires within the breed.

Morgan horses became very popular in New England and northern New York. They worked on farms, pulled stagecoaches, and were used in the cavalry in the Civil War (primarily on the Union side) with great distinction. Morgans also had great influence on a number of other breeds, including the Saddlebred, Standardbred, and Tennessee Walker.

Today's Morgans generally stand between 14.1 and 15.2 hands tall. They have a high-set neck; a beautiful and distinctive head with small, wide-set ears and expressive eyes; a short, strong back; and muscular hindquarters. They are known for being very sound and easy keepers. They also sport long, thick manes and tails that are traditionally left untrimmed and unpulled.

Morgans are ridden saddle seat, English, and Western, and also driven, and can be seen competing in just about every discipline. The versatility that was Figure's hallmark is still a part of the breed today, as is his quiet, steady disposition.

The American Morgan Horse Association, founded in 1909, is the official registry of the breed, and currently counts about 108,000 registered Morgans.⁴²

Thoroughbred

For more than three centuries, the Thoroughbred breed has been synonymous with horse racing. In the early 1700s, three Arabian stallions were brought to England, where racing was already a flourishing pastime, to cross with native stock in the hope of producing superior running horses. Those three foundation stallions were the Byerley Turk, the Darley Arabian, and the Godolphin Arabian.



The Thoroughbred Classics winner and stallion Hansel.

From those three sires descended a breed that was blessed with speed over long distances, strength, and endurance. The first Thoroughbred was imported to the United States in 1730, and by 1800, more than three hundred had crossed the Atlantic to be used for breeding and racing here.

The Thoroughbred breed is notable for the meticulous record-keeping that has accompanied its ascent. Today's Thoroughbreds trace their ancestry back through dozens of generations, all the way to the original three foundation sires. The official Thoroughbred registry in the United States is the Jockey Club, which was founded in 1894.⁴³

Not only did Thoroughbreds revolutionize horse racing, they had tremendous impact on other breeds as well. The American Quarter Horse, Standardbred, Morgan, and American Saddlebred all derive in part from the Thoroughbred, and many of the European warmblood breeds have also benefited from an infusion of Thoroughbred blood.

Known for their tremendous heart and regal presence (often romantically called the “look of eagles”), Thoroughbreds are built to run. They

All registered Thoroughbreds who make their way to the racetrack are tattooed in order to document their identities.



THE HSUS / CHAD SISNEROS

sport powerful hindquarters that propel them at speeds of up to forty miles per hour. They are a light and lean breed, with long, slender legs and necks. The average Thoroughbred stands about sixteen hands tall.⁴⁴

Thoroughbreds have also excelled as sport horses. The racing industry has little use for most Thoroughbreds after their racing careers are over, however, and racehorse trainers offer Thoroughbreds to local show horse trainers at low prices. Although a Thoroughbred with race training can be challenging for a novice to ride, many trainers have had success retraining former racehorses with good minds for intermediate riders and better. Thoroughbreds have dominated eventing for decades, thanks to their ground-covering gallop and bravery, and have also found success as show hunters, jumpers, dressage horses, polo ponies, fox hunters, steeplechasers, and even endurance horses. Many Thoroughbreds transition into sport horse careers if they aren't suited to racing, but some are bred specifically for sport and never set hoof on a racetrack.

The Jockey Club counts about thirty-four thousand foals born each year. Unlike most other registries, it only accepts horses who have been conceived via live cover (rather than through artificial insemination as well).

The Warmblood Breeds

When widespread use of the internal combustion engine began to make horses obsolete for work and transportation in the early part of the twentieth century, breeding began to take on a new focus—producing horses for recreation and sport. Nowhere was this transition more effective than in Europe, where horses have been carefully bred for centuries, often at royal or state-sponsored studs. These breeders began to adapt the riding, carriage, and cavalry horses they had previously developed to the new reality of the horse world.

The warmblood breeds are named for their countries or regions of origin. Some of the common warmblood breeds include the Dutch Warmblood (Holland), Hanoverian (from the Hanover region of Germany), Danish Warmblood (Denmark), Swedish Warmblood (Sweden), Selle Français (France), Trakehner (from the East Prussian town of Trakehnen), Polish Warmblood (Poland), Holsteiner (from the Schleswig-Holstein region of Germany), and Oldenburg (Germany).

The term “warmblood” was coined to reflect the fact that most of these breeds historically were mixtures of “hot-blooded” horses (Arabians and Thoroughbreds) and “cold bloods” (coach or carriage horses)—although it refers to temperament, not actual genetics. Most warmblood breeds have open studbooks: a horse of any breed can be introduced to the gene pool as long as he meets the strict criteria established for the breed. New blood is regularly infused into the breed to refine and improve it.

The warmblood registries all rely on a system of inspections to approve their breeding stock. The process differs from registry to registry, and many offer various levels of approvals. In general the process includes having judges inspect stallions and broodmares to see if they meet the ideal standard for the registry. Stallions are usually performance-tested as well, to ensure their abilities match their looks.

Due to decades of careful breeding to stringent standards, warmbloods have come to excel as sport horses and now dominate the upper levels of the three Olympic sports. Each warmblood breed has an American registry, usually affiliated with the registry in the horse’s home country.



WELSH PONY ASSOCIATION

A Welsh Section B stallion being judged “on the line” (i.e., in the conformation class show ring).

Welsh Ponies and Cobs

Perhaps the best-known purebred ponies are the various types of Welsh ponies. Welsh ponies and cobs are divided into four types, corresponding with their respective sections of the Welsh Pony and Cob Studbook and their heights: section A, the Welsh Mountain Pony (not to exceed 12.2 hands in height); section B, the Welsh Pony (not to exceed 14.2 hands); section C, the Welsh Pony of Cob Type (not to exceed 13.2 hands); and section D, the Welsh Cob (13.2 hands and taller).

The Welsh Mountain Pony is considered the basis for all of the types. These tiny, hardy, beautiful ponies have roamed the harsh hillsides of Wales for centuries. The wild bands of ponies were influenced by the blood of other breeds, particularly the Arabian, which was brought to Wales by the Romans, and later, the Thoroughbred and the Hackney.

But the ponies remained of a distinctive type that is still evident today. Their hardiness is legendary, as is their beauty. Their heads show the Arabian influence, often having a slightly dished profile. They are

natural jumpers and are also often used for driving. Known for their intelligence and excellent temperament, they have been a popular children's mount in the United Kingdom for generations.

Welsh ponies and cobs are very versatile and can be found competing in just about every discipline.

How Breed Factors into Buying

The breeds just described represent a sampling of the amazingly diverse array of breeds in this country and around the world. Some, like the Quarter Horse, number in the millions; others may be represented by just a handful of horses in a remote corner of the world.

Breed should not usually be the deciding factor in a horse purchase. Unless your goal is to participate in a breed-specific discipline, a certain breed is not usually necessary. Nor is it required that a horse be of *any* breed—there are plenty of grade horses (those of undetermined or nonspecific origin) who are wonderful mounts. But a horse's breed can give you some insight into who he is, where he came from, and where he might be going.

The Past and the Future

Buying a horse of known breeding (i.e., that the *pedigree* is known, not just the breed) may be a little like having a crystal ball that allows you to see into both the horse's past and his future. The picture is fuzzy, but you'll sometimes be able to get some useful hints.

Meticulous record-keeping is the mainstay of any breed registry. It's what allows a sire or dam's progeny, as well as all of their competitive accomplishments, to be tracked and recorded. Breed registries keep lists of leading sires, as determined by points or prize money earned in competition, to determine which horses are fathering the next generation of winners. Even if a horse has never jumped a jump or run a race, looking at his pedigree can tell you a bit about what he's capable of, if the odds are in your favor.



HOOF CARE AND LAMENESS

An example of the vagaries of breed popularity, the Gypsy Vanner (so named for the gypsies who typically use the stocky piebald animals to pull their vans, or wagons), being shown here in dressage, is highly prized in the United States despite his remarkable similarity to the colored, draft-type “tinkers’ cobs” available for a song in Great Britain.

Horses are more than the sum of their accomplishments, however. A particular mare may be reputed to have an extraordinarily kind temperament or a stallion may be known for producing sons and daughters of remarkable soundness. That information can sometimes be discerned from a pedigree as well. (To reaffirm: many horses of unknown breeding have made wonderful partners and companions as well.)

Suitability for a Discipline

Every breed has an ideal type, the theoretical “perfect horse.” The type differs from breed to breed. Small variances in conformation can have a great effect on how a horse moves, how fast he runs, how high he jumps, and how sound he stays throughout his lifetime.

Even within a breed, there can be variations in the ideal type. A Quarter Horse intended for racing looks quite different from one bred for Western pleasure riding, for example.

Most breeds are built to do a certain job, designed over hundreds of years of selective breeding. This can work either for you or against you as someone looking for a new horse. You're stacking the deck in your favor if you choose a horse who was designed to do the kind of job you want her to do. If you purchase a Thoroughbred as an event prospect, you already know the horse is bred to have an efficient gallop and high endurance, qualities that will serve you well when traveling cross-country. If you want to show a gaited horse, you know that a Paso Fino or an Icelandic horse has the gaits to fit the bill.

While some individual horses can excel in disciplines unusual for their breed, they are the exception rather than the rule. That Morgan you love *might* be able to jump well enough to be a show hunter, but the odds aren't in your favor, and you might be setting both yourself and the horse up for a lot of frustration by asking him to do something he wasn't designed to do.

The Importance of the Individual

"A good horse is never a bad breed." The message of this old horseman's saying is that, if the horse standing in front of you is perfect for what you want to do, she is the right horse, regardless of breed.

Do you like her personality? Does her temperament match the demands of her intended career? Is the price right? Is she physically suited for the discipline you want to pursue? Is she healthy and sound? If so, it shouldn't matter if she's a different breed from the one you had in mind, or a strange combination of several breeds. Don't let preconceived notions or ignorance about a breed (called breed prejudice) close your mind to a great match.

Breed designation is not the be-all and end-all, and it offers no guarantees. There is wide variation within any breed, genetics being what they are. Even though most grandchildren of the great



ELAINÉ BONDWAY

Not all breeders walk in lockstep with a specific registry or strive to meet a show ring standard. P. Wynn Norman (above), breeder of Theodore O'Connor (page 251), has an unconventional approach to breeding an athletic, competitive horse. Kevlar is "Teddy's" full brother: both are one-eighth Arabian, one-eighth Shetland Pony, and seven-eighths Thoroughbred. Although not conformationally perfect, Kevlar proves that Teddy was not an "accident" but part of a well thought out plan.

Thoroughbred racehorse Secretariat are accomplished athletes, a few might be pony-size and unable to outrun the hay delivery man.

And while we often speak of a breed's common traits in a positive light, there are plentiful breed prejudices as well. All Arabians are "crazy"; Thoroughbreds are hot and spooky; warmbloods are "dumbbloods"; Saddlebreds "can't do dressage." There's often a kernel of truth in those biases, but it's unfair and unrealistic to condemn an entire breed. Horses are individuals: for every breed prejudice, there are many, many individuals who prove them wrong. An educated rider is able to look beyond what a breed is "supposed" to be, and instead see the horse who is actually there.

Papers and Registries

One segment of the horse-oriented human population believes there's a cachet to having a horse "with papers." In some locales, highly organized breed associations offer large, frequent, and well-run shows that are "the best game in town" for show competitors, particularly for young riders. For such folks, breed-registry papers are virtually required for their horses to compete locally, since these shows are open only to their registered horses. However, if you don't plan to breed your horse or participate in these breed shows, your horse's pedigree and registration papers may not be terribly important to you. Most sports don't have any breed restrictions or require that horses be registered with a breed organization.

Most breeds have one official registry that has been in existence for decades, even a century or more. Examples include the American Quarter Horse Association and the Jockey Club. Such organizations generally accept registrations for any foals from two registered parents.

Other registries accept horses of different breeds, but most of have extremely stringent selection criteria. Unfortunately, anyone can "invent" a breed, create a registry, and hand out registration papers (for a fee, of course) to anyone who meets certain criteria. The fact that a horse has papers or a registration certificate from an organization doesn't mean the documents are worth much more than they're printed on—whether or not being "registered" is anything to be proud of depends on the registry in question.