

Black Beauty (2020 film)

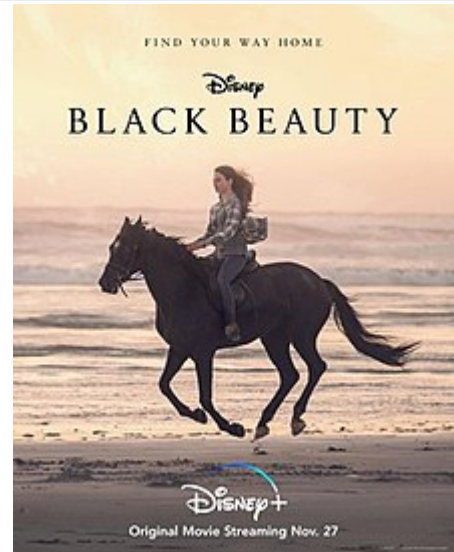
Black Beauty is a 2020 adventure drama family film written, edited and directed by Ashley Avis and based on the 1877 novel of the same name by Anna Sewell. A co-production between the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, France and Germany, it stars Kate Winslet, Mackenzie Foy, Claire Forlani, Iain Glen and Fern Deacon and is the sixth cinematic adaptation. In the film, Black Beauty is portrayed as a mare instead of a stallion (The horse in the original story was a gelding.) and is brought to Birtwick Park where she forges a bond with a spirited teenager that carries through different chapters, challenges and adventures. Originally scheduled for a theatrical release, it was unable to be released in cinemas due to the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The film's distribution rights were acquired by Walt Disney Studios and was released on the company's streaming service Disney+ on November 27, 2020. It received mixed reviews from critics. The film was removed from Disney+ on May 26, 2023.^[1]

Plot

A wild mustang narrates her life from birth, born free within the Onaqui Mountains of Utah. She explains that her mother taught that when horses pass away, they fly into the sky to rest among the stars. One day, the mustang draws the attention of some cowboys, who wrangle her herd; she never sees her mother again. A horse trainer named John Manly purchases the mustang and takes her to Birtwick, a horse sanctuary. While she likes John, the mustang refuses to cooperate, but John remains patient. The mustang befriends two other horses named Ginger and Merrylegs.

John is informed that his sister and her husband died in a car accident, leaving him to care for his niece, Jo Green. Jo wants nothing to do with John but becomes entranced with the difficult mustang. Eventually, the mustang recognizes Jo's pain as similar to her own, and they connect. Jo tames the mustang and names her Black Beauty, or Beauty for short. John gets through to Jo by having her work in the stables and tend to Beauty. They popularize the phrase "partnering" a horse as opposed to "breaking" a horse. John informs Jo that they will eventually have to sell Beauty, but Jo refuses.

Black Beauty



Disney+ release poster

Directed by	<u>Ashley Avis</u>
Screenplay by	Ashley Avis
Based on	<i>Black Beauty</i> by <u>Anna Sewell</u>
Produced by	<u>Jeremy Bolt</u> <u>Robert Kulzer</u>
Starring	<u>Kate Winslet</u> <u>Mackenzie Foy</u> <u>Claire Forlani</u> <u>Iain Glen</u> <u>Fern Deacon</u>
Narrated by	Kate Winslet
Cinematography	David Procter
Edited by	Ashley Avis
Music by	Guillaume Roussel
Production companies	<u>Constantin Film</u> JB Pictures Bolt Pictures Moonlighting Films <u>Walt Disney Pictures</u> (uncredited)

One night, a fire breaks out when a stablehand doesn't turn off a heater, and the horses are evacuated. With Birtwick losing money, Jo is concerned that Beauty will be sold but works out a deal with John's boss, Henry Gordon, so that she can work extra to earn the money to buy Beauty. The upperclass Winthorp family who are migrants from England arrive to purchase horses for their estate with the daughter Georgina immediately choosing Beauty to be leased. John convinces them to have Jo come along as her tenant. At the Earls Hall estate, Beauty learns that her friend Ginger was purchased for the Winthorp's son George, who unlike Georgina, is kind and takes an interest in Jo.

Georgina is cruel and rude to Beauty, who resists the urge to harm her as it would get her and Jo in trouble. A race is held at a social gathering where Georgina's poor riding results in Beauty injuring a leg. George stands up to his mother, and the Winthorps return Beauty. However, John informs Jo that Birtwick is closing and all the horses have to be sold. Beauty is taken away without Jo getting a chance to say goodbye. She becomes determined to find and buy her again.

Beauty is sold to a ranger named Terry, and they go on rescue missions in the wilderness. Eventually Terry retires, and Beauty is given to a farmer who uses old tools, forcing her to work harder. Then she is sold to a kind carriage driver in New York City whose daughter names her Lady. One night, Beauty is reunited with Ginger, who had been sold without George's knowledge, but she dies shortly afterwards.

When Jerry gets sick, Beauty is sold to another carriage company, which treats its horses cruelly and engages in illegal horse trading. While out driving, Beauty spots Ginger's body being taken away. Heartbroken, Beauty sits on the road during her carriage rotation, which draws media attention. The company attempts to sell Beauty, but a kind stable boy named Manuel alerts the police of the company's illegal activities. Jo finds Beauty and reunites with her. Jo reveals that she has rebuilt Birtwick and works with John and George, now her husband, to rehabilitate horses; she even finds that Merrylegs was also recovered. Beauty lives with Jo for the rest of her days.

Distributed by	<u>Disney+</u>
Release date	November 27, 2020 (United States)
Running time	110 minutes
Countries	United States United Kingdom South Africa Germany France
Language	English
Budget	\$24 million

Cast

- Kate Winslet as Black Beauty (voice)
- Mackenzie Foy as Jo Green
 - Faith Bodington as Jo Green (age 12)
- Iain Glen as John Manly
- Calam Lynch as George Winthorp
- Claire Forlani as Mrs. Winthorp
- Fern Deacon as Georgina Winthorp
- Hakeem Kae-Kazim as Terry
- Max Raphael as James
- Matt Rippy as Henry Gordon
- David Sherwood as Mr. York

- Bjorn Steinbach as Mario
- Patrick Lyster as Mr. Winthorp
- Craig Hawks as Walker
- Katja Hopkins as Jill
- Greg Parvess as Jerry
- Sascha Nastasi as Jennifer
- Alex Jeaven as Jasmine
- Nahum Hughes as Manuel

Black Beauty is portrayed by four different horses: Spirit, Jenny, Awards and Rosie. The horse that portrays her as a foal is named Black Beauty. Beauty's mother Duchess, is portrayed by a horse named Beauty. Ginger was portrayed by Susie and Orion. Merrylegs was portrayed by Lulu Belle and Victoria.

Production

It was announced in May 2019 that a new movie adaptation of [Anna Sewell's](#) 1877 novel *Black Beauty* was in development with [Ashley Avis](#) writing, editing and directing the film. [Mackenzie Foy](#) and [Kate Winslet](#) were set to star in the film.^[2] Filming began in [South Africa](#) in October 2019 with [Claire Forlani](#) and [Iain Glen](#) joining the cast.^[3]

Release

In July 2020, [Walt Disney Pictures](#) acquired distribution rights to the film from [Constantin Film](#).^[4] *Black Beauty* was released digitally on [Disney+](#) on November 27, 2020.^[5]

Reception

On review aggregator [Rotten Tomatoes](#), the film holds an approval rating of 48% based on 46 reviews, with a mixed-to-positive rating of 5.3/10. The website's critics consensus reads: "Unable to rein in the complexities of its source material, *Black Beauty* struggles to gallop out of the paddock."^[6] On [Metacritic](#), it has a [weighted average score](#) of 52 out of 100, based on 12 critics, indicating "mixed or average reviews".^[7]

Fionnuala Halligan of [Screen Daily](#) found the movie to be a solid reinterpretation of Anna Sewell's novel, complimented the performances of the actors, and praised the chemistry between Kate Winslet and Mackenzie Foy's characters, saying, "Like Anna Sewell's original novel, this film's heart is very much in the right place."^[8] Amy Amatangelo of [Paste](#) rated the film 7.8 out of 10, saying, "The movie looks stunning with sweeping landscapes and gorgeous shots of Beauty in action, as South Africa makes a lovely stand-in for both the American West and New York. An inspiring movie for young, old and everyone in between, I would be shocked if the movie's final moments didn't lead to a cathartic cry for every viewer. The beauty of this story is timeless."^[9] Jennifer Green of [Common Sense Media](#) rated the movie 3 out of 5 stars, praised the depiction of positive messages and role models, writing, "*Black Beauty* is emotionally taxing, with the central horse suffering abuse, loss, and danger. - That said, the film, told mostly from the horse's perspective, ultimately shows a clear respect and admiration for the animals, and it conveys positive messages of loyalty, family, perseverance, resilience."^[10]

Kayti Burt of *Den of Geek* rated the movie 2.5 out of 5 stars, praised Ashley Avis' direction, writing, "Ashley Avis hits all the plot points and throws in some fantastically pretty shots in the process, yet there is a lack of texture (both visually and narratively) that keeps this film from graduating from serviceable horse-girl film to something greater both within and outside the limits of Horse Girl Canon" and that the movie "lacks the thematic ambition of its source material, but is a serviceable addition to Horse Girl Canon."^[11] Sara Stewart of the *New York Post* rated the film 2.5 out of 5 stars, writing, "One of the purposes of the book was to shine a line on animal cruelty, which is admirable — but *Black Beauty* veers so often into the dark and the sad I question how much appeal it'll really have for the younger set. Still, if your tear ducts need cleaning, this is one holiday film that'll get the job done."^[12] Monica Castillo of *RogerEbert.com* rated the movie 2 out of 4 stars, claiming, "Avis' film clearly adores its four-legged subjects. Through David Procter's cinematography, she recreates the look and feel of one of Disney's nature documentaries for the first moments of *Black Beauty*'s life. It's a golden-hour, idealized look at a herd of horses galloping through fields and in the shadows of mountains. [...] It's a narrative choice that may work better for some than others, and it probably won't ride well with devotees of the book."^[13]

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External links

- *Black Beauty* (<https://www.disneyplus.com/movies/wp/5xbIDh090q9k>) on Disney+
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