

The Colonial Williamsburg

Animal News

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GOODBYE MOLLY

The red mare, mistook by some for Susie, was fired. She now has a new home. There was just too much Joan Crawford and not enough Shirley Temple in her personality for the needs of the Foundation.

HELLO CREAMS

Arrangements to bring four American Cream Draft Horses to C. W. have almost been completed—and there's a chance the Creams, along with a few other horses, may arrive by the time this issue is in your hands. Karen Smith, senior stable groom, solicited the donated Creams.



WHAT IS AN AMERICAN CREAM?

by Karen Smith

The American Cream is the only draft horse that originated in America and is recognized as a breed of American horse. The American Cream Draft Horse Association (ACDHA) can trace the ancestry of the American Cream all the way to its origin—a horse named "Old Granny" in central Iowa in the early 1920s. This mare was of unknown ancestry, but all her foals were of the same color and type. By mating her offspring to other well known draft breeds (i.e. Belgian, Shire) the type and quality of horse was improved while the color was maintained.

Around 1935 the breeders of this offspring made an effort to make these horses a distinct breed. This meant a lot of inbreeding and line breeding was done to establish the breed.

On February 15, 1950 they were recognized as the standard by the Iowa Department of Agriculture. This gave to the American Cream all the privileges granted to older established breeds in that state—such as their own breed class in the state fairs and shows.

The ACDHA gives this description as the ideal American Cream: They are "a medium cream color with white mane and tail, pink skin and amber colored eyes. Some white markings are also very desirable. Pink skin is the determining factor in securing

this rich color. Past experience has proven that dark-skinned creams often do not have a satisfactory color. Further, when mated with other American Creams, they generally produce too light or nearly white offspring. Therefore, our chief and most sought for strain of American Creams carry the pink trait."

A particularly distinctive trait is the amber eyes. When American Cream foals are born they have white eyes that slowly darken so that when they are mature their eyes have turned into an amber color.

Manes and tails are left long and flowing. The tails are not docked like some other draft breeds (our percherons for instance).

The American Cream is a medium draft type. The ACDHA describes them as looking like a Suffolk Punch (another draft breed). They have ample draft hindquarters, well-muscled chest, short strong legs and excellent disposition. Mares weigh 1,600 to 1,800 pounds and stallions 1,800 to 2,000 pounds. The average height is from 15.2 hands to 16.2 hands. A hand equals four inches. (Topsy is 18 hands.)

The reason most people, as well as most horsemen, have not heard about American Creams is they are a rare breed. From 1979 to the present only 28 Creams have been registered in all the United States, and none outside. Of the 28 Creams 22 are mares and 6 are stallions. There are only nine active breeders of American Creams that are listed with ACDHA.

American Creams never really got a chance to become well-known and established. One reason may be the Creams came along right as the farm and city were becoming mechanized. Draft horse numbers declined sharply at this time.

With the help of the American Minor Breeds Conservancy and the nine breeders the Creams are staying alive. As writer Carol Semrad put it, "There is something to be said for this horse's persistence. Showing much of the rugged American Spirit many of us hold dear, the Cream appears to be determined to survive and find its place.

For more information please write: ACDHA, Rt. 1, Box 88, Hubbard, Iowa 50122.

OUR GIRL STAR

by Allison Harcourt

Star is back walking the streets of Williamsburg again. Star has been on TLO waiting for her hooves to grow enough to wear shoes. The problem was caused by a bacterial infection which caused the hoof wall to weaken and crumble. Her hooves were treated with medication prescribed by her veterinarian and farrier. Star has shown great improvement, and with the aid of special shoes called grass tips, she's back at work again.

You probably have seen Star working the streets in the past. She is a black mare with an irregular shaped white mark on her forehead. She is of a good size,

and like many of our horses a draft cross. In Star's case this means a good bit of draft or heavy horse, combined with a mix of smaller light horse breeding. Just what the true parentage of Star really is—well only Star knows for sure, and she's not about to tell.

So far, this description could apply to a number of our horses, but what really sets Star apart is her luxurious long mane, low hanging lower lip, and her extreme LACK of speed. Yes, I'll admit Star is slow. In the summer one of her best impressions is the exhausted horse trick. This includes plodding along with her head hanging low, looking for all the world like she can barely go another step. This is of course ½ block from the Wythe Stable where we started, and she's not even pulling the cart yet. The cart is at the other end of town and I'm leading her. People look at me with accusing stares, or will even say "Oh how can you make that poor horse work?" My plaintive cries of "she just woke up," don't seem to help the situation. What the visitor may not see is Star transform from exhausted horse, to flirting mare when a good looking gelding goes by. She flirts with Jim and Jake, the wagon horses, and Rod, the new carriage horse. She also manages to revive whenever we come near any C. W. cookie stand. Star is addicted to all types of C. W. cookies. I must admit that she is also a bit of a hussy. She has her string of geldings, and has been known to jump the fence to follow her pasturemate Toby. Toby does not share her devotion, his priorities are "food, food, and more food." Star will occasionally cause the farrier to let slip a few words not always acceptable in polite company. She can be a bit silly about her hind feet.

Her lack of speed, which I prefer to call steadiness, makes Star a valuable horse. Patience and strength are two important qualities of a cart horse, Star's job title for a number of years. In her later years, Star has moved from the role of cart horse to that of teacher. She works with school groups, helping to introduce mobs of squealing children to the mystery and lure of horses. While giving Star a pat, they may also learn how a horse works, eats, and how she sees and understands the world around her. Star will stay absolutely still for a timid child to work up the courage to touch her, but will not tolerate rowdy behavior. We can find younger horses to pull the heavier loads, but that rare combination of patience and wisdom comes with age and experience.

Like the subject of her ancestry, Star is also keeping silent about her age. We know she came to C. W. at least twenty years ago to serve as a wagon horse. With the sale of her partner, Star found her true calling as a cart horse. Her teeth say she is somewhere between her mid-twenties and thirty years old. Twenty-five and holding? Now that we have confessed her age, there has been some talk of retirement. Star seems to hold the theory "use it or lose it." Judging from the way she chases the geldings or prances back to the barn, Star seems ready to keep on working. We have adjusted her work to suit her "experience." We also make sure her teeth are in good shape, and pamper her during the colder months of the year. With the small exception of her hooves, Star is very healthy for her age, and will continue to work as long as she is fit and willing. I think that will be for quite awhile. I hope so, she's a good partner. She puts up with my moods, and I put up with her's. I guess that means were friends?!

ANIMAL SURVEY FEEDBACK MEETINGS

Our animals met in their feedback groups recently to discuss results of the summer survey.

The sheep unit went like this—

Beltane: Baaaa, baaaa.

Thomas: Bleeeah, bleeeah.

Not much was accomplished in that unit.

The carriage horse unit was particularly vocal when asked how they felt about Topsy management. They met behind the carriage house. Here's a transcript of what occurred.

Bill: Topsy thinks she's the smartest thing on four legs and I get sick of that.

Bruce: It's enough to make you colic. (Topsy shifts her weight from one hoof to another)

Jake (mule): She doesn't care what we think and none of this is going to change anything.

Diamond: She's Okay with me.

Ruby: Sure, but she's not the only animal in the barn. This place doesn't operate on the strength of one animal.

Jake (mule): She can't communicate with us. If she can't communicate with us how can we communicate with her. (Topsy bites off a piece of bark from a pine tree and drops it on the ground.)

Diamond: We're not discussing who's perfect.

Jock (mule): But we look to Topsy for leadership. She has to realize that and lead ALL of us.

Jake (mule): She's forgotten that. She gets so wrapped up pulling carriages for the important fancy people.

Topsy: SO! I've not been doing such a good job, huh?

Bill: Not as good as you could.

Ruby: Not as if we ALL helped at every opportunity and always put the needs of the barn first.

Topsy: Will you be QUIET, Ruby! Can't you hear what they're saying? (Topsy stamps one front hoof and picks up a wisp of hay off the ground and eats it very slowly). I am listening. I truly am. I really want this to be the best barn in the world. It hurts to hear what you've been saying. It's hard to listen to those things. (She rubs a fly off her front leg with her nose.) But I don't think you would have the courage to say those difficult things in front of me if you all truly did not care very much about this barn.

Things are going to change. We can make this barn a better place. (She lifts her head, her ears prick forward.) If we want to make this barn a better place, we've got to take a look at ourselves and make a change. (Her hooves start tapping.) I'm starting with the mare in the mirror. I'm going to make a change. (She starts to dance around the stable yard.) If you wanna make the barn a better place, take a look at yourself and make a change! I'm starting with the mare in the mirror . . . shhhmooaah, shhhmooaah! (Then she started to moonwalk)

Jake: Does this mean I have to start with the mule in the mirror?

Ruby: Yes, dear.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? Please write to:
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