

# Top 10 Western Breeds

By Doreen Shumpert



## The American Saddlebred

**HISTORY:** The American Saddlebred traces its roots to natural-gaited horses from the British Isles. Through selective breeding, the Narragansett Pacer was developed. These were crossed with Thoroughbreds and imported to America in the early 1700s. During the Revolutionary War, a horse called simply “the American horse” was a recognized type. As the Nation developed, these horses went West with the pioneers. In Kentucky, horsemen continued to add Thoroughbred blood and developed a larger, prettier, all-purpose animal that established the American Saddlebred as a breed. They were used for riding, pulling carriages, and other work. Although not often credited, Saddlebreds did their share to help settle the country.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

With the size and beauty of a Thoroughbred, and the ability to learn the easy-riding gaits, Saddlebreds are prized for a pleasant temperament, eagerness, strength, and stamina.

### KNOWN FOR:

The American Saddlebred is best known today for being high stepping and elegant as it performs five gaits (walk, trot, canter, slow gait, and rack). The American Saddlebred Horse Association also has a Western division, in which the breed competes in events such as cutting and reining.

**American Saddlebred Horse Assoc.**  
4083 Iron Works Parkway  
Lexington, Ky. 40511  
(859) 259-2742  
www.asha.net

William Shatner  
(founded the annual Hollywood Charity Horse Show in California);  
Patrick Duffy; Carson Kressley; former President Ronald Reagan.



## The Arabian Horse

**HISTORY:** There is no breed with a more romantic history than the Arabian. Originating from palace courtyards in Persia, prized Arabians were presented as gifts to kings and princes. They also found their way onto the battlefields of Europe. European royalty and governments, such as the former USSR and Poland, established studs for breeding purebred Arabians and improving native stock. The first Arabian horse in the United States belonged to president George Washington. In 1877, the Sultan of Turkey presented two stallions to General Ulysses S. Grant. One was later bred to two mares imported from England, and two more stallions were also imported. This program, limited as it was, is considered the first purebred Arabian breeding program in the United States.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

The oldest of all breeds, Arabians are known for their stamina, beauty, intelligence, and loyal disposition.

### KNOWN FOR:

Today, Arabians have erased many stereotypes as only show or endurance mounts. They excel in all events, including cutting, reining, and cow horse, and are even used as good ranching mounts in parts of the country.

**Arabian Horse Association**  
10805 E. Bethany Drive  
Aurora, Colo. 80014  
(303) 696-4500  
www.ArabianHorses.org

Kenny Rogers; Patrick Swayze; Robert Wagner; Kim Novak; Wayne Newton; Burt Reynolds; Shirley MacLaine; film director Mike Nichols



## The American Quarter Horse

**HISTORY:** If you have ever seen a horse in one of rodeo’s timed events, been along for work on a ranch, or watched a Western, nine times out of 10 you have witnessed an American Quarter Horse. The fastest were called Celebrated American Quarter Running Horses by English colonists in the 1600s. When Spanish horses were crossed with blooded stallions such as Steel Dust, the American Quarter Horse became the world’s greatest mount for gathering and working cattle. They were essential to frontier life.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

The world’s most popular and versatile breed, these heavily muscled, compact horses can run a quarter mile over a straightaway faster than any other horse—hence the name.

### KNOWN FOR:

Today they are staples as ranch horses, and compete in many events with ranching origins such as reining, roping, and cutting. Quarter horses also prove their versatility in halter and English events, and as recreational horses.

**The American Quarter Horse Association**  
1600 Quarter Horse Drive  
Amarillo, Texas 79104  
(806) 376-4811  
www.aqha.com

James Pickens, Jr.; Morgan Freeman; Sam Elliott; Tom Selleck; Julia Roberts; Lyle Lovett; George Strait; Jewel; Ty Murray; Clay Walker; Terry Bradshaw; Nolan Ryan; Kyle Petty



## The Appaloosa

**HISTORY:** The Appaloosa has roots dating back to cave drawings. The Nez Perce Indians of the Northwest bred these animals very carefully for their strength, speed, and unique colors. Their history alone conjures images of the American Wild West and Indian battles. This history is celebrated each year with the The Chief Joseph ride, which is open only to Appaloosas. It travels through Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, following the last hundred miles of the Nez Perce Trail that marked the end of the fighting between the Nez Perce and the U.S. Cavalry 126 years ago.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

Appaloosas are known the world over for their unique coat patterns, athletic ability, intelligence, and heart.

### KNOWN FOR:

Today, you will find the modern Appaloosa competing in a wide variety of disciplines. They are often used for roping, reining, cutting, and as sure-footed ranch mounts. They are make for an even-tempered and reliable family mount.

**Appaloosa Horse Club**  
2720 West Pullman Road  
Moscow, Idaho 83843  
(208) 882-5578  
www.appaloosa.com

John Wayne; Burt Reynolds; James Brolin; Picabo Street (*Olympic skier*); James Drury (*The Virginian*); Mabel DeLong Strickland Woodward and Sherri Mell (*Cowgirl Hall of Fame inductees*)



## The Missouri Fox Trotter

**HISTORY:** Born in the Ozark Mountains to facilitate cow management in the rugged, rocky hills of Arkansas and Missouri, the Missouri Fox Trotter is known for its sure-footedness, good nature, and the comfort it affords its rider. They are also the chosen breed of the National Park Service.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

With at least two gaits—the flat foot walk and fox trot—the breed is prized for its smooth stride and versatility. They can extend their natural four-beat gait and add a rock-in chair canter.

### KNOWN FOR:

With no “special shoeing” required, super disposition, and good looks, the Fox Trotter is prized in competition, endurance, and trail riding. With cow sense running in the blood, they have excellent versatility as cutting, roping, and ranch horses.

**The Missouri Fox Trotting Horse Breed Association**  
PO Box 1027  
Ava, Mo. 65608  
(417) 683-2468  
www.mfthba.com

Robert Redford; Governor of Missouri Matt Blunt



HORSE PHOTOS COURTESY THE BREED ASSOCIATIONS

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## The Morgan Horse

**HISTORY:** Most have probably heard “Justin Morgan Had a Horse” courtesy of author Marguerite Henry. And what a horse he had. One day in 1791, the singing teacher walked home with a two-year old colt he received as payment for debt. A breed was born; the horse sired offspring so sturdy, durable, and popular that they’re still going strong 219 years later. Morgan blood currently streams through many breeds, including Quarter Horses.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

Distinguished by an upright, graceful neck, distinctive head, and expressive eyes. Compact with heavily muscled quarters, Morgans are reliable, versatile, and tireless.

**KNOWN FOR:** America’s first recognized horse breed, Morgans were popular Civil War mounts for being sensible under fire, loyal, able to march tirelessly, and maintain condition on inconsistent rations. Today Morgans are known for strength and pulling ability. They regularly compete in roping, cutting and reining events and serve on working ranches.

**American Morgan Horse Association**  
122 Bostwick Road  
Shelburne, Vt. 05482  
(802) 985-4944  
www.morganhorse.com

Johnny Depp; Glenn Close; Phylicia Rashad; Mary Tyler Moore; Carson Kressley; George Foreman; ; Christian radio hosts John and Sherry Rivers



## The Mustang

**HISTORY:** Living symbols of the American West, Mustangs are protected and managed by The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to ensure that healthy herds thrive on healthy rangelands. Since these animals have virtually no natural predators, herd sizes can double in just four years. To help restore the balance, the BLM gathers them and offers them for adoption to those willing and able to provide humane care.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

Wild mustangs are known for their strength, endurance, loyalty, and intelligence, which make them ideal for work or recreation.

**KNOWN FOR:** Adopted Mustangs make excellent mounts, used for everything from dressage to trail riding and mounted shooting. Approached correctly, they are more highly trainable and accepting than is often realized. Nevada Joe, an adopted Mustang, is the ambassador for the North America Riding for the Handicapped Association, Inc.

**American Mustang and Burro Association**  
P.O. Box 1013  
Grass Valley, Calif. 95945  
www.ambainc.net

Donovan Tea (*from the singing group The Lettermen*); Several color guards, including: the United States Marine Corps Color Guard, and the 3rd US Infantry Regiment in Arlington Cemetery (Caisson)



## Paint Horse

**HISTORY:** Paint Horses reportedly first appeared in the New World in 1519 with Spanish explorer Hernando Cortes. One horse was described as having “white stockings” and one as having “white patches.” Eventually, herds of wild horses included some with paint markings. Due to their flashy color, they became the favorite mounts of many American Indians—particularly the Comanche, who even depicted them on painted buffalo robes. Today, Paints constitute the second-largest breed registry in the United States based on the number registered annually.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

While the colorful coat pattern is essential to the identity of the breed, American Paint Horses also have strict bloodline requirements and a distinctive stock-horse body type.

**KNOWN FOR:** Paints are still favored mounts for ranching, showing, cutting, reining, roping, and rodeo events due to their color and disposition.

**American Paint Horse Association**  
P.O. Box 961023  
Fort Worth, Texas 76161  
(817) 834-2742  
www.apha.com

Charlie Daniels; NFL Hall-of-Famer Mel Blount; Viggo Mortensen; musician Kix Brooks



## The Palomino Horse

**HISTORY:** The most famous and loved Palomino of all time is most likely Trigger, the mount of silver screen cowboy and American icon Roy Rogers. Their years together helped identify the breed as a cowboy’s horse and make them highly recognizable. Mr. Ed, from the TV show of the same name, was also a registered Palomino. The Palomino Horse Breeders Association was formed in 1941 to promote palomino-colored horses. Palominos registered with multiple associations are also eligible for registration with the Palomino Horse Breeders of America, provided they meet size and color criteria.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

Generally recognized as a “color” found in many breeds, the golden coat always grabs attention, making Palominos ideal parade mounts and show horses.

**KNOWN FOR:** Palomino horses compete in the world’s toughest all-breed competitions, including National Cutting Horse, Reining, and National Snaffle Bit Association events. They contend in AQHA horse shows, American Horse Show Association events, and in many Western aspects, such as ranching, barrel racing, and team roping.

**Palomino Horse Breeders of America**  
15253 East Skelly Drive  
Tulsa, Okla. 74116  
(918) 438-1234  
www.palominohba.com

Elvis Presley owned a Palomino Tennessee Walking Horse named Rising Sun that survived “the King” by nearly 10 years, passing away at Graceland in 1986.



## The Rocky Mountain Horse

**HISTORY:** The Rocky Mountain Horse originated in the United States in the late 1800s in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains of eastern Kentucky. The existence of these horses was practically a secret for many years outside of that region. Although little written history survives, it is said the name originated from a horse that arrived there from the Rocky Mountains. They were sure-footed, easy-gaited, and the mount of choice for postmen, doctors, and traveling preachers. They also plowed small fields, herded cattle, traveled rugged trails, and pulled buggies. Versatility was critical, as horses endured rough use, harsh conditions, and only the toughest survived to keep the breed alive.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

A versatile breed with a smooth, single-foot gait, Rocky Mountain Horses must be 14.2 to 16 hands high with no white above the knee or hock except for on the face.

**KNOWN FOR:** Rocky Mountain Horses are used for multiple events such as roping, serve as cow working horses, and as children’s mounts. Because of their smooth gait, they are also excellent trail riding mounts.

**Rocky Mountain Horse Association**  
P.O. Box 129  
Mt. Olivet, Ky. 41064  
(606) 724-2354  
www.rmhorse.com

Rockin’ Dobbin is the “mane attraction” for Straight Arrow’s Mane ‘n Tail products. He’s also due to be featured in a children’s book written by owner Diana Medler.

