

= Breton horse =

The Breton is a breed of draft horse . It was developed in Brittany , a province in northwest France , from native ancestral stock dating back thousands of years . The Breton was created through the crossbreeding of many different European and Oriental breeds . In 1909 , a stud book was created , and in 1951 it was officially closed . The breed is often chestnut in color , and is strong and muscular . There are three distinct subtypes of the Breton , each coming from a different area of Brittany . The Corlay Breton is the smallest type , and is generally used for light draft and under saddle work . The Postier Breton is used for harness and light farm work . The Heavy Draft Breton is the largest subtype , and is generally used for the hardest draft work . This horse breed has been used in military , draft and agricultural capacities . It also has been used to improve and create many other draft breeds , and to produce mules .

= = Characteristics = =

Breton horses are usually about 1 @. @ 58 metres ( 15 @. @ 2 hands ) tall , but may range from 1 @. @ 55 to 1 @. @ 63 m ( 15 @. @ 1 to 16 @. @ 0 hands ) , depending on type . They usually have a chestnut coat , often with a flaxen mane and tail , but can also be bay , grey , or red or blue roan . Bretons have a well @-@ proportioned head of medium volume with a straight profile and a strong , short neck well @-@ set into muscular withers . The shoulder is long and sloping , the chest broad and muscular , the back short and wide , and the croup sloping . The legs are well @-@ feathered , short but powerful , with broad joints and well @-@ formed hooves .

= = = Subcategories = = =

There are several subtypes of the Breton breed . Two , the Trait Breton and the Postier Breton , are officially recognised , while others such as the Corlais or Cheval de Corlay and the Centre @-@ montagne or Central Mountain Breton are not . Older types that have disappeared include the Grand Breton and the Bidet Breton or Bidet d 'Allure .

The Corlay Breton is derived from crossbreeding native stock with the Arabian and Thoroughbred , and is considered the real descendant of the original Breton . It has the same general features as the draft type but is smaller with a more dished face . It was used mainly for light draft work that required speed and under saddle , and its numbers have been decreasing in recent years . The type is also known as the Cheval de Corlay , and is now extremely rare . It was also used in local races because of its speed , which it inherited from its Arabian and Thoroughbred ancestors .

Postier Bretons were developed as a result of crossbreeding with the Norfolk Trotter and the Hackney during the 19th century . This type is bred mainly in central Brittany , has a very attractive gait , is a good coach horse , and capable of light farming work . Its name originates from its use in pulling mail coaches . The Postier was used extensively by the French Horse Artillery , and it has been described as a lighter version of the Suffolk Punch draft breed from Great Britain .

The Heavy Draft Breton is derived from an infusion of Ardennes and Percheron blood . It is very strong relative to its size and has short but muscular legs . It is bred in the northern coastal area of Brittany , in Merléac . This type has absorbed another , older type , called the Grand Breton , a heavier horse that was used to improve many other draft breeds . The Centre @-@ montagne or Central Mountain Breton is a smaller draft type .

= = Breed history = =

Bretons were originally bred for great strength and durability . Horses have been present in the Breton mountains for thousands of years , but nobody knows how they first arrived . One theory is that they were brought to Europe during the Aryan migration from Asia over 4 @, @ 000 years ago , while another school of thought has them descending from horses bred by Celtic warriors before their conquest of Great Britain .

The original ancestors of the Breton were a population of horses that lived in the Breton mountains, possibly descended from steppe horses ridden by Celts. During the Crusades, these mountain horses were crossed with oriental horses to create a type known as the Bidet Breton. In the Middle Ages, the ancestral Breton horse was sought by military leaders, partly because of its comfortable gait, which was said to be partway between a brisk trot and an amble. Due to its gaits and the fact that it only stood about 1 @.@ 40 m ( 13 @.@ 3 hands ) high, it was nicknamed the Bidet d 'Allure or Bidet Breton. Horses of other bloodlines brought back to Europe during the Crusades had a strong influence on the Breton, and two types subsequently developed. The Sommier was the common, heavier type, used mainly as a pack horse and for farm and draft work. From the Sommier, the Roussin was developed, was used mainly in wars and on long journeys. The Roussin's natural ambling gait made it popular as a lighter riding horse.

The breed retained its mountain roots with its main stud, the National Provincial Stud, being located in the mountain country of Langonnet. It was at this time that Arabian and Thoroughbred blood was added to the breed, creating the Corlay subtype. From the Middle Ages until the early 1900s, the Breton was crossed with various horses, both native and foreign, including the Boulonnais, Percheron and Ardennes breeds. In the 19th century it was crossbred with the Norfolk Trotter, which resulted in a lighter weight type of Breton, the Postier subtype. Today, the Breton breed is controlled by the Syndicat des Éleveurs de Cheval Breton, an organization dating its studbook to 1909 when it was created, with separate books for the Heavy Draft and Postier types. In 1912, the books were combined but separate sections were used for each type, and in 1926 the sections were combined so that all types of Bretons are now registered together. Postier Bretons must be of documented Postier bloodstock and pass in @-@ harness performance tests. In 1920, the decision was made to permit no new outside blood into the studbook, and in 1951 the studbook was officially closed to outside horses. Breton horses are only eligible to be registered if they were foaled in the present @-@ day region of Brittany or in the Loire @-@ Atlantique department, formerly part of Brittany. Registered foals are branded with a " cross surmounting a splayed, upturned V " on the left side of the neck. Despite the registration restrictions, breeding of the Breton horse has spread across France, and around the world. Today in France, the Breton is bred mainly at studs in Lamballe, Hennebont, and parts of La Roche @-@ sur @-@ Yon.

= = = Crossbreeding = = =

For a time, there was a trend to increase the size of draft horse breeds to gain more power and bulk through crossbreeding. However, due to its endurance and gaits, the Breton was an exception. Crossbreeding was shown to reduce the breed's unique qualities, and so in the 1930s, infusions of other blood were abandoned, and this decision led to the preservation of the breed's purity.

Therefore, rather than being subject to crossbreeding itself, the Breton has instead been used to improve many other breeds. Buyers come to France from all over the world to buy Bretons for use in improving their native draft horses. The Breton had a significant influence on the Canadian Horse, after members of the breed were sent to New France ( Canada ) during the 17th century. They have also been used to create the Swiss Freiberger, as well as other heavy draft breeds. Bretons were used in India to produce mules, and at the Saharanpur breeding farm were crossed with the Anglo @-@ Arabian stallion Mystère to produce carriage horses. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Italian farmers attempted to use the Brabant to improve local stock, but the offspring proved to be too heavy and slow for the lighter, more general draft work required. In the 1930s, the Hispano @-@ Bretón breed was developed in Spain by crossing imported Breton stallions with local mares. Today, the breed population is small, but has been noted by researchers for its rich genetic diversity. After World War II, a Breton stallion was used to improve the Schleswig breed of Germany.

= = Uses = =

The Breton is used in many capacities , due to the various sub @-@ types of the breed . Smaller types can be used under saddle and for fast , light draft work , while larger types are ideal for heavy draft and agricultural work . They are also commonly used to improve other breeds through crossbreeding . Today , the breed is used as a draft horse on small farms , and is also used to gather seaweed . It is also bred for meat production ; horse meat is a dietary staple in many European countries , including France , Belgium , Germany and Switzerland .