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By Kelly Davidson Chou

NINE AUSPICIOUS BREEDS

Mountain and Moorland Ponies Make a Name for Themselves in North America



*The Connemara stallion, *ArdCeltic Art, ridden by owner Donna Miller.*

Britain and Ireland's native Mountain and Moorland (M&M) pony breeds have created a great deal of enthusiasm in the United States. The nine breeds recognized by the National Pony Society (NPS) in the United Kingdom (UK) include the Connemara, Dales, Dartmoor, Exmoor, Fell, Highland, New Forest, the four sections of Welsh, and the traditional or "British" Shetland. The Welsh is the most familiar and well-established M&M pony in the country, with the Section B arguably the most popular pony throughout the U.S. Of the remaining eight breeds, the Connemara is the most recognizable to Americans. The other seven range from the rare and unusual,

including the Fell, Highland, and New Forest ponies, to the critically-endangered Exmoor and Dales breeds, with fewer than 900 and 2,900 registered individuals, respectively. The Kerry Bog Pony, although not recognized by the NPS, has a similar history to other M&M breeds.

The definition of an M&M pony is: "One whose ancestors have lived on mountain, moor or common for the last three generations in semi-feral conditions." This depiction asserts that breeders return to "wild" populations for breeding stock to maintain such qualities as durability, vitality, intelligence, and the calm, dependable temperament all M&Ms share.

To survive in their native environments, hardiness is the name of the game. M&M ponies possess robust muscling, short cannons, sturdy knees, and powerful hocks to move over rough ground. They often have luxurious manes and tails with thick winter coats that earn them the delightful nickname “the hairies.” Though the breeds possess much in common, their differences – especially in size and movement – can be striking, and they ultimately determine suitability for a variety of pursuits for small children to the “larger-than-average” adult.

Ireland

Connemara

Hailing from the rugged mountains and valleys of County Galway in Ireland, the Connemara adapted to the pounding storms that routinely brutalize the region. The result was an extremely robust and hardy equine that was likely crossed with Spanish breeds to create the beautiful and elegant pony of today. Standing between 13 and 14.2 hands – though ponies over 14.2 in the U.S. are accepted by the American Connemara Pony Society (ACPS) – the Connemara boasts a graceful, clean-throated neck, set onto well-sloped shoulders. The breed has a good-sized chest for excellent lung capacity, a deep, rounded barrel, strong back, and well-muscled quarters.

Noted for its athleticism and biddable temperament, the Connemara is celebrated for its innate jumping ability – though the breed excels at everything from carriage driving to dressage. Its calm nature makes it a first class Pony Club mount, though the thrill and excitement of the gymkhana ring also suit.

Proving just how competitive the breed can be, *ArdCeltic Art, owned by Roger Brown and Donna Miller from Hidden Creek Farm in Georgia, consistently wins at Intermediate Level three-day eventing and earns scores near 70% at Fourth Level dressage. This amazingly talented stallion was also named “Horse of the Year” by the ACPS in 2009, among many other awards and honors he has collected in recent years.

The ACPS registers 75-100 purebred foals annually. For many years, Connemaras in Canada were also registered by the ACPS, but the breed’s popularity eventually led to the formation of the Canadian Connemara Pony Society in 2006.

Kerry Bog

The Kerry Bog Pony is a native breed of Ireland. Originally used for hauling peat in from the bogs of Ireland, the Kerry Bog Pony also doubled as a cart pony for the family’s transportation needs. However, these gentle, strong ponies suffered from wars, mechanization and importation of the donkey, being nearly eradicated with only 40 ponies thought to remain by the latter half of the 20th century.

The Kerry Bog Pony owes its narrow flee from extinction in large part to the diligent efforts of a Kerryman named John Mulvihill, who brought the plight of these delightful ponies to the forefront of interest in the equine community. This upswing of popularity ignited the interest of Ireland’s leading DNA laboratory, Weatherby’s. John Flynn of Weatherby’s confirmed that the bog ponies’ DNA displayed distinguishing breed markers. A fairy tale was put in motion and the breed was saved.

Standing between 10 and 12 hands, the Kerry Bog Pony possesses a strong, compact body with a strong neck, well rounded, laid back shoulders and well sprung ribs. The breed is characterized by its powerful movement, strong trot and impres-



Photo: Linda C. Ashar

This Kerry Bog foundation stallion, The Spotted Badger, is wearing the original panniers that were used in Ireland to carry peat and other items.

sive strength in relation to their size, as well as their surefootedness in a variety of different terrains. The ponies are renown for their gentle disposition. They are easily trained and love to work, making them suitable both in harness competition and for children.

The first Kerry Bog Pony breeding herd came to the United States in 2003, and the American breed registry of the American Kerry Bog Pony Society (AKBPS) was established in 2004. The breed has grown quickly in the U.S. Imported ponies registered in Ireland are automatically eligible for registration with the American Registry as well as DNA-confirmed foals of registered American or Irish ponies.

Scotland

Highland

The Highland is a rare breed with only 6,000 individuals registered worldwide. With its great substance, it is one of the strongest of the M&Ms. The Highland ranges between 13 and 14.2 hands. Though substantial, Highlands are still ponies and must maintain such qualities as a well-made head with a broad forehead and large, well-set eyes. The neck is powerful and nicely arched. Shoulders are sloping and forearms are strong and placed well under the body for sturdiness. Cannons are well boned and short, and the feet are large and tough. Highlands have luxurious flowing manes and tails with silky feathering on the legs. Its quiet nature and willing disposition produce a great children’s lesson pony or a mount for the disabled.

Many of the owners of these versatile ponies are dedicated to getting this rare breed seen by the public, frequently participating in parades, equine exhibits, and other public events.

Circle H MacKenzie, owned by Pat and Judy Brescia in Virginia, is a true all-rounder, competing successfully in low level dressage and M&M classes. This spunky gelding is proving quite the breed ambassador through regular participation in local parades, costume classes and exhibitions, including two appearances at Equine Affaire in Massachusetts. Recently, he was



The Highland pony, Circle H MacKenzie ridden by Judy Brescia.

introduced to the sport of Le Trec, which combines mounted orienteering and obstacle courses, and like everything else he puts a "hoof to," he is doing it extremely well.

All purebred foals are registered by the Highland Pony Society in Scotland. With fewer than 90 ponies in North America, annual registry for foals born in the U.S. and Canada



The traditional or "British" Shetland is a compact wonder, having a strong, muscular structure, a square stance with a rounded barrel and well-sprung ribs.

rarely exceeds 10.

Shetland

Unlike the American Shetland, the traditional or "British" Shetland is a compact wonder, having a strong, muscular structure, a square stance with a rounded barrel and well-sprung ribs. It possesses a sloping shoulder that forms a triangle from point of shoulders to withers to head. Front legs are straight and sturdy with short, wide cannon bones. A refined, "leggy" look is undesirable. The Shetland personality is steady with an even, friendly attitude and a native intelligence that is willing and trainable.


AMERICAN KERRY BOG PONY SOCIETY




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Since the import of the first breeding herd of 6 from Ireland in 2003, the rare Kerry Bog Pony has grown to more than 50 purebred ponies with 5 breeders now in the U.S. The American Kerry Bog Pony Society keeps the U.S. breed Registry and DNA database. 3 Foundation Stallions of this endangered breed stand in the U.S. Visit us at ~www.KerryBogPony.org~

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As a leadline pony or first ridden pony, the Shetland is hard to beat. Olney Nick Nack, owned and ridden by Daisy and Tommy Fenwick, is a first-rate children's performance pony, doing everything from leadline to low hunters. The gelding has won "Best Child's Pony" numerous times at a variety of breed shows and other performance events, much to the delight of his owners and his many fans!

Outside of Britain, there is much pressure to alter the Shetland type. The Shetland Pony Society of North America (SPSNA) was formed to maintain the integrity of the breed in the U.S. and Canada. The SPSNA currently has 220 registered ponies and registers three to five purebred foals annually.

England

Dales

Though not often recognized in the U.S., the Dales Pony is a highly versatile breed, extremely suited to both riding and driving. Its agility and surefootedness, coupled with a gentle and willing attitude, make it a fantastic trail mount for timid or disabled riders. It provides confidence to young children and mature adults new to jumping and affords thrills in the hazards of a combined driving event (CDE).

The breed stands between 14 and 14.2 hands. They possess a powerful, sloping shoulder, well-sprung ribs, and a short-coupled trunk. Dales are renowned in the UK for their extremely sound and well-formed feet. The head should be straight or slightly Roman in profile with a small muzzle and short incurving ears. The Dales' eye-catching trot sets the breed apart; it is



Photo: Kelly Davidson Crow

The Dales stallion, Colliery Alick, owned by Davidson Dales.

straight and true with great use of knees and hocks.

Debbie Hamilton, of the Hamilton Rare Breeds Foundation in Vermont, says of the Dales' athletic ability, "The breed can do a lot of things well but they really shine as driving ponies. They are incredibly dependable in harness." Her trio of grey geldings, Redprairie Gandalf, Redprairie Chancellor, and Greenmountain Rob Roy McGregor had tremendous success in the late 2000s competing as singles and as an intermediate level pair in CDEs across the East Coast and Canada. Davidson Dales' stallion Colliery Alick is a true all-rounder, earning championships in the jumper ring, pleasure driving competitions, and in ridden M&M classes. In 2007, he was honored at the Welsh American Nationals in California as Ridden Reserve Champion under UK judge Jane Etheridge.

The Dales Pony Society of America, a recognized daughter registry of the Dales Pony Society in the UK, registers five to 10 purebred foals annually.

Dartmoor

Like all the M&M breeds, the Dartmoor is extremely hardy and sound. Though it possesses substance, it has many qualities of a good riding pony, with a longer, more elegant neck and well-laid sloping shoulders. The head is small with large, intelligent eyes and characteristically small pony ears. The canons are short and ample, and height should not exceed 12.2 hands. Dartmoor action is notable among the M&M breeds for the lack of knee lift at the trot. With its smooth action and easy-going temperament, the Dartmoor makes an ideal child's pony and competes successfully in leadline and first ridden classes. Dartmoors jump well and can make wonderful hunters or Pony Club mounts for children.

In the U.S., the breed excels in carriage driving. Four-time national driving champion, Muffy Seaton, introduced the world to Dartmoors as FEI level competition ponies. Her ponies won

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Photo: Susan Deutermon

A pair of Dartmoors owned by Betty Steel (whip).

every major CDE in the East, and in 1997, she was invited to represent the U.S. at the Royal Windsor Horse Show in England. Tracey Morgan was soon to follow with her Dartmoor pair, Lizwell Gambling Queen and SingleTree Tabitha Twitichit. Among other notable achievements, the pair won the silver medal in dressage in the pairs division in Denmark at the 2007 World Championships for Pony Combined Driving.

The Dartmoor Pony Registry of America maintains the official American studbook and provides information and education to the public about the breed. Since 2003, the organization registers an average of 20 purebred foals annually.



Marlyn Domino, an Exmoor gelding owned by Katie McCaffery.

Exmoor

This oldest and purest of the M&M breeds is also the most critically endangered. The Exmoor is very distinctive and unlikely to be mistaken for another breed. The mares should not exceed 12.2 hands; stallions may reach 12.3. Their coloring is always “Wild Bay,” which can range from nearly black to a light dun, with a “mealy colored” muzzle and similar coloring around the eyes and on the flanks. Unlike other M&M breeds, white markings are not permissible.

The unique environment of Exmoor has created a strong pony with a straighter shoulder than is usually seen in riding ponies. But, this very useful breed still performs admirably as a riding mount for children and small adults and as a competitive

driving pony.

Though there are fewer than 30 Exmoors in all of North America, that didn’t prevent Marlyn Domino, a gelding owned by Katie McCaffery of New York, from earning the Reserve Supreme Ridden Championship at the inaugural Festival of Endangered Equine’s competition component, the Stewardship Awards of North America (SANA).

Katie says of her beloved gelding, “We are using him for lessons with kids and a woman with multiple sclerosis, and he’s so gentle with them. I ride him around bareback in a halter all the time. But, when I take him into the show ring, he is ready to go and show his stuff. Several years ago at Dressage at Devon, Domino was M&M small pony champion; he can do just about anything!”

All purebred Exmoor foals are registered through the Exmoor Pony Society in the UK. Annual registrations of foals born in North America average fewer than five.

Fell

The Fell Pony is a versatile breed originating in northwestern England. Noted for agility, strength, hardiness and great beauty, it is strongly built, active and very forward in its paces.

The Fell does not exceed 14 hands. The head is well shaped, and unlike the Dales, some dishing is acceptable. It has



Littletree Bodini, a Fell pony stallion owned and shown by Melissa Kreuzer of Dream Hayven Farm, performing at the Bristol Renaissance Faire.

Photo: Jeffrey Gibson

large, expressive eyes and small pony ears, with a good length of neck and a long, thick mane and tail of quality hair. The breed possesses a strong back, rounded quarters and short cannons with dense bone. The Fell is a fantastic family pony and can be ridden by most members of the family – from small children to adults. It is suited to both riding and driving, and many Fells make safe and reliable jumping ponies.

With both competitive and recreational carriage driving gaining in popularity in the U.S., Fells in North America are rising to the occasion. Demonstrating just how competitive Fells can be in pleasure driving shows, the gelding *General de Knip*, owned by Elaine Olsen in California, won United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) "Horse of the Year" National Champion for Single Pleasure Driving Pony in 2009. In addition to pleasure driving shows, the gelding also successfully competed at the preliminary Single Pony Level in combined driving, handily winning the marathon section at the prestigious Shady Oaks CDE in 2007.

North America produces 30-40 purebred Fells annually. All foals are registered by the Fell Pony Society in the UK.

New Forest

The New Forest is sturdily built but still possesses great elegance of conformation and movement. In their native environment in southern England, they have to traverse rugged and boggy ground; so, strong, well-shaped feet are a must. They have sloping shoulders, strong backs, and well-muscled quarters. Short, strong cannons with well-built knees and hocks are characteristic of the breed. They range from 12 to 14.2 hands.



Photo Courtesy of Okjen Farm.

New Forest stallion, *Okjen's Pico Bello*.

New Forest ponies are very friendly, outgoing ponies and usually train easily for a variety of tasks. The New Forest is well suited as a children's pony or as a mount for timid adult riders.

In the United States, the New Forest Pony is finally gaining recognition as a first-class athlete in the hunter/jumper ring. Two geldings took top honors in both the hunter and jumper divisions at the 2007 Pony Finals. *Enchanted Forest*, an imported New Forest gelding, was the Medium and Grand Pony Hunter Champion at the USEF Pony Hunter Finals, and *Magic BB* was the USEF National Pony Jumper Individual Champion – a significant accomplishment for a breed not easily recognized by most equine enthusiasts in the U.S.!

The New Forest Pony Society of North America (NFPSNA) is the recognized daughter studbook of the New Forest Pony Breeding & Cattle Society in the UK, registering 15-20 foals annually. An additional independent organization, the New Forest Pony Association (NFPA), was founded in 1989. The association provides a registry for ponies in both the U.S. and Canada and has registered about 350 individuals since 1992.

Kelly Davidson Chou is the Chairman of NPS America – the first international chapter of the National Pony Society in the UK. Its mission is to support and recognize the nine M&M breeds and the British Riding Pony in the United States. You can reach her through the organization's website at www.NPSAmerica.org.

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