

= Rocky Mountain Horse =

The Rocky Mountain Horse is a horse breed developed in the state of Kentucky in the United States . Despite its name , it originated not in the Rocky Mountains , but instead in the Appalachian Mountains . A foundation stallion , brought from the western United States to eastern Kentucky around 1890 , began the Rocky Mountain type in the late 19th century . In the mid @-@ 20th century , a stallion named Old Tobe , owned by a prominent breeder , was used to develop the modern type ; today most Rocky Mountain Horses trace back to this stallion . In 1986 , the Rocky Mountain Horse Association was formed and by 2005 has registered over 12 @, @ 000 horses . The breed is known for its preferred " chocolate " coat color and flaxen mane and tail , the result of the relatively rare silver dapple gene acting on a black coat , seen in much of the population . It also exhibits a four @-@ beat ambling gait known as the " single @-@ foot " . Originally developed as a multi @-@ purpose riding , driving and light draft horse , today it is used mainly for trail riding and working cattle .

= = Breed characteristics = =

Rocky Mountain Horses stand between 14 @. @ 2 and 16 hands (58 and 64 inches , 147 and 163 cm) high . Any solid color is accepted by the registry , but a dark brown color called " chocolate " with a pale , " flaxen " mane and tail is preferred . This coloration is the result of the relatively rare silver dapple gene acting on a black base coat . Although uncommon , this gene has been found in over a dozen breeds , including the Rocky Mountain Horse . Minimal white markings are accepted by the registry , although leg markings may not extend above the knee . The physical characteristics are somewhat variable , due to the disparate breeds that created the Rocky Mountain Horse . The Rocky Mountain Horse is known by enthusiasts for its hardiness and ability to withstand winters in the mountains . It is also praised for its good nature and affinity for humans . Rocky Mountain Horses have the highest risk of any breed for the genetic ocular syndrome multiple congenital ocular anomalies (MCOA) , originally called equine anterior segment dysgenesis (ASD) . MCOA is characterized by the abnormal development of some ocular tissues , which causes compromised vision , although generally of a mild form ; the disease is non @-@ progressive . Genetic studies have shown that the disorder may be tied to the silver dapple gene , as most horses diagnosed with MCOA carry the gene .

The breed exhibits a natural ambling gait , called the single @-@ foot , which replaces the trot seen in a majority of horse breeds . Both gaits are an intermediate speed between a walk and a canter or gallop ; ambling gaits are four @-@ beat gaits , whereas the trot is a two @-@ beat gait . The extra footfalls provide additional smoothness to a rider because the horse always has at least one foot on the ground . This minimizes movement of the horse 's topline and removes the bounce of a two @-@ beat gait , caused by a moment of suspension followed by the jolt of two feet hitting the ground as the horse shifts from one pair of legs to the other . The value of an intermediate speed is that the horse conserves energy . More than thirty horse breeds are " gaited , " able to perform a four @-@ beat ambling gait , and some can also trot . Thus , a Rocky Mountain Horse , with rider , can use the single @-@ foot to cover rough ground at around 7 miles per hour (11 km / h) and short stretches of smooth ground at up to 16 miles per hour (26 km / h) . The faster speed is known as the rack . In comparison , the average medium trot speed is 6 to 8 miles per hour (9 @. @ 7 to 12 @. @ 9 km / h) .

= = History = =

Eastern Kentucky is known for its gaited breeds , created through a mixture of Spanish horses from the southern United States and English horses from the North . American Saddlebreds , Tennessee Walking Horses and Missouri Fox Trotters also originated in the same general geographic area , from the same mixing of Spanish and English blood . Rocky Mountain Horses have a similar history to the Kentucky Mountain Saddle Horse , and together are sometimes called " Mountain Pleasure

Horses " . The Rocky Mountain Horse originated in eastern Kentucky from a foundation stallion brought to the Appalachian Mountains from the Rocky Mountains around 1890 . Brought to the area as a colt , oral histories state that the " Rocky Mountain Horse " , as he was known , possessed the preferred chocolate color and flaxen mane and tail found in the breed today , as well as the single @-@ foot gait . He was used to breed local saddle mares , and due to the small area in which he was bred , a local strain of horse originated .

This foundation stallion produced a descendent , named Old Tobe , who became the more modern father of the Rocky Mountain Horse breed . Old Tobe was owned by a resident of Spout Springs , Kentucky named Sam Tuttle . For most of the 20th century , Tuttle was a prominent breeder of Rocky Mountain Horses , and helped to keep the strain alive during the Great Depression and World War II . After World War II , despite declining horse populations in the US , Tuttle kept his herd , and continued to use Old Tobe as a breeding stallion . Tuttle held the Natural Bridge State Park concession for horseback riding , and used Old Tobe for trail rides in the park and for siring additional trail horses , the latter until the stallion was 34 years old . Old Tobe died at the age of 37 . The presence of the single @-@ foot gait makes it possible that the breed is in part descended from the Narragansett Pacer , a breed known for passing its gaited ability on to other American breeds .

In 1986 , the Rocky Mountain Horse Association was created to increase population numbers and promote the breed ; there were only 26 horses in the first batch of registrations . Since then , the association has , over the life of the registry , registered over 25000 horses as of 2015 , and the breed has spread to 47 states and 11 countries . In order to be accepted by the registry , a foal 's parentage must be verified via DNA testing . Horses must also , after reaching 23 months of age , be inspected to ensure that they meet the physical characteristic and gait requirements of the registry . The Rocky Mountain Horse is listed at " Watch " status by the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy , meaning that the estimated global population of the breed is fewer than 15 @,@ 000 , with fewer than 800 registrations annually in the US .

The breed was originally developed for general use on the farms of the Appalachian foothills , where it was found pulling plows and buggies , working cattle and being ridden by both adults and children . Today , it is still used for working cattle , as well as endurance riding and pleasure riding . The breed 's gait and disposition make it sought out by elderly and disabled riders . Each September , the Kentucky Horse Park hosts the International Rocky Mountain Horse Show .