

the **Brave New World** *of the Gypsy Cob*

By Cheryl Nygaard

“What is that horse? I’ve never seen one like it before!”

“Is it a baby Clydesdale?”

“It sure is pretty, but what can you do with it?”

“I’ve never seen one in ‘person’ before!”

These are just some of the comments and questions that come from those seeing a Gypsy Cob, also known as a Gypsy Vanner, for the first time. First, a bit of history.

The Romany people of Europe, also known as Travelers or Gypsies, roamed from town to town, selling handcrafts, working fields, raising horses and entertaining townspeople to support their families. In the process of trying to breed the perfect horse to pull their caravans, or living wagons, they took the beauty and showiness of the Clydesdales, the strength of the Shires, and the smaller and less intimidating body type of the Dale and Fell ponies to gradually develop the Gypsy Cob. Also known in Europe as a Tinker, Irish Cob, and Gypsy Horse, the beautiful and calm horses were heavily muscled, “bomb

proof” and proved to be crowd pleasers as well as valued members of each family. Built on need and tradition, the Gypsy Horse became a breed in their own right, and started to catch the eye of people in North America.

The first Gypsy Cob was imported to the U.S. in 1997 by Dennis Thompson and his wife, who after falling in love with them while on vacation in Europe, decided to bring them home. They developed the Vanner name to reflect both their original use and the rarity of the breed in North America. Both the traditional name and the North American name continues to be used to date, as the world of horses grows internationally through importing, internet connections, and shows around the world.

dapple, and the list goes on. They may be harder to find, but they do exist and are just as beautiful as the more commonly seen black and whites.

Because of their strong and stocky traditional body type, Gypsy Cobs may also be seen as mostly a driving horse. However, they are also great for riding, whether it be for long and easy-going trail rides, western reining or roping, and even the more competitive dressage. Some horses even seem to like jumping! They are now starting to be seen in demonstrations, competitions and shows in the U.S. and recently in Canada. Due to the lack of mature stock in Canada this is somewhat limited at the moment, but as the growing presence of this wonderful breed continues, they are sure to be popping up in all manner of ways.

Misconceptions

Many people think that because the most common color of Gypsy Cobs are black and white, they are only available in that color and pattern. In actuality, they come in every color found in the horse world. Buckskins, palomino, black, strawberry roan, grey

Training

Training starts young with immediate handling after birth, and halter training not too long after. Groundwork and manners can be started soon after weaning which usually happens at around 4-5 months, with limited lunge work at one year or thereafter. It is still a matter of much



discussion about when to start work under saddle, as this fabulous and strong breed looks very mature at two years of age. We tend to wait closer to three on the average to do too much in that area, as the joints are not yet mature enough to handle the stress of extra weight, although a young rider may be acceptable during their second year for limited amounts of time with many breaks in between.

Gypsy Cobs are very quick learners, and very eager to please. It is tempting to continue on in training early on because of this, despite the necessity of allowing their minds and bodies the chance to rest. It is also important to have fun with them and spend some time just grooming or walking with them, as they are very people oriented and the relationship that develops is just as important your horse as what you are able to do together. Trick training is also a great way to develop this relationship and trust between horse and rider. A combination of positive reinforcement and healthy treats can often accomplish much!

Grooming

One look at their long manes, tails and huge amounts of feather



on their feet can leave one feeling intimidated

by the grooming aspect of owning a Gypsy Cob. Grooming tips and tools can vary depending on the location of the horse, (pasture or paddock, temperature, weather), but surprisingly enough the course hair and natural moisture of this hairy breed makes it a pleasure to keep these animals looking their best. Even in muddy conditions, the feather almost seems to be "self cleaning" and is very low maintenance.

Manes can be impacted by type of fencing, being left in braids for too long, or excessive rubbing or combing. After washing with a gentle animal shampoo (the Cowboy Magic products are great if available), condition thoroughly. If manes must be braided for ease of riding during training, unbraided them regularly and work through additional conditioner or mineral oil with your fingers. Excessive brushing on a regular basis can thin the mane unnecessarily. The amount of times you wash your horse is up

to you. If your horse is in show more regular washing may be required, but many brood mares or pasture horses are mostly groomed with fingers or wide bristle brushes instead of more regular baths. Grooming is also a great time to continue developing your relationship with your horse and can be a pleasurable time for both.

More Than Beautiful

We still have many things to learn about the Gypsy Cob, their talents, care, and how best to share them with the public. But one thing we know for sure is that they are more than just a beautiful horse. Their calm and loving temperaments, willingness to please, and versatility make them more than just a beautiful horse. They make our lives richer, fuller, and overall, a fulfilling and wonderful journey. Welcome to the Brave New World of the Gypsy Cob.

About the Author

Cheryl Nygaard and her husband Dale manage their farm North Fork Gypsy Cobs just outside of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in Canada. They breed Gypsy Cobs and also run a boarding facility on the side. They presently have 28 Gypsy Cobs, and are expecting 7 more babies by the end of June, bringing their total to 35. Dale & Cheryl are originally city folks who fell in love with horses and enjoy sharing their passion with others.

For more information on their horses and their farm, go to: www.northforkhorses.ca

