

= Trait du Nord =

The Trait du Nord , previously also known as Ardennais du Nord or Ardennais de type Nord , is a breed of heavy draft horse developed and bred in the area of Hainaut in western Belgium and in northeastern France . Originally considered a subtype of the Ardennes , it was recognized as an individual breed with the opening of a studbook in 1903 . Developed in the fertile Flemish grasslands , it was bred for size and pulling power for agricultural work . By 1855 , the horses bred near Hainaut were considered by some veterinarians to be superior to other Flemish draft breeds . The Trait du Nord was used extensively in mining from the late 19th century through 1920 , with lesser use continuing through the 1960s .

The Trait du Nord continued to be used extensively for agriculture through World War II , but after the war this usage , and the breed population , declined significantly as farming became increasingly mechanized . During the mid 20th century , the breed was in demand for the production of horse meat , and due to this was bred to be larger and heavier . In the early 1970s , the market for horse meat began to decline , and the Trait du Nord , like many European draft breeds , was in danger of extinction . It was not until the 1990s that the breed experienced a slight revival through an increased interest in recreational riding and driving .

The Trait du Nord is large , with stallions weighing upwards of 1 000 kilograms (2 200 lb) , and is bred for traction ability and pulling power . The breed is found in many solid colors , although bay and roan are the most common , and is known to be gentle and easy to handle . Two slightly different types of Trait du Nord are found : a larger type used for heavier pulling and a lighter type used for faster work . The breed is considered to be endangered by the French government , with fewer than 100 new foal births a year . The national breed registry in France is working with local groups in an attempt to promote this breed and bring population numbers back up . The breed currently has a high risk of inbreeding , due to the low number of breeding stallions , and is at risk of extinction .

= = Naming and registration = =

According to the French National Stud , the current official name of the breed is Trait du Nord . The name has changed several times during its history . In the mid 19th century it is mentioned as the " large horse of Hainaut " , but before 1903 it was not considered a separate breed and was often thought to be the same as the Ardennes . Beginning in 1913 , it was known as the Trait Ardennes North , and from 1945 to 1965 was known as the Northern Ardennes Draft . The name of Trait du Nord became commonly used around 1961 .

Until August 5 , 1903 , the Trait du Nord 's studbook was merged with that of the Ardennes , with the former being considered a subtype of the latter and called the Northern type Ardennes . The studbook was under the responsibility of the combined group " Studbook of Northern Workhorses " . In 1913 , the name of Trait du Nord was used for the first time and French mares began to be registered as their own breed , although Belgian horses continued to be used for breeding , with the resulting progeny able to be registered as Trait du Nord . In 1919 , the northern type was separated from the Ardennes , although the studbooks remained tied , and the horse was given the name " Northern Ardennes " . A centralized breeding union for the Northern Ardennes was created in 1945 .

In France , the Syndicat d 'élevage du cheval de trait du Nord (Union of Trait du Nord Horse Breeders) is the national breed association recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries . Its mission is to promote the breed and assist in its recovery , as well as creating and executing a policy of genetic improvement through selective breeding . The association works with the French National Stud and the Center for Genetic Resources to develop breeding programs and represents the Trait du Nord on French breed committees . It also organizes and contributes to contests and events that help to promote and develop the breed .

= = Breed characteristics = =

In the early 1930s , the breed reached the peak of its physical structure . It was then described as a born laborer , built for traction and with a conformation that allowed it to move huge weights over short distances . Although some breeds of draft horses have declined in weight in modern times , the Trait du Nord has remained relatively large . The average size in the breed is 16 @. @ 1 hands (65 inches , 165 cm) for mares and 16 @. @ 2 to 16 @. @ 3 hands (66 to 67 inches , 168 to 170 cm) for stallions , weighing 1 @, @ 800 to 2 @, @ 000 pounds (800 to 900 kg) for mares and 1 @, @ 870 to 2 @, @ 200 pounds (850 to 1 @, @ 000 kg) for stallions . Foals of 30 months who are candidates to become registered must be at least 16 hands (64 inches , 163 cm) . Bay and roan are the most frequent colors seen in the breed . Chestnut (including liver chestnut , although this color is quite rare) is also allowed , as are black , brown and gray , although the latter is extremely rare .

In France , the National Stud regulates the physical standards of the Trait du Nord and eight other French breeds . The eligibility criteria have changed several times since the opening of the studbook in 1913 , and now describe the ideal Trait du Nord as large , well built , short and powerful , with a large frame and well @-@ developed muscles , energetic , with easygoing and beautiful gaits . Members of the breed are described by the breed association as courageous and observant , as well as gentle and easy to handle . The head is generally small in proportion to the mass of the horse , and often snub , with a flat profile (neither concave nor convex) . The neck is of medium length and strong , often slightly arched . The withers are prominent and the shoulder long and slightly oblique . The back is short and straight and the body compact , solid and very muscular . The chest is deep , with a broad , muscular breast . The croup is wide and powerfully muscled . The hooves are hard and strong .

There are two main types of Trait du Nord . One is a heavier type bred for pulling heavy loads , while the other is a lighter type bred for slightly faster work , generally at the trot . Auxois , Ardennes , Brabant and some Dutch draft breeds may be admitted to the Trait du Nord studbook after being inspected and approved by a review panel . Registered horses are marked with a stylized " N " brand on the left side of the neck , signifying conformity to the breed standard .

= = History = =

The ancestors of the breed lived in the northern river valleys of the Sambre and the Scheldt , near Valenciennes . Although it is a popular myth that many French draft breeds , including the Trait du Nord , are descendants of the prehistoric horses found at Solutr  , this is not true . Two or possibly three subspecies of now @-@ extinct equines have been found at Solutr  , but there is no evidence that they migrated to the area that later produced the Trait du Nord . Like Dutch and Belgian draft breeds such as the Brabant , the origin of the Trait du Nord is found in the large , fertile Flemish grasslands that cover the southern portion of the Netherlands , northern France and all of Belgium . The Hainaut region is the true birthplace of the breed in France . The Belgian draft breeds , the Ardennes and the Trait du Nord share the same ancestry , and the Trait du Nord has a history that is very similar to the Ardennes , due to the influence of the latter breed on the former . The Ardennes , Belgian , Dutch Heavy Draft , Trait du Nord and Auxois are all considered to come from the same group of breeds , due to their heritage , physical characteristics and selection for draft work . Until relatively recently , the breeds were not differentiated , and were frequently crossbred .

The region of Flanders is particularly conducive to agriculture , and in the 19th century the draining of the swamps and improved farming techniques led to a major expansion in cultivated areas and farm sizes . As there were no existing horses in the area that were suitable for plowing , the farmers found it necessary to create a breed of draft horse specifically for their use . From the 1850s on , farmers selected horses that eventually became the Trait du Nord . The farmers combined large Belgian breeds adapted to swampy ground with the Ardennes and Dutch breeds for size , weight and strength . The result was a muscular , powerful , and tough breed with long legs that facilitated movement . The Trait du Nord was unique in being selected specifically for farming , as many draft breeds were also bred for use in transport .

The Trait du Nord proved a successful breed for the farmers that developed it , and quickly spread throughout the Netherlands , Belgium and northern France . It was given different names depending on the country , and was often confused with and crossbred with draft breeds from the Netherlands , Brabants and the Ardennes . Breed associations began to organize in the late 19th century , and at this point blood from the Boulonnais was introduced to bring more elegance to the breed . The Trait du Nord gradually began to differ from the Ardennes as they gained size and volume and improved their gaits , and the breed became popular in the north and east of France . In 1855 , even before the breed had been differentiated from the Ardennes , veterinarians described the heavy horses bred near Hainaut as superior to Flemish breeds .

= = = 20th century = = =

During World War I , Trait du Nord horses were among those confiscated by Germans from Belgium and France for use in the war . In 1919 , these horses were returned to their homeland , allowing the reconstruction of the breed . During World War II , the armed forces used all stocks of fuel , and the draft horse was used to continue agricultural production in France . After the war , farmers quickly equipped themselves with mechanized equipment . The decline in the breeding of the Trait du Nord became noticeable in the early 1950s , and by 1960 breed numbers had collapsed completely . By the early 1970s , breeding had slowed so much that the Trait du Nord , along with other French draft breeds , was in danger of extinction .

As horses were replaced by tractors , the production of horse meat became the main viable market for the Trait du Nord and other French breeds . As the horses were sought for meat , the larger , heavier animals became more in demand , and these horses lost much of their power and pulling ability . A French decree on August 24 , 1976 , published in the Official Journal , encouraged farmers to select the biggest , heaviest stallions for breeding . The French National Stud backed this decree , and encouraged the breeding of foals that would fatten rapidly , to be butchered at the age of eighteen months . Between the mid @-@ 20th century and the 1980s , the average weight of the Trait du Nord increased from between 800 and 900 kilograms (1 @,@ 800 and 2 @,@ 000 lb) to over 1 @,@ 000 kilograms (2 @,@ 200 lb) . Since the early 1970s , the use of the Trait du Nord for meat has declined , contributing to a further reduction in breeding .

In the early 1990s , recreational riding experienced a revival , and the consumption of horse meat continued to decrease . On March 11 , 1994 , the Trait du Nord was officially declared to be a workhorse again , and in 1996 another decree prohibited docking of tails in horses . Members of the breed are occasionally exported from France , with some going to Italy , Belgium and Germany , mainly for work in logging and pulling brewery wagons . A few are sent to Sicily and Guadeloupe , but this is quite rare .

= = Uses = =

The Trait du Nord was originally used mainly for agriculture and mining . They also towed barges on waterways , although this use ended quickly with the increased use of the engine at the beginning of the 20th century .

The peak use of the breed for agriculture was quite short , running from 1880 to around 1960 (ending due to increased use of mechanized equipment) , but it allowed significant progress in agriculture in northern France . The stamina and energy of the breed allows them to perform well in the heavy and compact soils in the region of Nord @-@ Pas @-@ de @-@ Calais and recover quickly after exercise . The nature of soils in Hainaut required a horse weighing more than 1 @,@ 800 pounds (800 kg) for effective plowing . Since the 1950s , the Trait du Nord has been the preferred breed for farmers who practiced intensive cropping of cereals and beets in the Northern Great Plains of France .

The pulling power of the Trait du Nord made it popular for use during the Industrial Revolution of the late 19th century in heavy industry , including mining . In mines , steam engines and internal combustion engines could not be used due to the possibility of a gas explosion . The first horses

were used in the mines in 1821 and the Trait du Nord quickly became a favorite for hauling carts in the mines and operating the pulleys used to lift coal to the surface . Breeders worked to adapt the breed to mining requirements , and the breed became larger as more power was needed to pull heavier loads . Good horses were able to pull 16 @. @ 8 metric tons (16 @. @ 5 long tons ; 18 @. @ 5 short tons) , usually around twelve cars worth , along a railway . As early as 1920 , the usage of horses in mines began to decline as electric locomotives came into use , and in 1969 the last horse was removed from the mines .

= = = 1990s and today = = =

Today , the breed is used mainly for meat and logging forested areas inaccessible to machinery . Since the mid @-@ 1990s , colts not intended for breeding , recreational riding , or harness work are heavily fed and sent out to slaughter before the age of eighteen months . Fillies are generally used for breeding . The breed association and its breeders are trying to secure the future of the Trait du Nord by finding new markets , especially in the areas of recreational riding , agricultural work , recreational and competitive driving . The breed is involved in several reenactments and folk villages which attract good crowds . The breed is promoted for its use in logging in forests and fragile areas , with professional foresters using them to preserve the value and biodiversity of forested areas .

The revival of team driving has prompted farmers who use the Trait du Nord to attend competitions and improve the quality of their horses . The qualities of the breed make it a popular horse for leaders in the areas of recreational and competition team driving , and the breed has the advantage of being able to be immediately returned to work even after a period of inactivity for several months . When being driven , a traditional " Flemish collar " is generally used . The horses are trained to be driven with only one rein , leaving the driver 's hands free for other work . When shown in hand , Trait du Nord horses are often presented in groups , generally between four and eight to a string .

Each year , the Trait du Nord is honored at an agricultural show and horse show in Paris . In 1995 , the breed won the International Workhorse Trophy at the Paris show and in 2010 , a Trait du Nord took the first place prize for weight pulling at the show . Trait du Nord teams participate in the Route du Poisson , a relay race commemorating the route that teams took to bring fresh fish from Boulogne to Paris until the 19th century . The race takes place every two or three years and is the biggest equine relay race in Europe .

= = Breed preservation = =

The Trait du Nord is an endangered breed ; the Haras de Compiègne (Compiègne Stud) , a national stud in France , had a major influence in saving the breed , until it was closed in October 2009 . The national breed registry for the Trait du Nord is supported by other local initiatives . However , breed numbers were already low when these initiatives began to be implemented , and media attention on the Trait du Nord is insufficient to maintain economically viable interest . The breed is bred mainly by enthusiasts returning to family farms , but even the number of farms has been decreasing as many young farmers prefer more to breed cattle , which are more lucrative .

Although breed associations and the French National Stud are making efforts to protect the breed , very low numbers persist , and these organizations consider the breed very close to extinction . It is one of the most threatened French horse breeds . The production of horse meat has declined due to a decrease in consumption , and most male foals are neither selected for reproduction nor work . One author says that more alternatives to slaughter are needed and that the steady decline in breed numbers is proof that the breed is slowly disappearing . Beginning in 2011 , the Trait du Nord association is working with the North Pas @-@ de @-@ Calais regional council and other groups to increase the number of births by 20 percent by December 2014 , and double the number by 2020 .

The main breeding areas are located around the former Compiègne Stud and include the departments of Nord , the Pas @-@ de @-@ Calais , the Oise , the Aisne and Somme . A few are found in the central region of Normandy and the Paris area . This breed is found mainly in France and is rarely exported abroad , or only very sporadically with related Belgian and Dutch breeds . A

survey of mares in 2008 gave 121 mares in the region of North Pas de Calais , 46 in Picardy , 6 in Normandy and one to three mares in the other regions .

Despite efforts to revive interest in the breed , numbers steadily declined in the years before 1988 . In 1995 , there were 33 stallions in service ; in 1996 this number remained the same and by 1998 it had declined to 30 . In 2004 , there were 111 breeders and 119 Trait du Nord foals were registered . By 2007 and 2008 there were only 17 stallions registered , a number which is exposing the breed to a dangerous increase in inbreeding . To combat this danger , farmers are cross breeding the Trait du Nord with approved Belgian and Dutch horses . The number of farmers breeding the Trait du Nord decreased from 150 to 125 in 2002 , then to 92 in 2007 and 86 in 2008 . After birth rates remained relatively steady in the 1990s , they began to drop in the 2000s , declining from 176 in 2000 to 100 in 2005 and just 75 in 2007 .