

By Janice Voss-Crosby

DISCOVER THE AMERICAN CURLY HORSE...

The Equine of Your Dreams

The American Curly Horse is a true Native American breed that is finding a worldwide audience with its growing popularity. The Curly Horse, originally found in the wild mustang herds of the West, has been selectively bred to include many different types, all possessing the distinctive Curly Horse characteristics that set it

apart from other breeds – the hypoallergenic coat, tractable nature and hardiness. Through careful out-crossing, the Curly Horses of today now range in size from miniature to over 16 hands, come in many body types, and are found on the trail, in the show ring, performing dressage, eventing, driving, in therapeutic programs, and in the backyard.





Photo: Krista Bekker Harvey

The winter coat is the most distinguishing feature of the Curly Horse and ranges from almost straight to crushed velvet looking.

No wonder these personable and unique horses have been exported to Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The secret is getting out – there really is a Curly Horse for everyone!

A Distinctive Coat

There are two types of Curly Horses: those who carry the recessive curly gene, and those who express the dominant curly gene. The American Curly Horses is a group of horses that shares the dominant curly gene, or group of genes with modifiers, and these genes are dominant over straight-haired horses. In 2010, new research was funded for a new, complete gene scan of the Curly Horse DNA in hopes of locating the curly-hair gene. At this time, the actual genetics of the Curly Horse remain unknown. It is known from observation that the Curly Horses can be homozygous, carrying two dominant curly genes and always producing curly offspring. The great Curly Horse, Spartacus, was homozygous for curl, always producing curly offspring from both curly and non-curly mares. Other horses expressing the dominant curl are heterozygous, having one curly and one straight gene, producing both curly and non-curly horses. Interestingly, these straight foals often exhibit the bunny-haired coat and can also be hypoallergenic.

The winter coat is the most distinguishing feature of the Curly Horse and ranges from almost straight to crushed velvet looking, to Marcel waves, to tight ringlets, to “French knot” micro curls. Their thick winter coat is made up of several layers of hair. The thick, curly outer layer repels rain and snow. Manes

and forelocks can be corkscrews, ringlets, or dreadlocks, and are often split with ringlets hanging down the sides of the neck. Tails may have some wave or curl. The hair in their ears is curly; the whiskers, eyelashes, and fetlocks are often curly or wavy. Some shed part or all of their mane and tail hair in summer.

Whether curly- or straight-coated, the most notable trait of the Curly Horses is their hypoallergenic quality. People who are allergic to horses are more tolerant of Curly Horses, with many showing no allergic reaction at all. Through research, the Curly Horses have been found to have fewer allergy-causing proteins. They have the same proteins, but there are fewer quantities of them, so people do not react as much. What makes Curly hair different is the twist that is found in the hairs; it is a three-dimensional curl, shaped like a corkscrew. It most resembles the shape of the Suri alpaca, as they also have three-dimensional curls. Curly hair is even spun and used to make garments!

Hardy and Dependable

Another remarkable quality of the Curly Horse is their tractable, steady and calm temperament. The Curly Horse has a gentle, kind manner and a tolerant nature, extraordinary intelligence, a willingness to work, and an affinity to training. They learn quickly and retain their lessons, making them generally easy to train. Curly Horses also tend to assess and think things through rather than panic and flee when faced with unexpected situations. The Curly Horses are generally people-orientated, sensitive, and tend to bond closely with their people.

There are many stories about how hardy the Curly Horses are. Broadly speaking, they are hardier than other breeds, will



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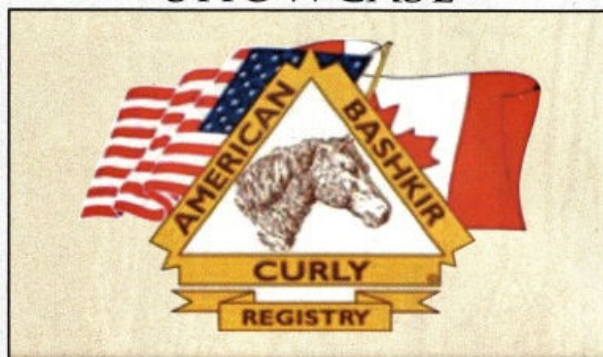
do better on their feed, and are generally not high-maintenance horses. However, they do require the same care as any other horse, including quality hay and grain, and farrier and veterinary care.

An Unknown Origin

The origin of the American Curly Horse is unknown. Currently, ancestral DNA testing is being conducted to try and determine where the Curly Horse originated. What this testing has shown is that there is no breed all Curly Horses trace back to. The only thing they seem to have in common is the curly-coat dominant gene(s). There are many theories as to the origin of the curly gene, several of which are likely possibilities; however, there is no proof of these yet.

There is a Native American legend that the Curly Horse is "the horse before there were horses." Curly Horses were documented in Asian artwork as early as 161 A.D. It is also known that the Crow and Sioux documented having Curly Horses in their winter counts. High Dog, a Lakota Indian, depicted the Sioux stealing Curly Horses from the Crow Indians in the winter count of 1801-1802. The Curly Horse, or buffalo ponies, were sacred horses to the Indians and were used by the Chiefs and Medicine Men. Chief Red Horse, a Minneconjou, created drawings of the battle of the Little Bighorn in 1881, and one of the pictures depicted an Indian riding a Curly Horse. A "wooly mare and a bald colt" were listed in an Ohio estate inventory from 1828. There are numerous documented instances of Curly Horses from the last three centuries, including Charles Darwin referring to Felix de Azara's work in 1802, which documented Curly Horses in Paraguay, South America. P.T. Barnum also purchased a Curly Horse from a Cincinnati agent in 1847 and promoted it as a woolly horse. Curly Horses have been intertwined

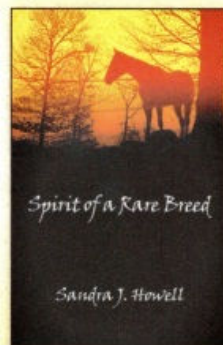
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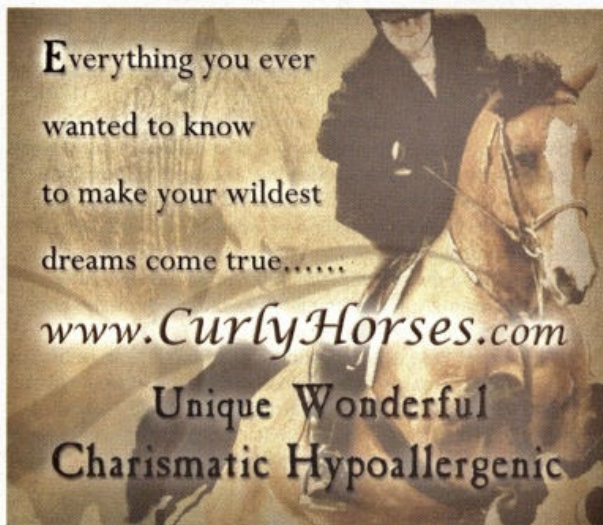
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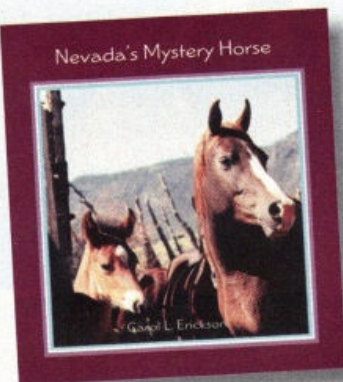
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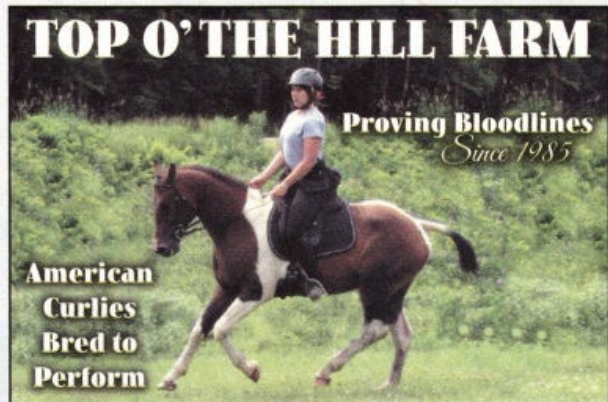


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with our history for centuries.

The Damele family of Eureka, Nevada, started the modern history of the Curly Horse when they captured feral Curly Horses in the first half of the last century. They noted that these extremely rare Curly Horses were the only range survivors of the harsh winters of 1932 and 1951 and decided to incorporate this hardiness into their working stock. Other pockets of Curly Horses were found in various wild herds scattered throughout North America and these are the foundation of the Curly breed. The Curly Horses of today are the descendents of these native curly-coated North American horses.

The Curly Horse of Today


The Curly Horse has come a long way since its days of running free over the rangelands of North America. When the few and rare wild Curly Horses were captured in the early 20th century, they were crossed with Arabians and Morgans to prevent excessive inbreeding. Eventually, out-crosses with Appaloosas and Missouri Foxtrotters were also incorporated into the bloodlines. Other breeds have been introduced over the years, and now there are a variety of types to suit most equestrian needs. In spite of this out-crossing to expand the gene pool, the Curly Horse of today continues to share many physical characteristics with primitive horses, including wide-set eyes with an elliptic slant to them and wide-set ears that are somewhat blunt at the tip or gently curved. Their faces can be long and narrow, with a generally straight profile, along with a somewhat shallow and fairly short mouth, and medium to small nostrils. The Curly Horse generally has a short back with a medium-length neck that is deep at the base, solid-boned legs with a short cannon bone as compared to the forearm, and almost round, tough, thick-walled hooves. They may have smaller chestnuts and smaller or missing ergots. This is in addition to their most obvious characteristic, the curly coat!

The Curly Horse is generally sound, well proportioned and balanced with an overall desirable conformation. Their movement is bold, long-strided, and forward-moving.

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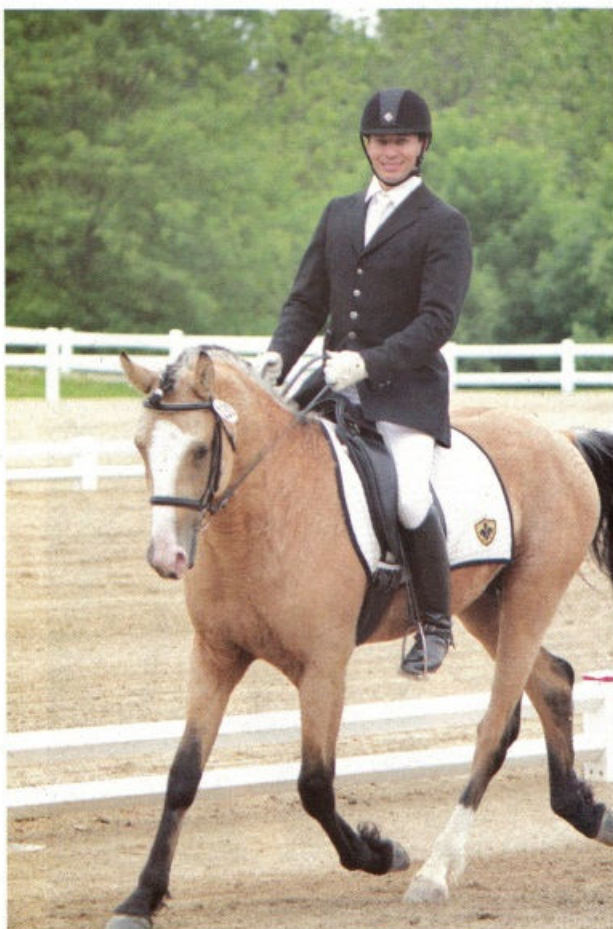
Types of Curly Horses

You can find a Curly Horse suited to any discipline you participate in. When shown, Curly Horses are not required to be clipped in order to display their unique Curly traits.

Curly sport horses participate in dressage, eventing, show jumping and combined driving. A Curly sport horse should show free, straight, forward movement with good suspension and power, moving with an elevated forehand, pushing well from the hocks and hindquarters, and showing elastic and energetic forward-moving gaits. The back should be swinging and show good freedom of the shoulder, good reach with the hind legs, and long strides. You will find Curly Horses excelling in all disciplines, and their growing success is being seen everywhere they are shown.

The stock type Curly Horse is a working saddle horse with well-balanced stock horse conformation. The muscle pattern is thicker than other Curly types, but not enough to interfere with athletic movement. They have a long, free-strided movement for a ground-covering walk, smooth fluid trot, and comfortable lope.

Photo: Michelle Cook



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Photo: EventingNation.com

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Other Curly types include the gaited Curly Horses, smooth-coated Curly Horses, Curly miniatures and ponies, Curly drafts, and non-specialized Curly saddle horses.

The Registries

The American Bashkir Curly Horse Registry (ABCR) was established in 1971 with 21 Curly Horses. In 1999, the ABCR closed its books to any outcrossing, and anticipates that the ABCR Curly Horse type will be set in five to 10 generations. Various programs are offered for promotion of the ABC horse.

The International Curly Horse Organization (ICHO) was founded in 2000 for registering all Curly Horses, including those adopted from the BLM. It provides for those wishing to continue crossing and improving Curly Horse quality, setting specific types toward breed genesis, as well as preserving old bloodlines. Education and research is a primary focus. The International Curly North American Curly Horse Inspection Program (NACH-IP) is an inspection program implemented by ICHO to provide quality evaluation of Curly Horses using uniform rating and inspection scores compatible with ICAMS, the International Curly Approved Mare and Stallion studbook.

Curly Sporthorse International (CSI) was created in 2003 to support sport horse Curly owners and breeders in improvement of breeding stock, promotion, and marketing. CSI also sponsors Horse of the Year awards, a futurity, and USDF All Breed Awards for performance. CSI advocates evaluation of breeding stock and their offspring to ensure the quality of horses produced.

If you would like to learn more about the American Curly Horses, their breeders, and their very happy owners, please visit the Curly Horse registries and curlyhorses.com. ■