

The Boy Scout Breed

The following text is excerpted from an article written by Margaret Layton that was published in GaitWay Magazine in April 1992. The article is derived from interviews with Al Prewitt, Marion Stamper, and E.R.Davis – three men who were integral to the development and continuation of Mountain Horses in the 20th century. Richard and Mary Hartmann were introduced to gaited Mountain Horses by Al Prewitt and Al was a founding partner of Mountain Magic Ranch before his death in May 2003 at the age of 75.

The article is a fun look at the history of these great horses and the people who raised them.

Mountain Horses

“The Boy Scout Breed”

Mountain Horses? “They’re the ‘Boy Scout Breed’ of horses...honest, loyal, trustworthy, and reliable,” describes long-time breeder Alfred Prewitt.

“And then when you add in smooth riding, hard working and great disposition, people begin to understand why I’m so crazy about these horses,” concludes Prewitt. Prewitt is a native of Kentucky, transplanted to North Carolina in the early 1950’s. Kentucky’s Mountain Horses also found a home in the Tar Heel State soon after.



Al Prewitt and

one of his young Mountain Horse mares

“My father had these horses all his life and after I moved here I brought a few to Fayetteville. After he died in 1984, I became even more interested in preserving these horses,” explained Prewitt, a prominent insurance executive and real estate developer.

Kentucky has been very prominent in the development of American Saddlebreds, Walking Horses and other gaited horses, and descended from some of the same stock as these well-known breeds is the group of easy riding horses known as Mountain Horses.

The Mountain Horse is the result of years of breeding by savvy Kentuckians who mated mare to stallion, seeking their ideal horse that was easy riding, but would step out and cover some ground, which they could ride all day and had the temperament to do anything required.

The resulting horse is, to this day, used to pull the plow or mower on steep slopes and provide hours of sure-footed riding enjoyment in places you’d swear a horse couldn’t go. These breeders couldn’t afford the luxury of having one horse to work, another horse for the children to ride, and yet another horse for their personal riding enjoyment — so they bred the horse that could do it all. This horse is a curious mixture of family pet and farm implement.

The current population of Mountain Horses is small compared to that of 50 years ago. “It used to be that cars and gasoline were scarce and there wasn’t much in the way of roads here in the mountain country,”

explains 70 year-old Marion Stamper, of Hazel Green, Kentucky. “Back then you could find about any kind of good saddle animal you wanted up any of these roads around here. Then the *drummers* (salesmen) and big money people started coming in from Virginia and Tennessee and such and bought these horses up until you can’t find them much anymore”

“Why, you could get \$1,100 for a good saddle horse back then and you could turn around and buy a good little ‘hill farm’ for that. With prices like that, we just couldn’t keep that many of the good horses around, but there have always been some of us who just had to be raising and training horses, and most of us have worked them, too, all our lives,” recalls Stamper.

“But these horses have always had to pay their own way. If they wanted to eat, they had to work, and ‘work’ meant pulling a plow,” recalls Marion Stamper. That forced practicality is another factor limiting the current Mountain Horse population, because past breeders have raised only enough horses to satisfy their personal riding/work requirements. A good riding mare was not bred if she was needed for working and the family had no need for an additional horse at that point. As a result, the population of horses has not grown because there’s not been an economic incentive to take the mare “out of commission” by impregnating her.



Richard Hartmann & grandson with Al Prewitt’s stallion, 1994 & 1999 International Champion, Tom’s Pride

Furthermore, good stallions may have serviced only five or six mares a year because there was no exchange of information about the stallions available. Currently the owner of a mare breeds to a stallion owned by

his next door neighbor or, indeed, a stallion he owns himself. While there is an amazingly broad population of these horses throughout Eastern Kentucky, there has been relatively little cross pollination of bloodlines.

E.R. “Buddy” Deavis has, however, been an exception to that rule. Davis and his wife, Aleitha, live in Central, rather than Eastern, Kentucky. Buddy Davis has trailered his mares as much as two hours to breed.

“I probably bred two or three mares to Cable’s Rex in Campton back in 1959 to 1962, and that was before the Mountain Parkway, so it was about a two-hour drive from Paris on mountain roads. And I bred to Tobe, at Sam Tuttle’s near Irvine, at about the same time,” recalls Davis.

Davis, like Stamper and Prewitt, come from a long line of gaited horse owners. “My dad, my Granddad, my Great Granddad and my Great-Great Granddad have always kept a stable of good going horses and were big in fox hunting. They say my Great-Great Granddad came to Kentucky (Fleming County) from Virginia in 1825 because he wanted to hunt more, and things were getting too crowded in Virginia,” says Davis.

“I had my first horse when I was three, my kids could ride before they could walk, and at one point I had seven generations of one bloodline I particularly liked,” Davis recalls. Davis remembers the Gobel Horse, the Joe Thompson palomino (in Bath County) and Harlan Porter’s Silver (near Morehead) as some of his favorites stallions to breed to, in addition to Cable’s Rex and Tobe.

Mountain Horse are all colors — black, gray, palomino, chocolate, chestnut, bay, roan, perlino and cremello. Marion Stamper recalls that these horses have, in the past, been noteworthy for how unpredictable the resulting color of mating two horses would be. “The only time people around here have ‘bred for color’ was when palominos were so popular in the ’40’s, ’50’s, and ’60’s.

In fact, it may have been a Mountain Horse that was the first Trigger owned by Roy Rogers — and therefore responsible for the popularity of palominos. Alfred Prewitt recalls being told that his father, Ed Prewitt, and Hub Spencer sold the horse that became Roy Rogers’ first Trigger — a palomino single-footing horse. “The story was that’s why you always saw Trigger cantering in the movies. They didn’t show Trigger on camera at a trot, because he’d be hitting a lick when the rest of the horses would be trotting!”

But, back to color. Stamper recalls, “Mostly, people bred for gait and disposition. Color didn’t matter, so you have all different (coat) colors in the background of these horses.”

The common denominator is that all of these horses have an evenly paced, four beat, lateral gait with moderate forward speed and extension, without exaggerated knee and hock action. The two key attributes are the natural gait and amiable disposition, which breed true. Proper breeding will enhance these desirable characteristics in successive generations and no action devices, aids or harsh training methods are permitted.