

= Heck horse =

The Heck horse is a horse breed that is claimed to resemble the tarpan ( *Equus ferus ferus* ) , an extinct wild equine . The breed was created by the German zoologist brothers Heinz Heck and Lutz Heck in an attempt to breed back the tarpan . Although unsuccessful at creating a genetic copy of the extinct species , they developed a breed with grullo coloration and primitive markings . After the Nazi invasion of Poland , they were introduced to the Białowieża Forest , where a small herd still survives . Heck horses were subsequently exported to the United States , where a breed association was created in the 1960s .

= = Breed characteristics = =

Heck horses are dun or grullo ( a dun variant ) in color , with no white markings . The breed has primitive markings , including a dorsal stripe and horizontal striping on the legs . Heck horses generally stand between 12 @. @ 2 and 13 @. @ 2 hands ( 50 and 54 inches , 127 and 137 cm ) tall . The head is large , the withers low , and the legs and hindquarters strong . The hooves are strong , often not needing shoeing . The gait of the Heck horse is high stepping , which makes them comfortable to ride and which is considered attractive while being driven . The breed is described as being calm , friendly , curious and intelligent , although very independent . The physical description of tarpans was very similar - strong , approximately the same height , and with the same coloration and primitive markings .

= = History = =

The tarpan was a Eurasian wild horse that became extinct in the wild in 1879 , due to hunting and crossbreeding with domesticated horses , and in 1887 the last captive horse died in Russia . The Heck horse was created by the German zoologist brothers Heinz Heck and Lutz Heck , director of the Berlin Zoo , at the Tierpark Hellabrunn ( Munich Zoo ) in Germany in their attempt to breed back the tarpan . The Hecks believed they could recreate the extinct tarpan subspecies by back breeding living descendants . They believed they could combine and rearrange the genetic material from these living descendants into a recreation of the extinct horse . Other breeders had the same idea , and used different genetic stock to attempt to recreate the tarpan or a reasonable look @-@ alike . One result was a line of horses bred from American Mustangs by a breeder named Harry Hegardt .

The Heck brothers bred together several European small horse and pony breeds hypothesized to be descended from the tarpan . They eventually integrated mares of the Konik , Icelandic horse , and Gotland breeds . These mares were bred to stallions of a wild horse type known as Przewalski 's horse . The Hecks believed the wild Przewalski blood would help to draw out the wild characteristics they felt lay dormant in the domesticated pony breed mares . The initial crosses were made between Gotland and Icelandic mares ( who visually closely resembled the tarpan , especially in the shape of the head ) and Przewalski 's horse stallions ( who provided the desired dun coloration and upright mane ) , and the offspring were then bred to each other . The first foal born from the program who had the desired coloration was a colt born on May 22 , 1933 at the Tierpark Hellabrunn . The breeding program continued , using only those horses who showed the desired skull shape , bone structure and coloration . Relatively quickly , the breed 's conformation and coloration became set , with parents reliably passing their characteristics onto their offspring .

During World War II , horses of the desired type were taken from German @-@ occupied countries to use in the Hecks ' breeding program . Tadeusz Vetulani , a Polish biologist , had been working with Konik horses , at that point believed to be descended from tarpans , with the goal ( like the Hecks ) of recreating the tarpan . Some of the horses from his program had been reintroduced to the forests of Białowieża , Poland . During the war , the Hecks removed the animals from the forest and used them in their own breeding programs . Vetulani considered this a " baffling campaign of destruction " , and the Hecks ' actions effectively ended his breeding program . Some of the resulting Heck horses , closely resembling tarpans , were sent back to Białowieża , to become part

of a hunting preserve for Nazi government officials . The land , and the horses , were returned to Polish management after the war ended . As of 2007 , a small herd of the horses remained , living with little interference from humans , in Bia?owie?a Forest , Europe 's last remaining area of primeval lowland forest . The Hecks had conducted a similar breeding program in hopes of recreating the aurochs , resulting in what would become Heck cattle .

= = = Export and crossbreeding = = =

The first Heck horse in the United States was a stallion named Duke , imported in 1954 by the Chicago Zoological Park in Illinois , followed by two mares in 1955 . A third mare was imported by the Fort Worth Zoological Park in Texas in 1962 . All four horses came from the Munich Zoo and in the early 1990s , all Heck horses in the United States traced back to these animals . Several private breeders in the United States now use these horses for riding and light driving . In the early 1960s , the North American Tarpan Association was founded by Heck horse enthusiasts to promote the breed . In 2002 , fewer than 100 Heck horses in the United States , most of them having descended from the six foundation horses , all imported from Germany . As of 2013 , a small number of Heck horses lived in a feral state in Latvia .

Several breeders have crossed the Heck horse with other breeds to get a larger horse with some of the primitive characteristics . Breeds commonly crossed with the Heck horse are the Welsh pony and Arabian horse , and a new breed of pony , called the Canadian Rustic Pony , has been developed from these three breeds . In Europe , many breeders cross Heck horses with Thoroughbreds to produce hunters .