

= Boulonnais horse =

The Boulonnais , also known as the " White Marble Horse " , is a draft horse breed . It is known for its large but elegant appearance and is usually gray , although chestnut and black are also allowed by the French breed registry . Originally there were several sub @-@ types , but they were crossbred until only one is seen today . The breed 's origins trace to a period before the Crusades and , during the 17th century , Spanish Barb , Arabian , and Andalusian blood were added to create the modern type .

During the early 1900s , the Boulonnais were imported in large numbers to the United States and were quite popular in France ; however , the European population suffered severe decreases during 20th @-@ century wars . The breed nearly became extinct following World War II , but rebounded in France in the 1970s as a popular breed for horse meat . Breed numbers remain low ; it is estimated that fewer than 1 @,@ 000 horses remain in Europe , mostly in France , with a few in other nations . Studies as early as 1983 indicated a danger of inbreeding within the Boulonnais population , and a 2009 report suggested that the breed should be a priority for conservation within France . The smallest type of Boulonnais was originally used to pull carts full of fresh fish from Boulogne to Paris , while the larger varieties performed heavy draft work , both on farms and in the cities . The Boulonnais was also crossbred to create and refine several other draft breeds .

= = Breed characteristics = =

The Boulonnais today stands from 14 @.@ 3 to 16 @.@ 3 hands ( 59 to 67 inches , 150 to 170 cm ) or more . It has a short , elegant head with a broad forehead and a short , muscular neck . Members of the breed have full chests , rounded rib cages and sloping shoulders . The legs are fairly short but robust and strong . Unlike other draft breeds such as the Shire or Clydesdale , it has no heavy feathering on its lower legs . The breed is generally branded with a small anchor mark on the left side of the neck . Due mostly to the many additions of Oriental blood , the Boulonnais has an elegant appearance that is not often seen in heavy draft breeds and it has been called " Europe 's noblest draft horse " . The fineness of the skin and delicate appearance of the veins has allowed the horse to be described as looking " like polished marble " , leading to its " White Marble Horse " nickname .

In 1778 , the French National Stud performed an initial survey of the breed and found that most were black or dark bay . During the 1800s , gray horses began to appear , and it was the predominating color by the end of the century . Gray became a popular color during this time due to the use of the horses to haul fish at night ? gray horses were more visible in the dark , and therefore more valuable . In the later years of the 20th century , breeders again began to prefer darker colors such as bay and chestnut . Today , chestnut , gray and black are the only colors allowed by the French breed registry , with the vast majority of horses being gray ? a popular phrase says that the horses have coats " the color of the clouds from the coast " .

= = = Sub @-@ types = = =

There were originally several types of Boulonnais . The Petit Boulonnais , Mareyeuse or Mareyeur was used in the rapid transport of cartloads of fresh fish ( la marée ) from the Pas @-@ de @-@ Calais to Paris ; it stood 15 @.@ 1 to 15 @.@ 3 hands ( 61 to 63 inches , 155 to 160 cm ) and weighed 1 @,@ 210 to 1 @,@ 430 pounds ( 550 to 650 kg ) . The Picard draft came from the Picardy region , and was called the " horse of the bad land " , in comparison to the Cauchoix horse from the Pays de Caux area , which was called the " horse of the good land " . The " grand Boulonnais " , which stood 15 @.@ 3 to 16 @.@ 3 hands ( 63 to 67 inches , 160 to 170 cm ) high and weighed 1 @,@ 430 to 1 @,@ 650 pounds ( 650 to 750 kg ) , was bred in the 19th century for farm work in the sugar beet fields . All of these types were bred together to create the modern Boulonnais horse .

= = History = =

One theory states that the origins of the Boulonnais breed emerged from the crossbreeding of native French mares and stallions brought by the Numidian army in 55 ? 54 BC . However , many equine scholars are skeptical of this theory , and state that , whatever the early origins , the later selective breeding and local climate and soil types had a greater influence on the breed than any early Oriental blood . During the Crusades , two breeders , Eustache , Comte de Boulogne , and later Robert , Comte d 'Artois , wanted to create a fast , agile , and strong warhorse for knights to ride in battle . They crossed the existing heavy French stallions with German Mecklenberg mares , similar to modern @-@ day Hanoverians . During the 17th @-@ century Spanish occupation of Flanders , a mixture of Spanish Barb , Arabian , and Andalusian blood was added to the breed , to create the modern Boulonnais . By the 17th century , horse dealers were coming into the Boulonnais district from Picardy and Upper Normandy to buy local horses , which enjoyed a good reputation among breeders . From the late 18th through the mid @-@ 19th century , the Boulonnais spread across France and Europe ; during this time , the breed increased in size as the Industrial Revolution called for larger horses that retained the active movement of the original type . Beginning in the 1830s , it was proposed to cross the Arabian with the Boulonnais to create a new type of cavalry horse , and in the 1860s , calls were put forth to add Thoroughbred blood for the same reason . However , breeders rejected these calls , stating that using the breed to create cavalry horses would make them poorer draft horses . Breed societies also discouraged crosses between the Boulonnais and the Brabant . In June 1886 , a studbook was created for the breed in France , and placed under the jurisdiction of the Syndicat Hippique Boulonnais ( SHB ) in 1902 .

During the early 20th century , the Boulonnais was imported into the United States in large numbers , where it was registered along with other French heavy horse breeds as the " French draft horse " . Breed members in the United States were registered with the Anglo @-@ Norman Horse Association ( or National Norman Horse Association ) beginning in 1876 , an association that was renamed the National French Draft Association in 1885 . This association declared in 1876 that the Boulonnais , Norman , Percheron and Picardy breeds were all essentially the same , and should all be known as the " Norman horse " . They later declared that all of the " Norman horses " were in fact " Percherons " , regardless of actual breeding . This was mostly designed to sell mixed breed draft horses to American consumers at higher prices , and the Illinois Board of Agriculture soon ruled that only those Percherons who came from proven Percheron stock were to be registered as such , and all other breeds , including the Boulonnais , were to be considered separately . Boulonnais were exported from France to Austria , although they saw little success there , and breeding stallions were sent to Argentina .

= = 20th century and today = = =

The Boulonnais was once a popular workhorse in France , with an estimated population of over 600 @,@ 000 in the early 1900s . World War I and World War II almost destroyed the breed , as its home area saw heavy combat in both wars and the bands of broodmares were scattered . Between World War II and the 1970s , the breed almost became extinct , and only a few breeders kept it alive . In the 1970s , it became popular for horse meat , and consumers considered it to be some of the best meat available . However , by this point , there were fewer than 1 @,@ 000 mares remaining . During the mid @-@ 20th century , the stallions Fréthun ( foaled in 1949 ) , Select ( 1962 ) , Trésor ( 1963 ) , Astérix ( 1966 ) and Prince ( 1981 ) had a strong influence on the breed , although this contributed to the problem of inbreeding . Fréthun genes are found in 14 percent of the pedigrees of Boulonnais living today . In the early 1970s , Henry Blanc , the newly appointed director of the French National Stud , proposed that nine draft horse breeds , including the Boulonnais , be recategorized from pulling horses to meat horses . When enacted , this recategorization helped to preserve the gene pool of the Boulonnais by encouraging breeding , but it also changed its primary purpose , resulting in a dramatic weight increase by the 1980s .

The Boulonnais is still bred in small numbers , with the American Boulonnais Horse Association

estimating a population of fewer than 1 @, @ 000 animals remaining in Europe . Many studs are government @-@ funded , to prevent the breed from dying out . The majority of the breed , 95 percent , are located in the Nord @-@ Pas @-@ de @-@ Calais and Normandy regions and 75 percent in just the Pas @-@ de @-@ Calais department of Nord @-@ Pas @-@ de @-@ Calais alone . Although most Boulonnais are in France , a few are exported . In 1999 , fifteen foals were exported to Brazil and one stallion to Argentina . On average , a little over a dozen horses a year are exported , mainly to Brazil and Belgium for breeding and to Germany for forestry work . A few horses live in the Netherlands , Switzerland and Luxembourg , as well as in North America . Since 2006 , twenty horses , including two registry @-@ approved breeding stallions , have been exported from France to Denmark to create a stud farm in that country .

The French national stud , the Haras Nationaux , allows the registration of horses bred using artificial insemination and embryo transfer , but does not allow the registration of cloned horses . It considers the breed to be endangered , along with several other French draft breeds . A 2009 study of French equine genetics proposed that the Boulonnais , along with four other French breeds , should be a conservation priority , with a goal of maintaining maximum genetic variability in France 's native horse population . This follows from studies done as early as 1983 that showed inbreeding and a lack of genetic diversity in the breed .

= = Uses = =

During the 17th century , the smaller Mareyouse type was used for transporting fresh fish from Boulogne to Paris , a distance of almost 200 miles , in under 18 hours . This journey is remembered annually in the Route du Poisson race . Only mares pulled small carts full of ice and fish on the relay @-@ style trip . By 1884 , the Boulonnais was called the " largest and most valuable of that kind of horse in France " . At that time , they were used to move heavy blocks of building stone in Paris , with six to eight horses drawing blocks of several tons . During the 20th century , the larger Boulonnais type was utilized by the French army , and highly regarded for its ability to pull artillery and supply wagons . Falling demand for the breed means that today it is bred mainly for horsemeat . In 2010 , 60 percent of Boulonnais horses bred in France were intended for slaughter , and 80 percent of these were exported , mainly to Italy , to be fattened before being sent to slaughterhouses . However , the sector is in crisis due to falling prices , controversy and the importation of cheap meat ; despite a resurgence following the Mad Cow scares of the 1990s , the consumption of horse meat has fallen sharply , although the Nord @-@ Pas @-@ de @-@ Calais region remains the largest consumer of horse meat in France .

The Boulonnais provided part of the base for the Anglo @-@ Norman breed , which was later to play a large role in the creation of the Selle Francais . It was also used in the creation and refinement of the Italian Heavy Draft , the post @-@ World War II improvement of the Schleswig horse , and the creation of the early 19th @-@ century Ardennes . Some equine scholars theorize that if the smaller Mareyeur had survived , it would have been an ideal horse to cross with the Thoroughbred or Anglo @-@ Arabian to produce a warmblood for competition . In France , a breeding program has been developed by the National Stud to cross Boulonnais and Arabian horses to create a fast , alert driving horse , called the Araboulonnais . This breeding program also brings new blood into the Boulonnais line as , if an Araboulonnais mare is bred to a Boulonnais stallion , and a resulting filly is bred to another Boulonnais stallion , the third generation horse may be inducted into the purebred Boulonnais studbook if it passes an inspection .