

INTRODUCTION TO APPALOOSAS

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The Appaloosa horse first was known as the "Palouse horse", or in local jargon, "A Palouse", after the Palouse River country of the northwest. In time, the name became slurred to "Apalouise"; the final spelling was adopted by the Appaloosa Horse Club for its registry in 1938.

During the Nez Perce War of the late 1800's, the Appaloosa earned a coveted niche in Western History on performance. They fled the cream of the U. S. Cavalry, covering 1,500 miles in three grueling months, over rocky canyon walls, across swift-flowing rivers, and down narrow mountain trails.

In a tragic day both for the Cavalry and the Nez Perce Indians, the proud tribe finally surrendered to the Cavalry in 1877. Their horses were confiscated and taken to Fort Keogh, where they were sold at a government auction. The horses not rounded up during the flight of the Nez Perce, many of which were Appaloosas, remained on the plains for anyone who caught them to claim them.

Thus, two hundred years of raising Appaloosas by the Nez Perce resulted in shambles. The establishment of the Appaloosa Registry in 1938 was the result of a plan by dedicated men to reclaim the glory of the Appaloosa horse. The Appaloosa was recognized as a breed by the National Stallion Board, the final authority as to what is recognized as a breed in this country, in 1950.

Characteristics of the Appaloosa

Height varies from 14.2 to 16.0 hands tall, and weight varies from 950 to 1250 pounds. The minimum height for a mature Appaloosa is 14.0 hands. There is no maximum height, and 17.0 hands is sometimes seen. Weight is to be in proportion to the size and frame of the horse. Registered Appaloosas should not carry pony, draft, Pinto/Paint or Albino breeding.

The Nez Perce spotted horses were reputedly a speedy, handsome animal with great endurance and athletic build. Today, the ideal Appaloosa TYPE would be described as a well balanced "middle-of-the-road" horse. The general appearance of the Appaloosa should be well muscled, symmetrical and smooth, with a clean throatlatch, prominent and well defined withers, short appearing back and sloping croup, a long sloping hip, deep heartgirth and long underline, long sloping shoulders with a deep chest (not excessively wide), short and flat cannon bones, medium long and sloping pasterns. Their way-of-going is ground covering (not choppy), smooth and easy. Because the breed is versatile, one sees many variations of type to fit the uses.

Genetically, Appaloosas come by their characteristics the same way as any other horse breed. As in most breeding, Appaloosas of good type and known breeding are in demand as breeding stock. However, Appaloosas have an added dimension not considered in most horse breeds: coat color, mottled skin, white sclera and striped hooves.

Appaloosa Coat Patterns

Although the Appaloosa is not judged on its color, the color is an important visual part of our breed, i.e., people want their Appaloosas to look like Appaloosas when they are being exhibited. Appaloosas come in all general horse colors. Their base color can be solid as well as roans, that is, white hairs mixed with darker base colors. They can have standard face and leg marks or the unique splashing and striping known only to the Appaloosa breed.

There are six basic coat patterns with an unlimited combination of these because no two Appaloosas ever have absolutely identical markings. Many carry dual patterns, such as roan and spots. Basic patterns are:



LEOPARD (considered the "Classic" pattern)—dark foreparts with white over loin and hips, with round or egg-shaped spots, many times with haloes (i.e., roan rings edging the spots); spots may vary from dime sized to four inches in diameter. Blankets may be small patches on the rump to large ones as illustrated.



WHITE BLANKET—dark foreparts with a blanket that is nearly void of spots. The blanket is of the same size and shape as the spotted blanket variety but is white over-all. In other words, they are blankets without spots.

MARBLE (or Roan)—base color is usually red or blue



roan, at times described as bay, brown or black roan. The Marble pattern is one of the most common of the Appaloosa patterns. The blue roan can be very light to very dark in hue, but these blue colors are never referred to as "grey". (There is no "grey" color in the Appaloosa breed unless it carries a "greying gene" in addition to the roaning factor.) Marbles usually have "varnish marks" (a grouping of predominant dark hairs) about the face, adding expression. Marble-pattern Appaloosas are nearly always born solid color and "color out" to recognizable Appaloosas as they mature.

LEOPARD—base color is pure white with evenly distributed dark spots of uniform size over its entire body, from head to toe. An Appaloosa of the Leopard pattern is born with the spots it will carry throughout life. (Many Appaloosas appear to be leopards because they may have spots on the rump and light on the front, but these are not "true" Leopards...most often they are very light blue roans with dark spots and should be grouped in the Blanket with Spots category.) Simply put, a "true" Leopard is base white with dark spots AT BIRTH.



SNOWFLAKE—sometimes called a "reverse leopard" because the base color is dark with white spots over the body. The Snowflake-pattern Appaloosa is usually born solid and "colors out" to this pattern. The Snowflake can also be a transient pattern, that is, they often become Marbles with age and the Snowflake is the middle process of the entire coloring change from solid to roan. A "true" Snowflake is probably the most rare of the Appaloosa coat patterns, and even then will vary in their spotting throughout the year.



FROST or SPOTTED HIP—dark base color with either frost or white spots on the loin and hips. This pattern can develop with age, or an Appaloosa can be born with the color. The Frost pattern is unpredictable...it can be a permanent pattern or transient like the Snowflake, in that it is the middle process of the color change from solid color to Marble.



To elaborate on the changing color in Appaloosas, around 30% of the Appaloosas born are solid colored at birth with only the white sclera and some parti-colored skin under the tail, indicating that they are Appaloosas. Most of these horses develop their pattern later, beginning as Frost or Snowflake, progressing to the Marble pattern by the time they are four or five years old. This process is termed "coloring out" or "roaning out". It is this strong "Roaning Factor" in the Appaloosa breed that enables this dramatic change to take place.

A small percentage of Appaloosas are born without color and do not develop it at maturity. They are termed as "Marginal" Appaloosas; they can be registered. A "Marginal Mare or Stallion" can be valuable as a breeding animal when bred correctly. They are genetically capable of producing foals of excellent color although they are unrecognizable as an Appaloosa.

All Appaloosas must have two things.....

Having described the basic coat patterns of the Appaloosa breed, it should be noted that ALL Appaloosas must have two things in common: The WHITE SCLERA and the PARTI-COLORED SKIN. White Sclera—this is sometimes called the "human eye" as the white which encircles the eye is like a persons eye. Most horses have dark scleras; an Appaloosa must have a white sclera. Parti-Colored (mottled) Skin—this is one of the most telltale physical characteristics of the breed. This mottling of pink and black skin is ALWAYS EVIDENT in the genital region, and may be evident around the soft skin of the lips, muzzle, nostrils or eyes. Some Appaloosas have a minimum of mottled skin, others may have a lot.

Other Characteristics often seen in Appaloosas are:

STRIPED HOOVES—vertical stripes or laminations on the hoof. The striping is prominent on most Appaloosas but is not a registration requirement, because the hoof is an outgrowth of the skin at the coronet. If the horse has four white socks, it is likely to also have four white hooves. If the registration rules demanded striped hooves, this individual would not be eligible. Striped hooves can be on one or all feet of an Appaloosa. SPARSE MANE and WISPY TAIL—an inherited tendency toward this lack of mane and tail hair. Not all Appaloosas show this characteristic however they generally tend toward this trait. VARNISH MARKS—most commonly seen with the Marble pattern, it is a grouping of a predominance of dark hairs within an area. Common areas where Varnish Marks are found are over the bridge of the nose, above eyes (giving the appearance of eyebrows), also on the point of hip, behind the elbow, on the gaskin and stifle region. The presence of Varnish Marks aids in determining whether a horse is a Marble pattern Appaloosa or simply a roan colored horse.

Genetically speaking.....

Geneticists have long been intrigued with Appaloosa breeding, but much is still a mystery. For breeding purposes, like color patterns do not necessarily insure this pattern in the offspring. Although some Appaloosa lines produce certain patterns more consistently than others, breeding a blanket does not mean you will get a blanket on the foal. It is possible to come up with any pattern or combination of patterns listed above (and if there is leopard in the pedigree, even an occasional Leopard). Pedigrees will tell the story of color consistency better than any other single thing. Therefore, unknown breeding, sparse pedigrees, and pedigrees with extra heavy amounts of crossbreeding are more risky than staying with the known Appaloosa breeding to produce the desired coloring in the next generation. Breeding to solid colored breeds, such as Quarter Horses or Thoroughbreds, dilutes the color production percentages in future generations, as a general rule.

Even with concentrated Appaloosa breeding, recognizable color at birth is not a "sure" thing, but the percentages are increased somewhat. Most Appaloosas born solid colored will have the necessary white sclera and indications of parti-colored skin to be registered and a high number will probably color out to the Marble pattern at maturity.

Part of the fun of raising Appaloosas is that the color factor is a bit of a gamble. The ultimate aim of any serious breeder is producing a well built, straight legged, good disposition, attractively colored individual with performance ability and the bred-in genes to reproduce these qualities consistently.

A genetically strong Appaloosa of the Marble pattern can produce blankets, leopards and other marbles, therefore they play an important part in any breeding program. The ROANING FACTOR in Appaloosas is very strong. This is the gene that enables foals born solid to "color out" in time to recognizable Appaloosas.

The "Greying Gene": Rapid roaning in the extreme involves a genetic problem known as the "Greying Gene". This comes from breeding an Appaloosa to a grey gene-carrying Appaloosa. The chances are 50-50 that the resulting foal will carry this fading gene. When both parents carry the "Greying Gene", the chances are increased to 75% that the offspring will fade. The odds of producing a grey are high, especially when there are so many other desirable horse colors to cross with where stable coloring is insured.

Horses with the "greying Gene" are usually born black with contrasting color. By the time they are yearlings, much of the dark hair in the spots has been replaced by white hair. This change is rapid and horses have either turned white or the spots are barely visible by age 4 or 5. The pigment of the skin does not change, only the pelt turns white.

Appaloosas that are properly bred, with no grey in their immediate breeding (parents), will carry their spots throughout life. A certain amount of natural roaning may take place over the years but the color in the spots, themselves, will not fade out.

Undesirable Crosses: Appaloosas crossed to dun, buckskin or Palomino colors should be discouraged because it introduces the "Dilution Factor". The dun color is a dominant color and can range from very dark grullo to very light cream. The concern with the dun cross is that the contrast of the base color on horses of very light dun shades cannot be distinguished from the white blanket and light dun spots. In other words, the contrast is "diluted". Crossing a yellow horse to a non-yellow horse will give you a 50-50 chance that the

resulting foal will also be yellow colored. If both parents are dun, the chances are increased to 75% that the offspring will be dun and/or albino (the latter not being eligible for registration). The factors for dun are genetically strong. Unlike grey, the factors for dun color can be carried but not expressed, and can skip generations without consistency.

Ineligible Crosses: Appaloosas carrying Paint/Pinto, draft, pony, and/or Albino breeding, families known to carry HYPP, and Appaloosas exhibiting the greying gene are ineligible for registration.

Acceptable Crosses: Appaloosas that are 7/8ths in the fourth generation and 75% in the fifth generation or those that will create them.

Face/Leg Marks: Breeders have different preferences about the amount of white markings their Appaloosas carry. A lot of white face/leg marks did not appear on the early day Appaloosas, and dun color was nearly unheard of. These traits came about by crossbreeding to horses with these genetic features. Some breeders feel the presence of four stockings and a blaze add flash to show animals. How much white that is favorable to carry on Appaloosas comes under much discussion. ("Misplaced white" such as large belly patches, apron faces or extra high stockings may indicate Paint/Pinto breeding. The gene for face/leg marks can be carried without being expressed, making this particular gene difficult to anticipate unless the background of the individual is known.

Pedigrees are important.....

By studying the pedigree before buying, a person will learn a lot about a horse, such as the probable disposition and intelligence, performance potential, health and longevity, ability to reproduce its likeness, etc. The various conformation types within the breed enables a person to buy the type that suits them best.

Since the Appaloosa is a breed with an identifying color pattern which makes it stand out over other horse breeds, it must also be remembered that some Appaloosas seen with undesirable points may actually be unregistered but are referred to as "Appaloosas" because of their coloring. Sub-parr specimen of solid colored breeds go unnoticed because they are not identified by their pelts. Such is not the case with the Appaloosa coat pattern.

Appaloosas are versatile.....

Once used for war, racing and Buffalo hunting by the Nez Perce Indians, the present day Appaloosas are a versatile breed. They are used for stock working and pleasure riding, field hunters and at rodeos, endurance riding and dressage...from youth horses to pari-mutual racing. In all fields where light horse breeds are used, you are likely to see Appaloosas.

Appaloosas are gentle.....

Looking at the breed as an over-all body, Appaloosas are tractable, easily trained and handled. They are quiet by nature with a keen intelligence and willingness to learn. Most Appaloosas enjoy a close relationship with people and display extremely gentle dispositions, with an inherit desire to please.

Other qualities in the Appaloosa breed are adaptability, endurance, good feet and legs, and they are known to be "easy keepers".

Choosing an Appaloosa.....

Putting together the foregoing information should lead to a happy collaboration between horse and owner. If you are in the early stages of "spotted fever", have a qualified Appaloosa horse person help you choose a breeding animal. Too often people new to the breed are so excited by a color pattern that they fail to take a horse's conformation into consideration. Remember that old cliché that "beauty is only skin deep" and learn something about the individual under that spotted hide! Study the horse's pedigree carefully, ask to see pictures of some of its relatives, its health care and other important points. Since each Appaloosa is unique, make certain that what is unique about your Appaloosa is something you can be proud of.

