

The NORTH AMERICAN CURLY HORSE STANDARD

BONE, LEGS, and FEET.

Front legs should have relatively long forearms and short, substantial cannons. Pasterns should not be too long (weakness), or too steep (lacking flexion or shock absorption), and will normally follow the angle of the shoulder. Durability and endurance are key traits common to Curly horses, and are especially evident in the strength and substance of their virtually trouble-free legs and feet. Feet and bone are large and substantial to bear a rider's weight with ease. Hooves should be thick-walled, thick-soled, open-heeled, well rounded and strong. The front and hind legs are correct and straight when viewed from fore, side or rear. Cow hocks, sickle hocks and any structural imperfections known to affect soundness are undesirable. Small degrees of toeing out behind, slight set to hocks, and other traits familiar to certain types or disciplines and functions, are to be taken into consideration. Smaller than normal or missing chestnuts (inside legs) or ergots (at point of fetlocks), thought to be primitive horse traits, occur in some Curly horses.

BODY.

The withers should be prominent enough to hold a saddle on properly. Ribs will be well sprung to provide plenty of depth and capacity. Potbellies are undesirable. A Curly horse should have a short to medium, well muscled back, and a short to medium coupled loin, for strength and flexibility. The Curly should have a long underline for free athletic movement. The croup is somewhat sloping and rounded, and should display strength. The hindquarter should be proportionately long when viewed from the side, and hindquarters are well muscled without being bulky. Short or narrow hindquarters are undesirable. When viewed from the rear, the width across stifle and gaskin area should at least be as wide as the width across the hipbones.

MANE and TAIL.

The manes of Curly horses shed more in spring than other breeds. They can still be long, thick, and spiraled, and when they are, they are usually split down the middle (double or split mane). When they have the thinner manes, they can be quite light maned especially during shedding, and this is not undesirable. Tails are set properly, neither too low nor too high. The dock (tailhead) of a Curly horse is very often thinner haired than the rest of the tail, with shedding or breakage in that area. That is considered a trademark of the dominant Curly gene, especially in the Western bloodlines, and is not undesirable. Short and thin hair or balding down the entire length of the tail may occur in the probable homozygous dominant curly gene horses (specifically in the Western bloodlines). Some recessive gene Curly horses of the Eastern bloodlines exhibit scanty haired tails as well.

MOVEMENT.

The Curly horse will display straight, efficient, athletic movement in a medium to long stride. When walking, the hind foot will typically fall over or before the front footstep (creating an over stride). The trot should be naturally extended and smooth to ride. The North American Curly horse is typically a walk, trot, canter "breed", however there is a distinct group of Curly horses that are naturally gaited.

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This is a breed standard for the dominant gene Curly horse. ICHO also tracks and researches the recessive gene curly horse. At the present time, no known similarity of the two types of curly horses exists except for the possession of a hypoallergenic curly coat. Research is ongoing to identify the dominant curly gene and in so doing attempt to identify the accompanying genetic traits. When this is finished, ICHO has tentative plans to attempt to identify the recessive curly gene. We will share our education as research progresses.

The purpose of this Curly horse standard is two fold: First to identify the most highly valued Curly horse traits recognized and valued by owners and breeders (*general*), and secondly to identify a basic consistent similarity which may be used to develop varying types of Curly horses so they do not lose the essence of being Curly (*official standard*).



GENERAL BREED INFORMATION

GENERAL IMPRESSION:

Whether in draft, pony, or in one of several saddle types, the North American Curly horse is a very naturally successful horse. We look for a hardy, sound, well proportioned, well-balanced curly-coated horse, usually seen with a high head carriage and forward way of going with an overall desirable conformation. It will show a gentle, calm, docile demeanor, yet remain alert. It will exhibit friendliness, intelligence, and a willing, dedicated work ethic. Stallions will display masculinity and mares will display femininity. Thickness and type of muscle pattern will vary with type, but its muscling will be ideal for the disciplines its type is best suited for.

The domestic Curly horse of today is still a horse designed more by Mother Nature than by man, and it still has many survival and primitive characteristics as a result of that heritage. It is not a stabilized equine breed by most definitions, which are usually variations of this statement: "Animals that, through selection and breeding over many generations, have come to resemble one another and pass on those traits uniformly and predictably to their offspring." Instead, the North American Curly horse is a very unique horse of widely variable descriptions. Part of its very identity is this wide range of diverse types. Close to nature, and unique to man for all these reasons, the North American Curly horse of today is still a horse known for its solid rugged natural ability and adaptability, and its wide diversity of size, color, and type.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

COAT. The coat is the Curly's main "claim to fame". The Curly horse does have a unique curly coat. It is most obvious in winter, when its longer coat shows thick dense curls similar to a sheep fleece. In summer, the Curly horse sheds its thick curly body coat for a smoother, sleeker summer coat, which may or may not show evidence of curl. Its mane and forelock, the hair inside its ears, and often its fetlocks will typically remain conspicuously curly year round. The Curly coat is hypoallergenic for many people allergic to other horses.



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SHOW. When being shown, (depending upon the discipline), Curly horses are frequently not clipped everywhere that other breeds are. The Curly horse should look good and is more characteristic when shown in its natural state. The presence of curls (inside their ears or on their fetlocks, for example) is to be viewed as exhibiting desirable breed traits, and is not to be penalized.

SIZE. Curly horse saddle types are the most numerous kind of Curly horses, typically ranging from 14.1 to 15.1 hands high. However, the amazing Curly horse comes in all sizes and shapes from large draft type Curly horses on down to Curly miniature horses, and everything in between. Although all sizes exist and are acceptable in Curly horses, in the saddle types, the recommended maximum size is 16.2 hh and 1350 lbs, to preserve their natural durability. With the widest possible variation in one "breed" of horse, there is truly a Curly horse for every equine discipline and purpose.

PONY HEIGHT CLARIFICATION. In the general horse industry a saddle type Curly will technically be considered a pony when under 14.2 hh. Among Curly horse fanciers, since a height of 14.0 to 14.2 hh is so common, the designation of "pony" will more often refer to a pony that stands 14.0 hh or less.

COLOR. There are no restrictions in color. All equine genetic coat colors, dilutes, eye colors, markings, and pigments are allowed, and probably all exist in the Curly horse - none are penalized. Dark or striated hooves (coronet ermine spotting with white socks) are desirable.

TEMPERAMENT. Most horse breeds fondly claim their most intelligent or well-mannered members as being representatives of their breed. With Curly horses, the majority of them are found to be consistently highly intelligent, naturally calm, and friendly, personable horses. Curly horses are highly prized by their owners for both their peaceful dispositions and their ability and desire to use reason when frightened or challenged.

ORIGIN. Unknown. All we know is, apparently curly-coated horses have been pictured in artwork throughout the history of mankind. And we know that as recently as two to three hundred years ago, dominant gene Curly horses were living in the wild horse herds of North (and probably South) America. Today, there are still Curly horses found in the wild mustang herds scattered throughout the western United States. In North America, today's dominant gene Curly horses trace directly back to the Curly horses that developed in the wild.



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The **OFFICIAL STANDARD** for
The **NORTH AMERICAN CURLY HORSE**

HEAD.

General: Size of head will be in proportion to its body. Head will often have a somewhat strong or deep jaw. Somewhat shallow mouth (not extending much past nostrils when viewed from side), and medium to small crescent shaped nostrils are typical. Desirable eyes are large (with soft or gentle expression), and may be somewhat elliptical in shape. Lightly to moderately hooded eyes are considered normal in Curly horses and are not penalized. Small, sunken, or pig eyes are undesirable. Small flat chins or lazy loose lips are undesirable. Long faces are common, but a head that is too big or coarse or too long is undesirable.

When viewed in profile: the bridge of nose is normally straight or slightly ram-nosed. Very convex (Roman) or very dished faces are undesirable. "Sheep ears" are undesirable, as are overly large or coarse heads or muzzles.

When viewed from front: Face is noticeably wide between the eyes. Ears are set widely apart, and usually the tips are not heavily notched. Ears should have curly hair evident inside. Narrow faces are undesirable.

NECK.

Throatlatch should be clean. Width between jaws is desirable. Length of neck will vary with type. Thickness of neck will vary with sex and bloodline, but very coarse necks or very short necks are undesirable. The neck should be longer on topline (from straight to arched upward) and shorter on bottom line (straight underneath - a bulging underline on neck is undesirable). Neck to shoulder attachment should be smooth and clean, but neck to shoulder placement will vary among the types.



SHOULDER.

Shoulders and chest are well muscled without becoming bulky. A V'd chest and a well laid back shoulder (an ideal angle is from 45 – 55 degrees) are desirable. Steep shoulders are undesirable.