

THE PERCHERON HORSE.

by

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The most remote ancestor of the horse of which we have any knowledge is the Phenacodus, which is antecedent to all the horse series, the hog, the rhinoceros, and all the other series of hoofed animals. The Phenacodus belonged to the early Eocene period, had five digits on each limb and three phalanges on each digit, the ulna and fibula were entire and separate from respectively the radius and tibia, there was no interlocking of the carpal bones. There were twenty two teeth on each jaw, the incisors being small and with sharp edges, the canines were well developed in both male and female. There was no diastema between the canines and pre-molars. The molars had very short crowns each of which had six cusps, the skull and brain were small and the head was carried nearly on a line with the neck.

Phenacodus resembled a wolf in appearance, was about forty-two inches high and walked chiefly on his second, third and fourth toes, which were provided with small hoofs, the third toe being wider and longer than the others. He was active, had a long tail, powerful hind quarters and was probably omniverous and inhabited swampy ground and low lying forests.

The next higher form was the Eohippus of the lower Eocene period, which was about the size of a fox and inhabited Europe as well as America. The first digit was absent on all the limbs and there was only a vestige of the fifth on the hind limbs. The bones of the wrist were becoming interlocked as in the horse but the ulna and fibula were still complete and separate. In the structure of the teeth and feet the Eohippus indicates that the direct ancestral descent of the modern horse had already separated from the other perissodactyles or odd toed Ungulates. The feed appears to have been succulent grasses.



The following forms are believed to connect the Eohippus with our present Equidae; Orohippus, Meshippus, Miohippus, Protohippus and Pliohippus, by which a steady advance was made to the present horse, by increase of size and becoming more horselike in appearance the animal inhabiting more open ground the toes, with the exception of the third digit gradually disappearing, and the limbs becoming longer. The food being harder and dryer there was a change in the teeth until they became cupped and the crowns increased in length, the front teeth being separated from the back teeth by a wide diastema. The ulna and fibula are no longer distinct and entire and the carpus is firmly interlocked.

Horses made their first appearance in the upper Pliocene period and extended over North and South America, Asia, Europe and North Africa, but became extinct in America before the beginning of the historic period.

The earliest record of the horse that we possess is in the Bible where he is inferently mentioned in the thirty-sixth chapter of Genesis as existing in the wilderness of Idumea. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had asses which were spoken of in their riches together with camel and sheep but nowhere is horse mentioned. In the time of Moses the Hebrews did not use them even in battle. About 1900 B. C. Abraham received presents of oxen, camel, etc., but no horses, whence it is inferred that at that time horses were not in common use in Egypt, but in the time of Joseph 1700 B. C. Jacobs funeral was attended by chariot and horsemen.

The Scythians are said to have first practiced the art of riding on horse back. When they invaded France before the Trojan war the Greeks regarded the horse and man as one animal as did the



Mexicans in the time of Cortez. The Greeks did not use the horse in war till long after it had been thus employed in Egypt, Scythia and Assyria. At the Battle of Mastodon 490 B. C. they had no horse, prior to this the horse was used in the chariot races of the Olympian games, and the Greek horses of that time were of the finest breeds.

The horse was first domesticated by northern tribes of eastern Europe and western Asia. Tartary and Scythia is believed to have been the birthplace of this whole group. The Tartar horse regarded as the progenitor of the present species, extended into Persia, Arabia and Egypt, and bred with care for centuries in the pure and elastic atmosphere of that region developed into the beautiful and elegant Arabian which spread westward through northern Europe and under the new circumstances developed into the wild rover of the Don, the heavy but irresistible charger of Flanges, the vigorous waggoner of Normandy, the ponderous cart horse of Belgium and the shaggy but hardy pony of Norway, Sweden and Iceland.

In Spain crossed with the Barb it produced the light graceful genet, in England blent with the Arabian it reaches the climax of the species of race horse.

It is thought that the breed now known as the Percheron had its origin in the basin of the Seine river, this is the reason the scientific name "Segunius" is given to this type. Leaving the basin one can travel as far as the Pyrenees and meet nothing but horses of Asiatic, Eastern or African type.

The Percheron type is the only one born in the center of Gaul. The extent of the area occupied by this breed was confined for a long period within the limits of its birthplace. Families of this type solidly established and reproducing their own characteristics



cannot be found outside of this territory.

The center of production is the little county of Perche, a country of small hills, producing juicy herbs and divided into the departments of Orne, Sarthe, Eure-et-Loir and Loir-et-Cher. One section of the province produces while another one raises what has been produced.

No matter to what class the mare belongs, light or heavy or pertaining of both she is expected to breed every year. If barren she is sold and the fault continuing she passes into public use. During her gestation she works constantly; a short time before and after foaling is the only rest she gets.

At the age of five or six months the colt is abruptly weaned and sold and taken into the interior upon the fertile meadows of Mans, Pin, Regmalarg, Carbon and Tonguy it remains one year idle. In the winter it is fed hay in the stable and during the fine season turned into field to graze, that is during this period is rather poorly nourished on bran, grass and hay. At one and one-half years old they are broken in and put to light work in teams of four. The colt is naturally docile and in the hands of a man always patient and mild its training is generally easy. They are never over-worked, but are fed liberally and kept growing.

At three years old they are again sold; this time to the Beauce farmers, he is now taken to a country of proverbial richness, the work is abundant, but the light soft soil renders it easy. But it is necessary that he go at a rapid gait as the fields are much divided and distant from one another. It is a sort of sifting process in which the weaker specimens break down, while the stout rugged colts become seasoned for the strenuous work ahead of them. The Beauce farmer uses a large number of horses as the horse cannot be replaced by



any other beast of burden, he is subject to hard work; the work is easy, but there is much of it and must be done quickly and promptly. But he eats as much grain and hay as he pleases. He lives this way for two years but some succumb, as the mortality is quite high, but the horse that remains after such treatment offers many guarantees to the dealer who buys him. The farmers of this region buy nothing but stud colts and do not castrate them, nothing is therefore more easy than to select a stallion from this numerous herd.

At five years the omnibus and truck companies buy them for their final field of usefulness, seasoned and fit for any exertion.

It is thought that the Percheron like the draft breed of England and Scotland derived its size originally from the large black horse of Flanders. But from the fact that gray has for many generations been the prevailing color it is evident that some very powerful agency has been at work modifying the type until it has little in common with this old parent stock except size, and this agency has undoubtedly been the large admixture of the Arab and from this source the prevailing color is derived, in fact the Percheron shows a great analogy by his coat, conformation, character of race, mild disposition and endurance to the Arab of which he seems to be the son notwithstanding certain differences, the result of time, climate, and the region in which he is bred and lives.

During feudal times France maintained supremacy over other European countries in the production of horses. There were only private studs at that time but later with the decrease of feudalism the private studs were gradually abandoned and the Kings of France were asked to establish government control over the production of horses.

In 1665 the minister Colbert established for the first time government studs.



In 1690 the number of Royal and Government approved stallions amounted to 1600.

During the French Revolution the studs were momentarily destroyed but were soon restored by Napoleon who issued a number of decrees to encourage and develop horse breeding throughout the country. Ever since, the government has been a liberal patron of the breeders and owners of stallions.

In 1789 there were in France 3239 approved and government stallions which served 115,000 mares producing 55,000 living colts.

From 1815 the government bought for service in their studs 1902 stallions of these 223 came from Arabia and other foreign countries 853 from the northern departments of France, principally Cavados and LePerche, and 826 were selected from the finest of the improved breeds from government stallions.

In 1831 a most notable advance was made toward the improvement of the light breeds suitable for cavalry and coach purposes, followed 1833 by a royal decree establishing a government stud book for the purpose of the preservation of pedigrees.

This was placed under the supervision of the Minister of Agriculture.

Since the establishment of this stud book a very decided improvement has been taken in the character of the horse of the entire country, between 11,000 and 12,000 owned by the government having been recorded. No animal is given a number unless belonging to the government studs. In 1870 the management of government studs was vested in the Department of Agriculture and Commerce under the immediate direction of a Director General, eight inspectors, ten superintendents and twenty-six veterinarians; 1874 the number of stallions owned by the



government was ordered increased 200% per year, until they should reach 2500; and 50,000 francs per year, set aside for experiments with Arab and Anglo-Arab; and for this purpose sixty finely bred mares were placed in the stud of Pompadour.

Percheron horses were early brought to America; the horse Norman having been imported in 1816. Old Louis Napoleon, a famous stallion in 1856. Several importations were made by the Massachusetts Society for the Promotion of Agriculture. Canadian horses carry much of this blood but have been reduced in size in the new country.

No draft breed is so generally distributed throughout America. January 1st, 1905 there were 1100 Percheron stallions and 1000 mares recorded in the American Stud Book. One year later the estimated number of stallions living was 19,000 and of mares 12,000 making a total of 31,000, not including the grade Percheron horses which would far exceed the pure bred Percherons in numbers. The Percheron grade draft horses in cities, on farms and in horse markets largely outnumber all other breeds combined.

They have achieved their premier position by priority in the field and by intrinsic value. Not only their weight but their active habits commend them to users and their clean legs are generally preferred to the profuse feather on the legs of some British breeds; particularly for farm work.

Owing to the demand for heavy horses in America during the last two or three decades the Percheron horse has, in consequence been selected more for size where formerly activity was more insisted upon. As a result the breed is much heavier and less active than formerly.

Of late years the black has come to be the most popular color with the breeders of the Percheron; but the majority of the heavy



Percherons used for dray purposes in our larger cities are gray. The users of this type of Percheron still preferring the gray color.

There is a type of Percheron bred in France that is not imported to the United States in very large numbers. This type is bred for the heavy artillery in the army and is a smaller and more active horse than is desired for the American or heavy draft market.

The Percheron is by far the most popular breed of draft horses in this country and rightly should be because his large size, massive strength and muscular power in the collar, great endurance and staying qualities, superior activity for horses of their weight, easy keeping, intelligence and gentleness, make them a very desirable horse. They fill a place that cannot be filled by any other of our draft breeds at the present time and will likely be our most popular draft breed for some time.