

= Percheron =

The Percheron is a breed of draft horse that originated in the Huisne river valley in western France , part of the former Perche province from which the breed takes its name . Usually gray or black in color , Percherons are well muscled , and known for their intelligence and willingness to work . Although their exact origins are unknown , the ancestors of the breed were present in the valley by the 17th century . They were originally bred for use as war horses . Over time , they began to be used for pulling stagecoaches and later for agriculture and hauling heavy goods . In the late 18th and early 19th centuries , Arabian blood was added to the breed . Exports of Percherons from France to the United States and other countries rose exponentially in the late 19th century , and the first purely Percheron stud book was created in France in 1883 .

Before World War I , thousands of Percherons were shipped from France to the United States , but after the war began , an embargo stopped shipping . The breed was used extensively in Europe during the war , with some horses being shipped from the US back to France to help in the war effort . Beginning in 1918 , Percherons began to be bred in Great Britain , and in 1918 the British Percheron Horse Society was formed . After a series of name and studbook ownership changes , the current US Percheron registry was created in 1934 . In the 1930s , Percherons accounted for 70 percent of the draft horse population in the United States , but their numbers declined substantially after World War II . However , the population began to recover and as of 2009 , around 2 @, @ 500 horses were registered annually in the United States alone . The breed is still used extensively for draft work , and in France they are used for food . They have been crossed with several light horse breeds to produce horses for range work and competition . Purebred Percherons are used for forestry work and pulling carriages , as well as work under saddle , including competition in English riding disciplines such as show jumping .

= = Characteristics = =

The ideal size for the Percheron varies between countries . In France , height ranges from 15 @. @ 1 to 18 @. @ 1 hands (61 to 73 inches , 155 to 185 cm) and weight from 1 @, @ 100 to 2 @, @ 600 pounds (500 to 1 @, @ 200 kg) . Percherons in the United States generally stand between 16 @. @ 2 and 17 @. @ 3 hands (66 and 71 inches , 168 and 180 cm) , with a range of 15 and 19 hands (60 and 76 inches , 152 and 193 cm) . American Percherons average 1 @, @ 900 pounds (860 kg) , and their top weight is around 2 @, @ 600 pounds (1 @, @ 200 kg) . In Great Britain , 16 @. @ 2 hands (66 inches , 168 cm) is the shortest acceptable height for stallions and 16 @. @ 1 hands (65 inches , 165 cm) for mares , while weights range from around 2 @, @ 000 to 2 @, @ 200 pounds (910 to 1 @, @ 000 kg) for stallions and 1 @, @ 800 to 2 @, @ 000 pounds (820 to 910 kg) for mares . They are generally gray or black in coloring , although the American registry also allows the registration of roan , bay and chestnut horses . Only gray or black horses may be registered in France and Britain . Many horses have white markings on their heads and legs , but registries consider excessive white to be undesirable .

The head has a straight profile , broad forehead , large eyes and small ears . The chest is deep and wide and the croup long and level . The feet and legs are clean and heavily muscled . The overall impression of the Percheron is one of power and ruggedness . Enthusiasts describe the temperament as proud and alert , and members of the breed are considered intelligent , willing workers with good dispositions . They are considered easy keepers and adapt well to many conditions and climates . In the 19th century , they were known to travel up to 60 kilometres (37 mi) a day at a trot . Horses in the French registry are branded on the neck with the intertwined letters " SP " , the initials of the Société Hippique Percheronne .

= = History = =

The Percheron breed originated in the Huisne river valley in France , which arises in Orne , part of the former Perche province , from which the breed gets its name . Several theories have been put

forth as to the ancestry of the breed , though its exact origins are unknown . One source of foundation bloodstock may have been mares captured by Clovis I from the Bretons some time after 496 AD , and another may have been Arabian stallions brought to the area by Muslim invaders in the 8th century . Other possibilities are captured Moorish cavalry horses from the Battle of Poitiers in 732 AD , some of which were taken by warriors from Perche . A final theory posits that the Percheron and the Boulonnais breed are closely related , and that the Boulonnais influenced the Percheron when they were brought to Brittany as reinforcements for the legions of Caesar . It is known that during the 8th century , Arabian stallions were crossed with mares native to the area , and more Oriental horse blood was introduced by the Comte de Perche upon his return from the Crusades and expeditions into territory claimed by Spain . Blood from Spanish breeds was added when the Comte de Rotrou imported horses from Castile . No matter the theory of origin , breed historians agree that the terrain and climate of the Perche area had the greatest influence on the development of the breed . A possible reference to the horse is made in the 13th @-@ century romance Guillaume de Dole , in which the title character asks for " the Count of Perche 's horse " to be made ready , possibly indicating the " ' great horse , ' which could accommodate an armored knight " and was bred in the geographical setting of the poem .

During the 17th century , horses from Perche , the ancestors of the current Percheron , were smaller , standing between 15 and 16 hands (60 and 64 inches , 152 and 163 cm) high , and more agile . These horses were almost uniformly gray ; paintings and drawings from the Middle Ages generally show French knights on mounts of this color . After the days of the armored knight , the emphasis in horse breeding was shifted so as to develop horses better able to pull heavy stage coaches at a fast trot . Gray horses were preferred because their light coloring was more visible at night . This new type of horse was called the " Diligence Horse " , because the stage coaches they pulled were named " diligences " . After the stage coach was replaced by rail , the modern Percheron type arose as a slightly heavier horse for use in agriculture and heavy hauling work moving goods from docks to railway terminals .

= = = 19th century = = =

Arabian stallions were made available to Percheron breeders for use in breeding army mounts , beginning in 1760 at the royal stud at Le Pin . Between 1789 and the early 1800s , the Percheron was in danger of becoming extinct as horse breeding was suppressed during the French Revolution and its aftermath . Early histories of the breed point to two gray Arabian stallions from Le Pin , Godolphin , and Gallipoly , as the blood that helped to restart Percheron breeding . However , later research found that Godolphin was a chestnut Arabian of ordinary conformation and no special worth , while Gallipoly was a gray saddle horse of unknown breeding . Modern breed historians contest that there was enough breeding stock left after the early 19th century to restart the breed without further Arabian influence , and state that it is unlikely that two horses of unremarkable breeding and conformation had a significant influence on the breed . Jean le Blanc , a founding stallion of the Percheron breed , was foaled in 1823 . Today , all Percherons trace their ancestry to this stallion . At this time the breed also became larger , with horses from other French districts being imported to Perche to change the Percheron from a coach horse averaging 1 @,@ 200 to 1 @,@ 400 pounds (540 to 640 kg) to a draft horse averaging 2 @,@ 000 pounds (910 kg) . In 1893 , the first Percheron stud book was created in France . By 1910 , French registrations had risen to almost 32 @,@ 000 horses . Between 1880 and 1920 , Percheron breeders in France exported horses all over the world , including South Africa , South America , Australia and North America .

= = = = In the United States and Great Britain = = = =

Percherons were first imported into the United States in 1839 , although only one of the initial four horses survived the ocean trip . Soon after , two stallions and two mares were imported ; one mare died shortly after arrival and one stallion went blind and was retired within a year . Although the first

importations of Percherons were less than successful , the remaining stallion , named Diligence , was credited with siring almost 400 foals . In 1851 , three stallions were imported : Normandy 351 , Louis Napoleon 281 and Gray Billy . Throughout their stud careers , each had significant influence on American draft horse stock . In the mid @-@ 19th century in the United States , Percheron stallions were crossed with homebred mares to improve the local stock , resulting in thousands of crossbred horses . After the American Civil War in the 1860s greatly reduced the number of horses , there was a significant need for large draft horses , especially in growing cities and in the expanding West . Large numbers of Percherons were imported to the United States beginning in the early 1870s , and they became popular with draft horse breeders and owners . In the 1880s , approximately 7 @, @ 500 horses were exported to the United States . This extensive importation lasted until 1893 , when the US experienced a financial panic , and virtually no Percheron imports occurred between 1894 and 1898 . In addition , many existing horses were lost as people were too poor to purchase or care for large draft horses . In 1898 , importations began again as abruptly as they had ceased , with an average of 700 horses a year imported between 1898 and 1905 . In 1906 alone , over 13 @, @ 000 horses were imported to the United States from France . In the American traveling circuses of the late 19th century and early 20th century , the Percheron was the most frequently seen draft horse . Drivers appreciated the breed 's agility , stamina and quick @-@ footed gait .

In 1876 , the Norman @-@ Percheron Association was formed by a group of Percheron breeders in Chicago , and at the same time the stud book was begun . The Norman @-@ Percheron Association was the United States ' first purebred livestock association . In 1877 , the word " Norman " was dropped from the name . Later , in the panic of 1893 , the Percheron Association went bankrupt and ceased to function . In 1905 , also in Chicago , Percheron breeders met again to reform as the Percheron Society of America . Since 1934 , the group has been known as the Percheron Horse Association of America . At its height , the organization was the largest draft horse association in the world , in the early 20th century registering over 10 @, @ 000 horses annually .

In the late 19th century , Percherons also began to be exported from the United States to Great Britain , where they were used to pull horse @-@ drawn buses in large cities . The first Percherons imported to Britain included some of the thousands of crossbreds from the United States . In Britain , many of the horses , once they finished their bus @-@ pulling career , were sold to farmers . Other imported horses were sold to the British Army , and in 1900 , 325 horses were shipped to South Africa for use in the Boer War .

= = = 20th and 21st centuries = = =

In 1911 , the French society restricted registration to horses with both parents already registered with the society . In the early 20th century , the Percheron was one of the four major draft horse breeds , along with the Belgian , the Clydesdale and the Shire . Breeders could sell their horses for significant amounts of money , especially in the United States and Canada , where breeding stock brought a premium price .

Prior to World War I , a flourishing trade route for Percherons existed between Nogent @-@ le @-@ Rotrou , Le Havre and the United States . However , after the war began , an embargo was placed on French Percherons , disallowing them from exportation . Other than an exception in April 1916 to allow 59 horses to be shipped from France to the US , this embargo remained in place until the end of the war . The war took its toll on the Percheron breed as horses , fodder , and handlers were requisitioned for the fighting , and even after the embargo was lifted France did not have the quality or quantity of stock to fulfill the needs of American breeders . The embargo created a breeding boom in the US , replacing the previous practice of importing the majority of Percherons from France , and late in the war horses were shipped the other way ? from the US to Europe ? to supply those needed in the war . The lack of feathering on the Percheron 's lower legs made them easier to care for in the mud that they often worked in during wartime . Their quick trot on paved roads made them more versatile than motorized vehicles , and they were useful for work with guns and in forward units due to their calm temperaments .

Between 1918 and 1922 , over 350 Percherons were imported to Britain from France and , combined with stock from the US and Canada , were used as breeding stock to establish the breed in the country . In 1918 , the British Percheron Horse Society was formed . British breeders and owners continue to import Percherons from France , and also occasionally from Canada , when not prohibitively expensive .

By the 1930s , Percherons accounted for over 70 percent of the purebred draft horses in the United States , and all of the major land @-@ grant universities maintained stables of Percherons . A 1930 census of horses found over 33 @,@ 000 Percherons in the United States , with the next most popular breed , the Belgian , having a population of less than 10 @,@ 000 . One Percheron historian attributes this popularity to the breed 's " strength , energy , activity , robustness and endurance " . After World War II , increasing mechanization prompted a decline in the Percheron population . In 1954 , only 85 Percherons were registered in the US , a record low . The 1950s , 1960s and early 1970s were bad years for the US Percheron population , and breeding was reduced to only a few farms . These breeders kept the American population alive through these years , however , and the 1980s saw renewed interest in the breed .

In 1966 , the French stud book was changed to include draft types from other areas of France that were closely related to the Percheron ? including the horses of Berrichon , Nivernais , Marne , Augeron , Bourbonnais , Loire and Saône @-@ et @-@ Loire . French Percherons were also hit hard by the advent of mechanization , and between 1970 and 1990 focus was placed on breeding horses of greater mass for the meat market . The largest and heaviest stallions were selected for breeding . Beginning at the 1989 World Percheron Congress , French breeders realized that they needed a lighter breed for tourism , export to Japan for draft work , and other markets . In 1993 , a trend of importing American stallions to France was started with the black stallion Silver Shadows Sheik . This stallion and others were used to create a more elegant , smaller and sleeker look in the French Percheron , while still retaining the traditional bone and foot structure . All the imported stallions were black , reviving the popularity of black Percherons in France . French breeders continue to import American @-@ bred Percheron stallions in order to produce lighter foals , moving away from the heavier meat @-@ type horses of the late 20th century . Also in 1993 , the Société Hippique Percheronne anticipated the increasing tourist and exportation markets by prohibiting docking , which was not prohibited for other draft breeds until 1996 . This was partly at the request of the Germans , and partly due to the influence of magazines such as Cheval .

In 1988 , there were 1 @,@ 088 Percherons in the United States , rising to 2 @,@ 257 by 1998 . As of 2009 , the Percheron Horse Association of America had horses registered in all 50 states , and had nearly 3 @,@ 000 members , with around 2 @,@ 500 new horses being registered annually . The French Société Hippique Percheronne de France (Percheron Horse Society of France) registered between 750 and 885 horses in each year between 2007 and 2010 . As of 2012 , the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy considers the Percheron to be " recovering " , meaning that the breed has exceeded the numbers required to be in one of the " watch " categories , but still needs to be monitored .

= = = Augeron = = =

The Augeron , also known as Caen or Virois , was developed from the Percheron during the 19th century and was merged back into the Percheron in the 1960s . Bred mainly in the Pays d 'Auge region , it previously had its own studbook , registered by the Société hippique du trait augeron . The status of the subtype has been repeatedly debated because of its origin from Percherons bred in Pays d 'Auge , a breeding group that was modified from the original breed standard due to the influence of soil and climate over the years , creating the Augeron type . Augerons are light gray in color , tall , strong , well @-@ built , and energetic . They stand between 158 ? 170 cm (15 @.@ 2 ? 16 @.@ 3 hands) in height , but those horses bred in Vire are known to be smaller than the standard .

In the 19th century , the existence of the Augeron population was , despite its popularity , generally ignored by authors . In Paris , they were named " Caen " and " Virois " , after their region of origin ,

although specialists included the " Caen Virois " breed with the Augeron in a 1904 text . In the 19th century , these horses were sold at fairs in Argences and Bayeux in Lower Normandy . They were noticed several times for their homogeneity , beauty , and high value . In 1858 , Augerons were sold for between 600 and 1200 francs .

The Société hippique du trait augeron , or Augeron Horse Society , was formed in 1913 by breeders in Auge to record these horses in a breed registry . One reason for this lay in the desire to protect the cradle of breeding Percheron horses : only animals born near the Perche were entitled to registration in the studbook , and hence to use the name of " Percheron " . This limitation excluded several nearby populations of horses foaled outside of Perche , such as the Maine and the Augeron .

= = Uses = =

The Percheron is the most famous and populous of all French draft breeds in the world today . They were used to improve both the Ardennes and Vladimir Heavy Draft horses , and to create the Spanish @-@ Norman breed , a cross between the Andalusian and the Percheron . By the end of the 19th century , Percherons made up the majority of driving horses in Paris . The Percheron is still used extensively for draft work and , like other draft breeds , it is also used in France for meat production . Around the world , Percherons are used for parades , sleigh rides and hayrides , as well as being used to pull carriages in large cities . The largest team of working Percherons in Europe is found at Disneyland Paris , where the breed makes up 30 percent of the horses in the park and the horses work to pull trams on the main park street . One of the most famous horse teams in the United States is the Heinz hitch of Percherons , having appeared multiple times at the Tournament of Roses Parade .

In Great Britain , the Percheron is used for advertising and publicity , as well as forestry and farm work . They are crossbred with lighter horses by breeders of heavy hunters in order to increase size and improve disposition . Purebred Percherons are also ridden , and some have proven useful at show jumping . Crossbred Percherons have been used successfully in dressage . In both the Falkland Islands and northern Australia , Percherons have been crossed with local mares , primarily Criollos in the Falklands , to produce larger stock horses with greater stamina . These crossbred horses are used extensively in both the sub @-@ Antarctic climate of the Falklands and the sub @-@ tropical climate of Australia for working stock . In Australia they are also crossed with Thoroughbreds for use as mounted police horses .

In 1978 , the first World Percheron Congress was held in Great Britain , and has been held annually ever since . Although the majority of the shows have been held in North America , four ? in 1980 , 1989 , 2001 and 2011 ? have been held in France . Each year , in July , the French national breed show is held in Haras du Pin .