

REMEMBER WHEN?

The Welsh Pony has a good forehead, good legs, and a free going trot and jumps creditably. His head and neck are good. He is native to Wales and is found either in the hills or boggy wasteland where he normally ranges wild. His size averages 12 hands and the usual colour is bay or brown. Efforts to improve the Welsh pony by use of the Thoroughbred have been successful where persevered. Welsh Ponies are spirited little animals.

The following brief account was written by Captain Charles K Bassett, an enthusiastic admirer of the Welsh Pony:-

The ancestors of the Welsh Pony were the small sturdy wild ponies which ran in the Welsh hills before the dawn of history. Fossil remains found in the British Isles are supposed to be of ancestors, still further back, of these ancestral ponies, named by Professor James Cossar Ewart, the Pony "Celticus". The frequent absence of ergots and callosities on the leg of the Pony "Celticus" would indicate a development at least as ancient as that of the ancestors of the Barb and the Arab. Professor Ridgeway of Cambridge University believes the Pony "Celticus" may be a related northern branch of the North African species.

It is evident that during the 400 years that the Romans occupied Wales, they imported horses of Eastern blood, probably the result of their North African campaigns. The crossing of these with the native pony "Celticus", a joining, or re-joining, of two of the oldest strains in the world have resulted in a pony whose characteristics are fixed and definite.

The theory of the origin of the Welsh pony is further borne out by the gratifying results obtained by modern breeders by an Arab cross on the old Welsh Mountain stock. It is probably the most receptive of all the native ponies of Great Britain to such a cross. Many of the larger modern ponies of riding type are a half or quarter Arab blood.

In colour as well as conformation and temperament, the Welsh Pony is a miniature in pony form of the Eastern Horse. A glance through the stud books published by the Welsh Pony and Cob Society will show greys, chestnuts, bays, blacks, browns, blue and red roans, with an occasional dun and cream. Piebalds and skewbalds are not seen among correctly bred ones and heavy 'daubs' of white are disliked. Silver eyes are not uncommon.

At the time of Henry the Eighth, laws were passed endeavouring to eliminate from the common lands 'little horses and nags of small stature'. Survivors, in search of safety, drifted up into the hills, into the most inaccessible districts. A natural further result was the preservation of these refugee pony bands in greater purity of blood than would have been the case had they been allowed to intermingle with the lowland horses turned out, after harvest was over, to graze at will over the unfenced fields and commons. Glancing at these early efforts at horse legislation it is realised that the wild ponies survived in these early days, not from man's aid and protection, but in spite of his efforts to stamp them out.

Further positive attempts to discourage the breeding of ponies were not found until the time of George II. In 1740 an Act was passed 'to prevent the encouragement of the vile and paltry breed of horses' by forbidding matches for prizes less than 50 pounds! The Welsh Pony and Cob Society, founded in 1902, made their influence for pony improvement felt at once by sponsoring and having passed an Act of Parliament, which enabled the commons to be cleared of all stallions except those which a competent committee decided were desirable. They keep a record of all registered ponies and pass on the merits of wild ponies from the hills, to be entered as 'foundation stock', the third generation of which, if breeding to registered stallions has been followed, becoming eligible for full registry.

In 1932 the Society decided that in their stud Book the classification of Welsh Ponies and Cobs should be as follows:-

Section A – Ponies of Mountain Type, not exceeding 12 hands high.

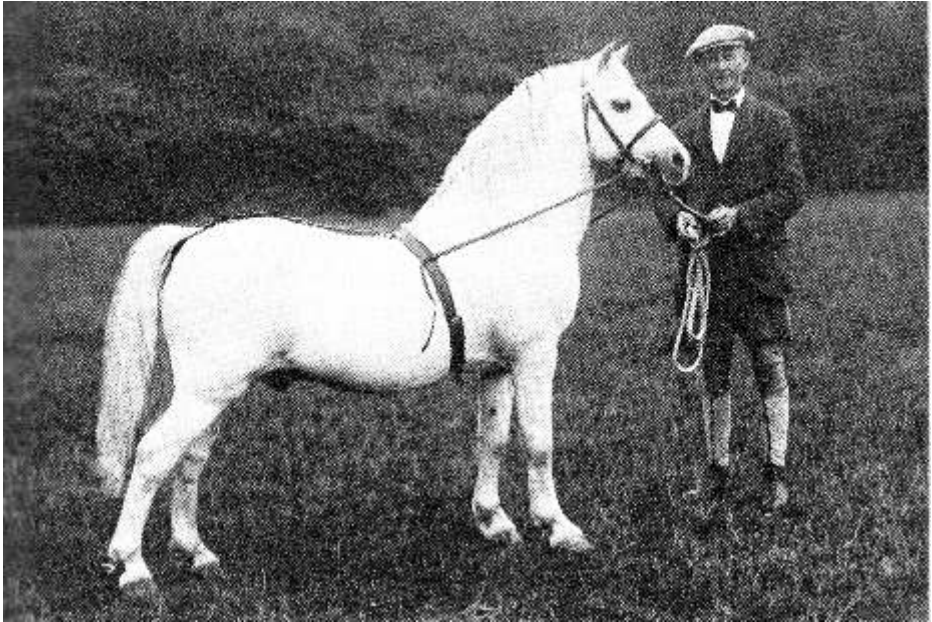
Section B – Ponies of Riding Type, not exceeding 13.2 hands high.

Section C – Cobs and Ponies of Cob Type

It is of the little stallion Bledfa Shooting Star that Olive Tilford Dargan in 1913 writes as follows, in her book 'The Welsh Pony':-

At Olympia, during the International Horse Show, I spent a fatuously happy time in the stables. Many pony types were exhibited and nobly they represented their kind, but I found none so love-inspiring as the little conqueror from Cymric, Bledfa Shooting Star, owned by Sir Walter Gilbey. He is dapple-grey, 11.2 hands high, of perfect shape and brim-full of spirit, not of the self-conscious kind, eager for gratuitous display, but unabashed, careful of the amenities and avowing with all the grace in him that will be your friend if you choose to be his. If he had one defect it is parsimony of tail, though I heard none of his thousands of admirers make that criticism; and he carries it

up and out in true Arabian style. In the arena, when all of the horses came in for the general parade – the big Clydesdales first, followed by representatives of nearly every breed in the world, the procession ending with a wee Shetland, whose mistress is the little Princess Juliana of Holland – it was Shooting Star that received the most impulsive greeting – an applause of love evoked by his irresistible dearness, billowing where he passed until he completed the great circuit. I had the assurance of other who daily haunted the Show that his triumph was a feature of every general parade.



Welsh Mountain Pony Stallion Bledfa Shooting Star No 73 taken at the Royal Welsh Fair at Cardiff, Wales, in 1929, when he was 28 years old. Believed by many judges to be the best Welsh Mountain Pony ever foaled – Photograph by G H Parsons

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I do not hesitate to say that Bledfa Shooting Star has the finest natural action of any animal that I have ever known in a long experience of horses ~ Sir Walter Gilbey in his book 'Thoroughbred and Other Ponies' published in 1910