

The American Saddlebred

Elegant and Versatile

by Janine Lyons, member of
The American Saddlebred
Association

The American Saddlebred type was first established as a generic all purpose type American Horse with easy gaits, and was first documented in a letter to the Continental Congress from an American diplomat in France in 1776.

One of the early breeds that contributed to the American horse was the Narragansett Pacer, the result of crossing local breeds with Galloways and Hobbies brought to the Americas in the 1600's. Many of these horses were exported to the Caribbean Islands becoming the ancestors to the Paso Fino, and to Canada where they became the ancestor of the Standardbred they also contributed to the Morgan horse. So although the Narangasset Pacer was officially extinct by the 1820, their genetics endure in many other breeds.

By 1816 the American Saddlebred was becoming a distinct type and by crossing the Thoroughbred horse to the local easy gaited horses they produced larger, prettier all purpose horses.

Between 1830 and 1860 - The Highlanders (Thoroughbreds descended from the Godolphin Arabian), added to the early development of the Saddlebred.

During the Civil War (1861-1865) the American saddlebred showed its superiority on the battlefield as a tough, even tempered horse. Most high ranking officials on both sides rode American Saddlebreds the most famous of which were: General Lee's Traveller, General Grant's Cincinnati, General Sherman's Lexington and Stonewall Jackson's Little Sorrell.

After the Civil War ended the horse shows rose in popularity again with the Denmark line of saddlebreds being most popular.

Around 1870 Hackney blood was introduced through the imported stallion Bellfounder, with one of the most famous saddlebred sires Bourbon Chief said to be out of one of his grand daughters.

In 1890 the great Rex McDonald was foaled near Mexico Missouri and became one of the most famous and most popular horses in America, setting the tone for the American Saddlebred.

In 1891 The American Saddlebred Horse Association was formed in Louisville, Kentucky, and was originally known as National Saddle Horse Breeders Association.

In 1900 Bourbon King, foaled near Mt Sterling Kentucky went on to become a sensational 5 gaited show horse winning the Grand Championship at the Louisville Horse show as a 3yo and becoming the progenitor of the sire line of the Chief family of Saddlebreds.

The stallion Denmark FS is recognised as the number one foundation sire of the breed with Harrison Chief FS number two. There were originally seventeen horses classed as foundation sires but these were reduced down to what we know today as two.

The arrival of the breed in Australia

In 1969 Mr and Mrs Ron Besaw purchased four purebred stallions: Bright Guy, Knolland Dark Demon, Peppermint Valley Supreme and Goldmount Challenger; and seven purebred mares in foal: Plainviews Fascination, Vanity's Compass Rose, Bourbons Sensation of Goldmount, Penny West, Shamrocks Carolina, Peppermint Valkyrie and Knolland Misty Moonlight (who died whilst in quarantine in NZ).

Their stud - Sutton Farm near Moss Vale in the Southern Highlands of NSW was the first saddlebred stud in Australia.

Production sales were held at Sutton Farm in 1973 and 1977 contributing to the spread of the breed, and in the latter year, the first association was formed and named the Australian Saddlebred Association, later changed to The American Saddlebred Horse Association of Australia.

The breed in Australia Today

The American Saddlebred and Sporthorse Registries of Australasia or ASSRA Inc. is the only Australian registry.

In 1996 the registry at the request of the US registry adopted blood typing of all purebred stock. Three years later DNA parent verification was introduced for all purebreds.

There are several options for registering of saddlebred stock:

- Purebreds are registered in the A registry and must be DNA parent verified. As a pure breed and therefore you cannot "breed-up" to pure no matter how many crosses. For a stallion to be registered it must pass a vet check.
- Partbreds (min 50%) are registered in the B registry
- Saddlebred sporthorses (min 25%) are registered in the S registry
- there is also a Georgian Grande registry for horses with a min 25% and max 75% saddlebred blood that are crossed with pure draught or draught x draught cross eg Clydesdale, Percheron, Friesian, Irish Draught etc no other light horse blood is allowed.

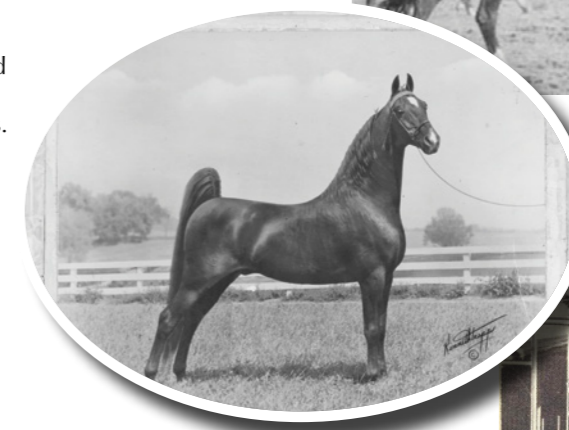


Main Event Photography

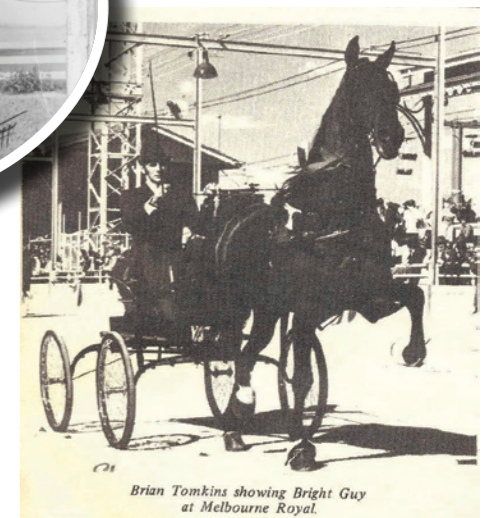
The American Saddlebred type was first established as a generic all purpose type American Horse with easy gaits and continues to be an elegant, athletic, and versatile breed



Horse shows became popular after the American Civil War



The first American Saddlebreds to arrive in Australia were imported in 1969 by Mr and Mrs Besaw and formed the first Australian stud, Sutton Farm, in the Southern Highlands of NSW



Brian Tomkins showing Bright Guy at Melbourne Royal

Melanie Dillmann



Matt Bennett Photography



Recent Saddlebred imports to Australia

In Australia we have complete stud book records dating back to the first imported horses that arrived in 1969.

Some of the more recent imports are:

Two stallions imported in the late 1980's to boost the bloodlines, they were the black stallion Mecca's Midnight Son and the chestnut Romantic Contract.

In the mid 1990's the stallion I Ring Bells was imported along with four purebred mares: Options, Spirit of Sunset, I Am Me and Winsdown Precious Resource.

Later in the 1990's Narrawin stud imported the black stallion Sovrans Midnight Express and Deadwood Farm relocated from California to Victoria with their horses - the black stallion Dreamers Midnight Commander and the Black and White stallion Moonlight Hy-Status. They also brought with them the mares - Tennessee's Rambling Rose, CF Swallowtail and The Tennessee Waltz.

In the late 2000's the Pinto stallion Nitro was imported by Black Orchid stud in WA.

In 2011 the silver bay and white stallion Silver Commander was imported by Platinum Park in Qld, they are also eagerly awaiting the arrival of another stallion a Champagne Double Shot O' Champagne.

In late 2012 Old World Horses in WA imported the grey purebred mare Grey Gardens the first grey purebred American Saddlebred in Australia after the tragic loss of Knollands Misty Moonlight in quarantine in 1969. She is in foal to the lovely black stallion Seaheart and due early April.

Conformation

The American Saddlebred differs from other breeds in its conformation, with the most striking differences found in the head and neck.

The neck should be long and elegant and the head should be well shaped with large wide set expressive eyes. Ears should be nicely shaped and set well on top of the head. They have a straight profile with a small refined muzzle and large nostrils.

Shoulders should be long, deep and sloping with the withers refined and well above the height of the hips.

The back should be short strong and level, the croup should also be level with the tail coming out high.

The front legs should be set well forward under the shoulder, the pasterns sloping and well sprung.

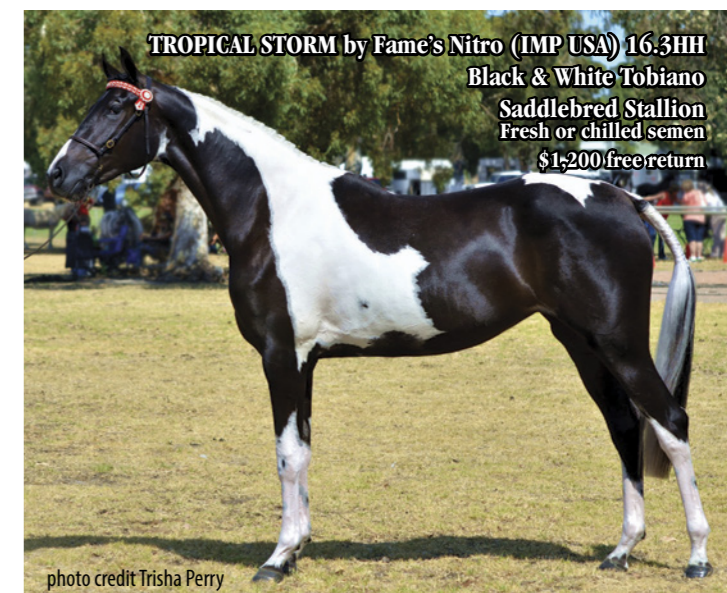
All these features contribute to the saddlebred's elegant way of going and smooth easy gaits.

Saddlebreds range in height from 15 to 17hh. Generally, the taller horses are the more modern type with longer necks, longer backs longer legs... whereas the shorter more stocky types tend to have heavier bone, shorter backs and necks but still keeping within the breed standard and elegance.

The temperament is perhaps the breeds most striking feature of all, they are generally a wonderful people orientated horse with a very trainable nature.

They are alert and curious, and like to check things out. They have been known to run over to see what the scary thing is instead of running away like a normal horse might.

It is this wonderful temperament that has seen them become favourites with movie producers. Some famous movie and TV saddlebred stars are Mr Ed, Fury, Flicka, Black Beauty.



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The breed in Australia today

There are approx 200 living purebreds and approx 300 living partbreds with less than 20 breeders owning the majority of these horses. Some of the famous purebreds are:

Wildmoors Buccaneer was a stunning purebred buckskin stallion, he was the mascot for the Brisbane Broncos Rugby league team for many years. There was even a book published about him.

Rhythmaire purebred mare was a successful galloway hack placing in the top 10 at the horse of the year.

Sarah a partbred crossed with a hackney was very successful at all levels all around Australia in open harness events at Royals and HOTY.

The purebred gelding Kobada's Jacq of Times was exported to the UAE for endurance, since then there have been many more saddlebreds both pure and part exported for endurance.

Last year in the Tom Quilty the purebred mare Southern Charm successfully completed the ride coming home with a coveted buckle (see photo on page 26).

The American saddlebred crosses well with most breeds such as Thoroughbred, Irish Sport Horse, Arabian and Warmbloods.

Crossbreds have excelled in open competitions from Combined Driving to dressage, showjumping and eventing to hacking.

A notable crossbred is Sheppards Hill Michael (registered Saddlebred Sporthorse) was Australia's Number 1 single CDE horse and was selected to represent Australia in Rome.

Gaited horses:

One of the peculiarities of the breed is the 'five gaited' horse. In the US, Saddlebreds compete in different disciplines and divisions such as performance, pleasure and park, and include classes for five-gaited, three-gaited horses and harness horses. Five-gaited horses perform the walk, trot, canter, slow gait and rack.

With the majority of Saddlebreds in Australia used in the mainstream performance arena, the desire for performing the slow gait or rack is not being bred for or encouraged by most breeders, therefore in Australia you will only find approximately 5% of American Saddlebreds to be "naturally" gaited, i.e. they can perform the extra gaits without training. In any case, most saddlebreds can be taught the extra gaits with proper training, but it is easier to find a horse who is naturally gaited if that is what you are looking for.

Saddlebreds are smooth to ride regardless of whether you are trotting or racking, this makes them ideal for people with bad backs or other injuries.

One of the main differences in regards to showing Saddlebreds here in Australia is that they are all shown in a natural state, with no artificial enhancements like hoof pads and tail-setting although some harness horses may use hackney style cruppers under the tail.

Saddlebred Gaits

The Slow Gait was developed from the pace to be a four-beat gait with each of the four feet contacting the ground separately. In the takeoff, the lateral front and hind feet start almost together, but the hind foot contacts the ground slightly before it's lateral forefoot. The slow gait is a restrained, four-beat gait, executed slowly but with true and distinct precision.

The Rack is a four-beat gait with the same footfall pattern as the walk in which each foot meets the ground at equal, separate intervals. It is smooth and highly animated, performed with great action and speed in a slightly unrestrained manner.

For more information about The American Saddlebred go to:
www.saddlebredaustralia.org.au or www.ashs.net



Janine Lyons

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