
THE TENNESSEE WALKING HORSE

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HISTORY



The Tennessee Walking Horse or Tennessee Walker is a combination of the Narragansett, Canadian Pacer, Standardbred, American Saddlebred, Morgan and Thoroughbred. The horse was originally bred for utility purposes, as both a good riding horse and farm work horse.

In the early 1800s, Tennessee breeders began breeding the

Narragansett and Canadian Pacers. They wanted to create a horse that would be able to handle the rough mountainous terrain of the area. Later, the Confederate Pacer and Union Trotter blood was added to the breed during the Civil War and created the 'Southern Plantation Pacer,' also known as the Tennessee Pacer. Later, breeders added in Thoroughbred, Morgan, Standardbred, and American Saddlebred. These breeds added stamina and refined the breed to create today's Tennessee Walking Horse.

In 1885, a horse named Black Allen was born. He was by the stallion Allendorf and Maggie Marshall, a Morgan mare. Black Allen became the foundation sire for the Tennessee Walking Horse breed.

The Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' Association was formed in 1935. The stud book closed in 1947. This means that every horse after that date would have to have both parents registered to be registered.

The breed became popular and is still popular today for their smooth gaits and excellent stamina. In fact, even after the automobile was invented, Tennessee communities still used their Tennessee Walkers as their daily transportation. Eventually the breed would gain a reputation as being a show horse and breeders began to produce refined and flashy horses.

BREED CHARACTERISTICS



The Tennessee Walking Horse is known for its excellent disposition. The horses are typically very easy to train due to their easygoing personalities. They are popular not only in the show ring, but also as pleasure and trail horses.

The Tennessee Walker is a tall horse standing at 15 to 17 hands with sloping shoulders. They have a long neck and a large head that is refined. The ears are small, but well-placed. The back is fairly short and strong. The horses are shown with long mane and tails.

COLORS & PATTERNS

The Tennessee Walker comes in a variety of colors:

- Chestnut/Sorrel
 - Red Roan
- Bay
 - Bay Roan
- Brown
 - Blue Roan
- Black
 - Smoky Cream
 - Black Roan
 - Blue Roan
- Palomino
 - Palomino Roan
- Buckskin
 - Buckskin Roan
- Cremello
- Perlino
- Gray (Graying is actually a genetic modification of all colors)
- Dun
 - Red Dun
 - Red Roan
- Grullo

- Grullo Roan
- Champagne
 - Classic Cream Champagne
 - Amber Champagne
- Amber Cream Champagne
- Gold Champagne
 - Gold Cream Champagne

In addition to these colors, the Tennessee Walker is available in a variety of patterns as well.

Sabino – This pattern usually has white that extends up the horse's legs in patches that have ragged edges. The pattern then extends up the body from the belly. The head usually has excessive white as well and the eyes are often blue. Flecks of white and roan areas are common as well. The sabino is a unique pattern and rarely confused with others, although in the past some were called roans due to the white hair.

Tobiano – The tobiano pattern is a solid-colored horse, often with white legs. The white spots are arranged in vertical patterns on the body and tend to be oval or round with rounded, smooth edges. These horses usually have dark areas on the flanks and the tail may have two colors. The head has no more white than what would be expected on non-spotted horse. The eyes are generally dark. The tobiano pattern can vary with large amounts of white or small amounts of white. The head is usually dark.

Overo – The overo coat pattern occurs on any color background and the white areas are usually crisp. Some horses will have halos around their white areas. The spotting usually comes up from the belly and the spots are arranged horizontally. The head may be all dark or bald-faced, covering the eyes or apron faced, extending beyond the ears and under the chin. The eyes, where there are extensive white markings, are often blue.

Tobiano/Sabino – This is a combination of both the sabino and tobiano patterns. This is a common pattern in the Tennessee Walker. These horses show characteristics of both patterns. It can be identified by excessive white on the face, under the chin and the haw. Blue spots in the eyes or blue eyes are characteristic of the sabino gene. The spotting is often a combination of both patterns with the white crossing the horse's topline.

GENES AFFECTING COLOR

There are four genes that affect the color of the Tennessee Walker. These are:

Cream Dilution Gene – The cream dilution gene is responsible for creating the palomino and buckskin colors. One copy of the cream dilution gene causes the coat to dilute from red to tan, yellow or bear-white. The eyes, points, and skin color are not affected.

Dun Dilution Gene – The dun dilution gene is responsible for the red dun, dun and grullo colors. The dun dilution gene can affect both the red and black genes. A foal with one copy of the gene will appear the same as a horse that has two copies. The hair color, eyes and skin are not affected.

Champagne Dilution Gene – The champagne dilution gene affects any base color including the cream dilution and dun dilution genes. It does affect the eyes and skin. The foal will always start out dark, but gradually change color as it changes. The eyes are blue at birth and change color as the horse ages. Exposed pink skin will also freckle.

Agouti Gene – The agouti gene affects the black horse and is an extension of the black gene. When the gene is 'on,' it causes the horse to have black points, such as in the bay. When it is 'off,' it causes the entire coat to be black.

THE GAITS

The Tennessee Walking Horse has three distinct gaits. These include:

- Flat foot walk
- Running walk
- Canter

These gaits are what the breed is famous for, particularly the running walk. The running walk is a natural and inherited gait, it is not trained.

The gait is often improved with training, however.



The Tennessee Walking Horse can also perform variations of the running walk. Although these variations are not desirable in the show ring, they are very comfortable gaits for riding for pleasure and on the trails. These variations include:

- Rack
- Stepping Pace
- Fox Trot
- Single Foot

THE FLAT WALK

The flat walk is a brisk walk that is long reaching. The horse can cover four to eight miles per hour at the flat walk. This is a four beat gait where the horse's feet hit the ground at separate intervals. The horse glides over the track left by the front foot with his hind foot in this pattern:

- Right rear over right front
- Left rear over left front

The action of the back foot stepping over the track of the front foot is known as overstride. Overstride is unique to the breed. The horse's hock should show only forward motion, but high hock action is undesirable. The horse nods its head in rhythm with the cadence of its feet. The nodding head motion is also unique to the breed. When judging the horse, these are two characteristics that are taken into consideration.

THE RUNNING WALK

The running walk is a gait for which the breed is the most well-known for. This is an extra smooth and gliding gait that is essentially the same as the flat walk, but with a noticeable difference in speed. However, it is proper form not to sacrifice speed for good form.

The horse can cover ten to twelve miles per hour at the running walk. As the speed increases, the horse over steps the front track by a distance of six to eighteen inches. The longer this length, the better "walker" the horse is. The motion of the running walk gives the rider the feeling of being propelled forward. It feels as though you are gliding across the ground. The gait should be smooth and easy for both horse and rider. The horse will also nod during this gait.

THE CANTER

The third gait is the canter. The canter is performed by the Tennessee Walker in much of the same way as any other breed. However, the Tennessee Walker seems to do it much more relaxed. The canter is performed in a diagonal manner. On the right lead, the footfall pattern is:

- Left hind, right hind and left fore together, then the right fore

On the left lead, the pattern is:

- Right hind, left hind and right fore together, then the left fore

When performing in the show ring, the horse should lead with the foreleg to the inside of the ring. So, if you're riding counter-clockwise around the arena, you would ride on the left lead. If you're riding clockwise, you would ride on the right lead.

The canter should have lots of spring and rhythm. The rider should feel the exhilaration of the canter in the saddle. The canter lifts the front end of the horse giving it the feel of a rock chair and has aptly been nicknamed the "rocking chair" gait.

SHOWING

The Tennessee Walker can be shown both English and Western. There are divisions for padded and flat shod horses at shows.

FLAT SHOD DIVISION

The flat shod division has grown due to the easy of training and the natural gaits of the horse. Many people are able to prepare their horse for shows without a professional trainer.

The flat shod plantation pleasure horse should have a brilliant show presence. They should perform true walking gaits and be penalized for pacing, trotting or racking. Form should always supersede speed. The horse should be ridden on a light rein and be well mannered. Manners are a large part of the judging, as a pleasure horse must be a pleasure to ride. The horse should be balanced and must back readily. The horse should also respond quickly to commands without excessive reining or bumping.

When entering the arena, the horse should enter at a flat walk and riders shall wait for the judge's call to perform the other gaits. The horse must also nod, as if the horse isn't nodding, then he isn't walking. The rider is also judged. They should be neat, clean and wearing tasteful attire.

The pleasure horse does not require any special shoes. They are generally shod at a slightly lower angle and with more toe than most horses.

WESTERN PLEASURE

The western pleasure Tennessee Walking Horse should be a suitable, working horse. The should be smooth and comfortable without too much animation. The horse should have free flowing gaits.

Western pleasure horses should be ridden on a light rein and exhibit a true four beat walking gait. The head should nod in cadence; however, it must also be natural and not nosed out or overly flexed. The head carriage should be natural for the breed, not too high or too low.

The Western pleasure horse must be well-mannered. Horses that do not stand quietly are penalized by the judges. If a horse is too fast and the canter is uncontrollable, or must be prodded excessively, then the horse must be penalized.

PADDED OR PERFORMANCE DIVISION



The performance Tennessee Walking Horse is shown in English Pleasure tack and attire. These horses execute the gaits, but with much more animation. These horses are flashy and brilliance is accentuated.

These horses are shown in double nailed or triple nailed pads. These pads add dimension to the horse's hoof and provide a sound base. Pads are a large part of training the performance Tennessee Walking Horse and serve various functions. When used properly, they accentuate the horse's gaits. Essentially, pads are simply a training device and how effective they are

depends on whether or not they are properly utilized.

MODEL DIVISION

The model class is known as "halter" in other breeds. The horse is shown in a bridle. They are led into the show ring and parked for judging. These horses are judged on their conformation and condition. The horses must stand quietly and unruly horses are excused.

VERSATILITY

There are approximately twenty different divisions that a person can perform on their Tennessee Walking Horse. There are a variety of classes available for adults and youth including:

- Showmanship
- Equitation
- Stock Seat Equitation
- Trail Obstacle
- Over Fences
- Pleasure Driving
- Obstacle Driving
- Western Riding
- Water Glass
- Barrels
- Basic Reining
- Poles

RECREATION AND TRAIL RIDING

The Tennessee Walking Horse is a very popular trail mount. The comfort of the Tennessee Walker's gaits make it easy on a rider to go several miles on a Tennessee Walker. The horse also has excellent stamina and endurance, making them the perfect trail mount.

Not only can you take your Tennessee Walker out on the trail for fun and pleasure, but you can also participate in competitive trail riding and endurance. The Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' Association offers many programs to encourage trail riding with the Tennessee Walker.

