



An SA Boerperd in action

Selecting horses: Choosing a breed

by Sue Webb

Horses differ in type and different disciplines require specific types of animals, which are often determined by the breed. For instance, a Thoroughbred is more likely to be a hack than an SA Boerperd, and a Warmblood is more likely to be a hunter than an Arab. The breed is also more likely to determine whether it is a horse or a pony.

An Arab, Nooitgedacht or a Boerperd may often measure pony, but a Thoroughbred or a Warmblood will be less likely to, while a Welsh Mountain Pony will never measure horse. A child under 14 years may only ride a pony in most competitions. Ponies measure up to 1,49 m at the

withers. A horse is 1,50 m and over, measured from the ground to the top of the withers.

Gender

A horse may be a colt (a male under four years), a filly (a female under four years), a stallion (an entire male), a gelding (a castrated male) or a mare (a mature female). A rig is a gelding with an undescended testicle which may cause it to act as an entire, which is very undesirable.

Stallions can be quite difficult to handle and children under the age of 14 are not allowed to ride stallions in most competitions. If a gelding had recently been castrated, he may still display some stallion behaviour, but it will usually pass. A rig will always display stallion behaviour.



Breeds such as American Quarter Horses have also been imported and are kept by enthusiasts for riding in various disciplines

Mares too, have a reputation for being moody, but most geldings tend to be even-tempered.

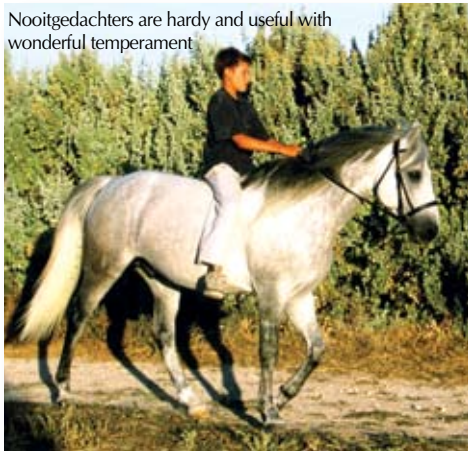
Ponies

- **Nooitgedachters** are hardy, useful types with wonderful temperaments. For show ponies the practice of branding them on the neck is unsightly. Micro-chipping is allowed these days, so it is possible to get a registered Nooitgedachter without a brand on the neck.
 - **Basuto ponies** come from Lesotho. The true Basuto ponies display very little variety in size and type, because they were isolated and inbred. Their stamina is the result of having lived in an extremely harsh environment where they had to adapt or die.
 - **Shetland ponies** are suitable for very young children, but their temperaments are not always suitable.
 - **Welsh ponies** are very popular as children's ponies and can be divided into three classes: Welsh Mountain ponies or Section A ponies that are the smallest; Section B ponies that are bigger and form the largest group of riding and driving ponies; and the Welsh Cob, which is much bigger and heavier and can often measure horse.
 - **Crossbreeds** and Welsh part-breds often make wonderful children's ponies. A Welsh/Arab/Thoroughbred cross produces a bigger, classy pony suitable for children until they turn 14. Ponies are cold-blooded, so cross-breeding with hot-blooded horses fires up their performance.
 - **Other native British pony breeds** have been imported. Connemara ponies originate in Ireland and are often an attractive dun with black points. Saddler ponies occur when their growth is stunted and often make amazing show jumpers with their cat-like quarters.
- Ponies hardly ever grow after the age of four, unless they are immature and underfed at that age and "blossom" late with care. So beware border-line "ponies" that are young and very thin. They may grow "over the stick".

Horses

- **The English Thoroughbred** is designed to perform its "life's work" before the age of five. A yearling costing R100 000 may sell at age six for a mere R2 000 after its racing days are over. However, TBs require the most expensive care all their lives. The result of early stress on bone and muscle, might only manifest itself when a rider has put ten years of exhaustive training into the horse. However, obtaining a TB from the racetrack ensures you have a horse that is broken in, handled, desensitised, experienced in boxing and shoeing, and accepts discipline. It is a hot-blooded athlete and could remain fiery even in old age.
- **The Warmblood** is a collective name for many breeds of European horses bred mostly for competing in the Olympic disciplines. It was usually a cross between cold-blooded draft horses and hot-blooded horses such as Arabs and Thoroughbreds. They are inspected before they are used for breeding, because their conformation is vital. They must be built to last as their life's work starts at five. Their value increases as they mature and develop physically through training. Before buying an unbroken horse, make sure you understand the enormous amount of experience a horse must gain before you even start to ride it.

- **The SA Boerperd** is the historical riding horse descended from the Cape Horse. They are either three- or five-gaited and can have either traditional (high knee-action) or universal movement. Professional trainers are the best source of a gaited horse. These breeds rejected with low action are useful dressage horses and show jumpers, but generally they have necks set too high and quarters too flat to produce the correct outline for the higher grades in these disciplines.
- **The Cape Boerperd** and the SA Boerperd share the same history, except that some breeders chose to improve their horses by the infusion of American Saddlers. The result was a type very similar to the Saddler, but more robust and hardy. Cape Boerperde are usually ridden in the three- or five-gait style, but make very good campaigners in other disciplines if so trained.
- **Arabs and Anglo Arabs** are popular for endurance riding. Soundness and stamina are vital to stand the pace and register a low pulse rate. Their action is cadenced for dressage and they jump well, but they tend to be too small.
- **Other breeds** such as American Quarter Horses, Appaloosas, Morgan Horses, Friesians, Hackneys, American Saddlers and even Percherons, have also been imported and are kept by enthusiasts for riding in various disciplines and for driving.



Nooitgedachters are hardy and useful with wonderful temperament

Points to ponder

All imported horses are not necessarily better. Only in exceptional circumstances will breeders overseas sell the very best of their horses. The cost is also prohibitive. Exotic animals have to acclimatise and many of these horses do not cope well in our harsh conditions.

South African indigenous breeds are much hardier and less expensive to keep. Remember, Africa is not horse country. That is why our only indigenous horses have evolved into something about the size of a donkey and striped. **SAH**