

= Ardennes horse =

The Ardennes or Ardennais is one of the oldest breeds of draft horse , and originates from the Ardennes area in Belgium , Luxembourg and France . They are heavy @-@ boned with thick legs and are used for draft work . The Ardennes is found in many colors , although black horses are very rare and are not allowed to be registered with the breed registry . Their history reaches back to Ancient Rome , and throughout the years blood from several other breeds has been added to the Ardennes , although only the Belgian breed had any significant impact . The first Ardennes were imported to the United States in the early 20th century , and the first breed registry was established in Europe in 1929 . The horses have been used throughout history as war horses , both as cavalry mounts and to draw artillery , and are used today mainly for heavy draft and farm work , meat production and competitive driving events . They have also been used to influence or create several other horse breeds throughout Europe and Asia .

= = Description = =

In France , Ardennes stallions stand about 1 @.@ 62 metres (16 hands) high , and mares about 1 @.@ 60 m (15 @.@ 3 hands) , while in Belgium these are the maximum allowable heights . They weigh 700 to 1 @,@ 000 kilograms (1 @,@ 500 to 2 @,@ 200 lb) . Their heads are heavy , with a broad face and a straight or slightly convex profile . Their conformation is broad and muscular , with a compact body , short back , and short , sturdy legs with strong joints . Their fetlocks are feathered . Their coats may be bay , roan , chestnut , gray , or palomino . Bay and roan are the two most common colors . Black is very rare and is excluded from registration . White markings are small , usually restricted to a star or blaze . The breed matures early , and they are said to be easy keepers , economical to feed despite their size . The Ardennes is a free @-@ moving , long @-@ striding breed , despite their compact body structure .

= = History = =

The Ardennes breed could be a direct descendent of the prehistoric Solutre horse , and is thought to be descended from the type of horse described by Julius Caesar in his *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* . Caesar described these horses of Belgium as " rustic , hard and tireless " , and recommended them for use in heavy cavalry units . The early type was used by many later Roman emperors for military applications . The breed 's ancestors are thought to have been bred for 2 @,@ 000 years on the Ardennes plains , and it is one of the oldest documented European heavy draft breeds . In the Roman era , the breed stood only around 14 hands (56 inches , 142 cm) high . Later , Napoleon added Arabian blood to increase stamina and endurance and used the breed in his Russian campaign . In 1780 , the breed still stood only 1 @.@ 42 to 1 @.@ 52 metres (14 @.@ 0 to 15 @.@ 0 hands) and weighed around 500 kilograms (1 @,@ 100 lb) .

Percheron , Boulonnais and Thoroughbred blood were also added , although they had little impact . In the 19th century , Belgian draft blood was added to give the breed the heavier conformation it has today . The extra weight and size was desired to turn the breed into a very heavy draft breed , after their role as an artillery horse had diminished through the advent of mechanization , as well as a desire for a meat animal . The breed increased in size from an average of 550 kilograms (1 @,@ 210 lb) to their current weight , which at the same time had the consequence of reducing their vigor and endurance . Breed registries have been in existence since 1929 . Today there are three separate studbooks in France , Belgium and Luxembourg , although there is extensive interbreeding between the three . The Ardennes Horse Society of Great Britain was also formed in the late 20th century to preserve and promote the horses of that country , but today is not recognized as a studbook or passport issuing organization by the British government and may not exist in any form .

It is difficult to determine when the first Ardennes horses were imported to the United States because originally , when imported to the United States , Ardennes horses were eligible for registration with the now @-@ defunct National French Draft Horse Association of America or

French Draft Horse Society . This organization published a stud book and registered six individual French draft breeds as one breed , combining the information so that no totals of individual breeds are known . Many of these horses were imported to the United States with their breed being considered simply " French draft " and no individual type being specified . Some Ardennes horses imported to the United States before 1917 were called Belgians when they were imported and subsequently registered as Belgians . Ardennes horses have continued to be imported into the United States from Belgium , with imports occurring as late as 2004 .

= = Uses = =

Horses from the Ardennes region were used in the Crusades in the 11th century by knights led by Godfrey of Bouillon . They were used during the 17th century by Marshal Turenne as remounts for his cavalry . In the French Revolution , they were considered to be the best artillery horse available , due to their temperament , stamina and strength . Napoleon used large numbers of Ardennes horses to pull artillery and transport supplies during his 1812 Russian campaign . They were said to be the only breed used by Napoleon that was hardy enough to withstand the winter retreat from Moscow , which they did while pulling a large amount of the army 's wagon train . They were also used to pull artillery in World War I , when they were depended upon by the French and Belgian armies . Their calm , tolerant disposition , combined with their active and flexible nature , made them an ideal artillery horse . The breed was considered so useful and valuable that when the Germans established the Commission for the Purchase of Horses in October 1914 to capture Belgian horses , the Ardennes was one of two breeds specified as important , the other being the Brabant .

Today , the breed is used mainly for meat , due to its extensive musculature . Horse meat is a dietary staple in many European countries , including France , Belgium , Germany and Switzerland . However , they are increasingly used for farm , forest and leisure work . Their nimble action , stamina and good temper make them increasingly used for competitive driving across Europe , and they have also been used as mounts for therapeutic horseback riding . The breed is known for its ability to work in rough , hilly terrain .

Ardennes horses have been used as foundation bloodstock to develop several other draft horse breeds and subgroups . These include the Baltic Ardennes and Russian Heavy Draft . The Swedish Ardennes is well established in that country , where it is in demand for use in forestry . It was first recognized as a separate sub @-@ group in the 19th century , but today is considered a separate breed , even though its ancestry is entirely from the Ardennes horses of Belgium and France . Another closely related breed is the Auxois . Ardennes horses were also used in the 1920s to improve the Comtois by adding size . Along with the Breton and the Anglo @-@ Norman , the Ardennes horse was used to create the Sokolsky horse . Similarly , the Trait Du Nord was created through a mixture of Ardennes and Belgian blood .