

NATIVE PONIES OF THE BRITISH ISLES
EXHIBITION & JUDGING CLINIC
DRESSAGE AT DEVON 2005

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EXMOOR PONY

The Exmoor is, like the Dartmoor, a native of the moors of South West England. In addition to being the oldest British Native pony, it is an extremely hardy pony whose primitive features suggest little change since the Stone Age. Caves in the Mendip Hills have revealed bones, from thousands of years ago, which are identical to those of modern Exmoor ponies.

DALES PONY

The Dales Pony is native to the upper dales (which are hills and valleys) of North East England. Bred specifically as a pack pony, they were able to cover rough country carrying heavy weights and at good speeds for up to 200 miles per week. They were a popular all round animal, being used for farm work, shepherding and hunting and yet stylish and fast enough to compete in trotting races. They were also used extensively by The British Army as pack and artillery ponies.

DARTMOOR PONY

From time immemorial, ponies have been running on Dartmoor, which is a large area of bleak Moorland in the South West of England also famous for its prison and as being the setting of the famous R.D. Blackmore classic novel, "Lorna Doone".

The earliest written reference to Dartmoor ponies is said to have been in the 11th century. They made useful pack ponies, being very strong and thrifty for their size. They are now a valued part of the conservation of Dartmoor, helping to keep unwanted trees and the gorse, or broom as it is sometimes known, at bay. They are a popular "lead rein" and children's pony in the UK, but are also strong enough to carry a small adult.

FELL PONY

A recognised breed since Roman times, the Fell pony has roamed the Northern Hills of the old counties of Cumberland and Westmorland in England, now known collectively as Cumbria. A few semi-feral herds still roam these hills. In the past, Fell ponies were used largely as pack horses for the transport of wool from outlying farms to collection points in the towns, and the transport of slate, copper, lead and iron ore from the various mining areas. They were also used extensively for shepherding in these Northern hills because of their extreme sure footedness.

CONNEMARA PONY

The Connemara Pony originated in the West of Ireland and unlike some of the British Natives did not roam freely as wild ponies but were mostly owned singly by farmers. They were expected to work on smallholdings doing a variety of jobs such as carting sea weed from the shores, peat from the peat bogs and of course carrying the family to market and to Church on Sundays. The Irish Connemara Breeder's Association was established in 1923 with the first Connemara Show being held at Roundstone in 1924. The first stud book was published in 1926. Connemaras are renowned for their natural stamina which makes them good long distance riding ponies. They are also sure footed and have great jumping ability.

THE SHETLAND PONY

These ponies have existed on the Shetland Isles at the most Northerly tip of the UK for at least 4000 years. The Shetland Isles are open to gales, buffeted by high seas and are no more than three miles wide. Few trees survive on these isles and so these ponies are accustomed to lack of shelter and can cope with any weather and a minimal diet.

They grow a double dense coat and the long mane and forelock protect the head, eyes and neck from the elements, whilst a thick tail affords the same protection to the hind end. In winter, in their native isles, they dig through deep snow to reach fodder as do their larger counterparts, the Fell ponies. There are many similarities between these two breeds.

NEW FOREST PONY

Canute's Forest Law of 1016 records the presence of horses in The New Forest in Hampshire in the South of England. Just how and when all the ponies passed into private ownership is not certain and few written references have come down through the years, but in general the New forest pony seems to have been valued for its docility, hardiness, strength and sureness of foot.

WELSH SECTION A

This Welsh Mountain pony bred in the mountains and wild regions of Wales has an acknowledged beauty. This does not however mean that they are merely a pretty toy. Centuries of survival of the fittest has ensured the sound constitution, iron hard limbs and great intelligence, which combined with the legendary Welsh temperament, makes the ideal child's pony of today. They were the hill farmer's main means of transport, herding sheep and wild ponies over rough and mountainous country. They had to be hardy, balanced and fast to survive and also have a natural jumping ability.

WELSH SECTION B

The description of the Welsh Section B originally was that of the Welsh Section A pony but rather larger. However, the reality is that the Section B has come to mean a more refined riding type of pony with finer bone. In fact in the UK, it is now quite common for Welsh B's to compete in both Mountain and Moorland Classes and also show or riding pony classes. Whilst it is acknowledged that they make great children's riding ponies and have a natural jumping ability, it is a debatable point if many of the finer boned Welsh B's of today could actually survive on a Welsh Mountain.

WELSH SECTION C

This is the stronger counterpart of the Welsh Section A and B but with cob blood. Their true worth as a dual purpose animal has been fully realised in recent years and their numbers have increased accordingly. They are active, sure footed and ideal for many purposes both for children and adults. Like all the Welsh Breeds they are natural jumpers and excel in harness.

WELSH SECTION D

The Welsh Section D has aptly been described as the best ride and drive animal in the world. The Welsh cob has evolved through many centuries for his courage, tractability and points of excellence. The Welsh Cob is a good hunter and a most competent performer in all competitive sports. In recent years they have had great success in the international driving world.

THE HIGHLAND PONY

The Highland, along with the Shetland is one of the two native ponies of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. It has adapted to the variable and often severe climatic conditions of Scotland. The double winter coat enables this pony to live out in all weathers. Its extreme hardiness is combined with a kindly nature and even temperament. It has long been a working pony in the Scottish Highlands having great substance and strength.

KERRY BOG PONY

Kerry Bog ponies were originally bred in the 17th century in the bogs of County Kerry in Ireland, specifically for working the peatlands to move the cut turf to drying areas. They were very sure footed and could thrive on very little feed: in fact they could live off the moss and heather thereby utilising land that was unavailable to cattle. They were known locally as "hobbys" – hence the term hobby horse. They were also used for working the beaches, hauling sea weed for fertilizer and for taking the family to church in the trap on Sundays.

The Reasons Why...

During the Native Pony "Clinic" at Devon today, you will have heard similar descriptions fitting many of these Native ponies. There are reasons for these, and if Owners, Breeders and Judges understand these reasons, and endeavour to breed or judge "true to type" ponies, then the traditional characteristics of these Native Breeds will endure. These are the reasons for many of the points that you will have heard described today, especially in relation to the "Native heaths, hills, fells and dales" of The British Isles from which these ponies originated.

Small pony ears – extremities like ears and lips feel the cold and can cause ponies to lose condition therefore small ears are less exposed in extreme weather especially on high ground.

Mane, tail and feather – equally important for protection from the elements in cold weather and on high ground,

Broad forehead- Width between a pony's eyes indicates that a pony has good sense. Very seldom do you see a pony that has manners and a good disposition, with a narrow head!

Broad nostrils- a wide nostril indicates a larger air intake capacity which can of course affect performance.

Neck of proportionate length- a pony with a short neck does not give the correct rein length and is thus more difficult to control when being ridden or driven.

Well laid shoulder- the shoulder should be deep with a symmetrical slope and be well muscled. The shoulder is the prime area of driving power in front – it is a weapon of propulsion and as such it must have both power and strength. A sloping shoulder indicates a bolder stroke whilst a straight shoulder means that a pony will hit the ground straighter and harder and for that reason will be more prone to lameness. A straight shoulder is often accompanied by straight pasterns.

Muscular and strong hind quarters- the other main source of propulsion where obviously power and strength is required.

Depth of heart- this is the measurement directly behind the front legs where the girth goes and is the area which encompasses the heart and lungs. It is vital that this area is roomy in order for these organs to function at maximum capacity.

Broad open feet- a contracted heel means that the shell of the hoof is "crowding" the bones inside the hoof and is one of the prime sources of navicular and coffin bone disease.

Pasterns sloping and not too long-the pastern is the bone that acts as the "shock absorber". When the foot hits the ground, the pastern bone "gives" and acts as a spring to help to absorb the shock of impact. If the pastern is too straight, they do not get this normal spring to relieve the strain when they hit the ground. When the pastern is too long, extra strain is placed on the tendons above and below the ankle. Long pasterns behind especially put undue strain on ligaments.

Legs- Ponies with cow hocks, sickle hocks etc. will eventually when working, develop various problems and most importantly, will not be able to produce their correct Breed action.

In addition – when buying or judging a Native pony, there are also other points to consider in addition to the above. There is the question of "heart" – not the actual shape or size of the organ, but the amount of courage, stamina and willingness displayed when the pony is

undertaking various disciplines. There is also that “indefinable” quality known as “presence” which separates the “good” from the “excellent”.

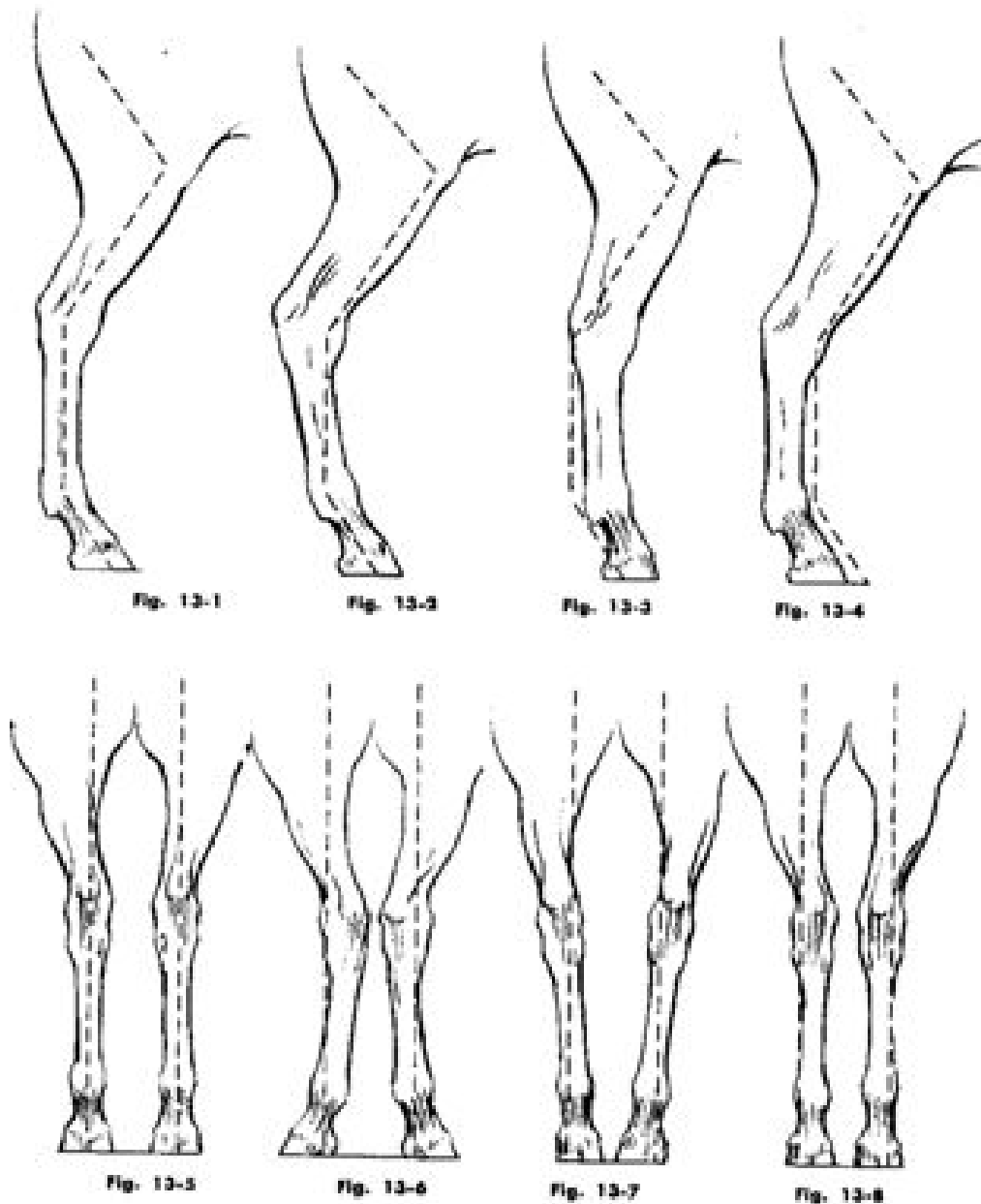


Fig. 13. Various types of hind leg conformation are depicted in these illustrations. In the upper panel, Fig. 13-1 shows a horse with normal hind leg conformation as viewed from the side. Fig. 13-2 demonstrates the sickle-backed condition. In Fig. 13-3, the hock is too straight and thus too far forward while in Fig. 13-4 it is set too far back. In the lower panel, normal conformation, as viewed from the rear, is indicated in Fig. 13-5. The horse is cow-hocked in Fig. 13-6, bowed at the hocks and too narrow at the base in Fig. 13-7, and too narrow at both top and bottom in Fig. 13-8.