

## = Florida Cracker Horse =

The Florida Cracker Horse is a breed of horse from Florida in the United States . It is genetically and physically similar to many other Spanish @-@ style horses , especially those from the Spanish Colonial Horse group . The Florida Cracker is a gaited breed known for its agility and speed . The Spanish first brought horses to Florida with their expeditions in the early 16th century ; as colonial settlement progressed , they used the horses for herding cattle . These horses developed into the Florida Cracker type seen today , and continued to be used by Florida cowboys ( known as " crackers " ) until the 1930s .

At this point they were superseded by American Quarter Horses needed to work larger cattle brought to Florida during the Dust Bowl , and population numbers declined precipitously . Through the efforts of several private families and the Florida government , the breed was saved from extinction , but there is still concern about its low numbers . Both The Livestock Conservancy and the Equus Survival Trust consider breed numbers to be at a critical point .

## = = Characteristics = =

The Florida Cracker Horse is also known as the Chickasaw Pony , Seminole Pony , Prairie Pony , Florida Horse , Florida Cow Pony and Grass Gut . The modern breed retains the size of its Spanish ancestors , standing 13 @.@ 2 to 15 hands ( 54 to 60 inches , 137 to 152 cm ) high and weighing 750 to 1 @,@ 000 pounds ( 340 to 450 kg ) . They are found mainly in bay , black and gray , although grullo , dun and chestnut are also seen . Roan and pinto colors are occasionally found . They have straight or slightly concave profiles , strong backs and sloping croups . They are known for their speed and agility and excel at trail and endurance riding , and are also used extensively as stock horses . They are sometimes seen in Western riding sports such as working cow horse , team roping and team penning . The Florida Cracker is a gaited horse , with the breed association recognizing two gaits , the running walk and amble , in addition to the regular walk , trot , canter and gallop . The single @-@ footed ambling gait is known as the " coon rack " by some breed enthusiasts . The foundation genetics of the breed are the same as many others developed from Spanish stock in North and South America , including the Paso Fino , Peruvian Paso and Criollo . The Cracker horse is very similar in type and genetics to the Carolina Marsh Tacky and the Banker horse , both Spanish @-@ style breeds from the eastern United States , but DNA testing has proven that these are separate breeds .

## = = History = =

Horses first arrived on the southeast North American mainland in 1521 , brought by Ponce de Leon on his second trip to the region , where they were used by officers , scouts and livestock herders . Later expeditions brought more horses and cattle to Spanish Florida . By the late 16th century , horses were used extensively in the local cattle business and by the late 17th century the industry was flourishing , especially in what is now northern Florida and southern Georgia . The horses brought to North America by the Spanish and subsequently bred there included Barbs , Garranos , Spanish Jennets , Sorraias , Andalusians and other Iberian breeds . Overall , they were relatively small and had physical traits distinctive of Spanish breeds , including short backs , sloping shoulders , low set tails and wide foreheads .

The early cattle drivers , nicknamed Florida crackers and Georgia crackers , used these Spanish horses to drive cattle ( eventually known as Florida Cracker cattle ) . The cowboys received their nickname from the distinctive cracking of their whips , and the name was transferred to both the horses they rode and the cattle they herded . Through their primary use as stock horses , the type developed into the Florida Cracker horse , known for its speed , endurance and agility . From the mid @-@ 16th century to the 1930s , this type was the predominant horse in the southeastern United States . During the American Civil War ( 1861 ? 1865 ) , both belligerents purchased large amounts of beef from Florida , and the Spanish horses bred there were highly desired as riding

horses . During this time , there was also a continual introduction of new Spanish blood from Cuba , as horses were traded between the two areas . During the Dust Bowl ( 1930 ? 1940 ) , large western cattle were moved into Florida , bringing with them the parasitic screwworm . Cattle with this parasite needed to be treated frequently . The cowboys found that the Florida Cracker horses , bred for working smaller cattle , were not able to hold the western cattle . They replaced the smaller horses with American Quarter Horses . This resulted in the Florida breed almost becoming extinct .

= = = 20th century = = =

The breed 's survival during the 20th century is owed to a few families who continued to breed the Cracker horse and kept distinct bloodlines alive . John Law Ayers was one such breeder ; in 1984 , he donated his herd of pure @-@ bred Cracker horses to the state of Florida . With them , the state started three small herds in Tallahassee , Withlacoochee State Forest and Paynes Prairie State Preserve . By 1989 , however , these three herds and around 100 other horses owned by private families were all that remained of the breed . In 1989 the Florida Cracker Horse Association was founded and in 1991 a registry was established . After the registry was created , 75 horses designated as " foundation horses " and 14 of their offspring were immediately registered . These horses came mainly from four lines of Cracker bloodstock and were designated as purebreds by breed experts ? partbred horses were denied entry to the registry . As of 2009 , around 900 horses had been registered since the foundation of the registry .

Effective July 1 , 2008 , the Florida House of Representatives declared the Florida Cracker Horse the official state horse . As of 2009 there are three main bloodlines of Cracker stock , as well as a few smaller lines . The state of Florida still maintains two groups of Ayers @-@ line horses in Tallahassee and Withlacoochee for breeding purposes and a display group in the Paynes Prairie Preserve . The state annually sells excess horses from all three herds , and individual breeders also send horses to the sale. The Livestock Conservancy considers the breed to be at " critical " status , as part of the Colonial Spanish Horse family , meaning that the estimated global population of the breed is fewer than 2 @,@ 000 and there are fewer than 200 registrations annually in the United States . The Equus Survival Trust also considers the population to be " critical , " meaning that there are between 100 and 300 active adult breeding mares in existence today . However , breed numbers are slowly on the rise .

= = = Chickasaw horse = = =

The original Chickasaw horse , bred by the Chickasaw Indians using horses captured from De Soto 's expedition , became extinct after being used to create the Florida Cracker Horse and having some influence on the Quarter Horse . Some sources still use the Chickasaw name to describe the Florida Cracker Horses of today . In the 1970s there was a surge of interest in recreating the Chickasaw using horses bearing strong resemblances to the original breed , but this has since died out and the breed association no longer exists .