

Discover a bit of equine ecstasy at Horse Haven



Eighteen different breeds of light horse will be on display at Horse Haven during the 2010 Calgary Stampede, as light horse breeders and enthusiasts extol the virtues of their equine companions in the north Agriculture Barns.
Photo credit: Calgary Stampede

CALGARY – It was a business venture all the way, but the Nygaards soon found their hearts ruling their chequebook.

“It’s like a box of chocolates. You can’t just have one,” says Cheryl Nygaard, recalling the Martensville, Sask.-based family’s decision to bring back a half-dozen Gypsy Cob mares from England, and start their North Fork Gypsy Cobs breeding operation, in early 2008. “They’re amazing animals. They are not only pretty, but they have calm, peaceful personalities.

“They’re quick to learn, and very eager to please,” adds Cheryl, who runs North Fork with husband Dale. “They really are very special animals.”

You’ll find plenty of that sort of sentiment during the 2010 Calgary Stampede at Horse Haven, located in the north Agriculture Barns. Open daily from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. in a Western setting, Horse Haven features all kinds of light horse enthusiasts extolling the virtues of their equine companions — and promoting the breed they love.

This year, 18 different breeds are on display. Sixteen of them (Quarter Horse, Appaloosa, Friesian, Tennessee Walker, Morgan, Paint, Welsh Pony, Mini, Norwegian Fjord, Thoroughbred, Standardbred, Peruvian Paso, Paso Fino, Curly, Foxtrotter and Canadian) had stalls set out at last year’s Stampede. And two other breeds are new in 2010 — the Gypsy Cob, which will set out its stall from July 9 through 13, and the Spanish Andalusian, which will have its own five-day presentation from July 14 through 18. These light horse breeds can be seen in action daily

during demonstrations in the Northern Lights Arena and the Big Top.

“Even rare breeds are becoming prevalent these days. Alberta is horse country, and there’s all kinds of breeds out there,” notes Lara Schuelke, the chair of the Stampede’s Light Horse committee. “And the more breeds we have that can commit to putting on a good show, the higher quality programming we can provide.

“Horse Haven promotes the breeds common to the region and provides an educational opportunity for the public,” adds Schuelke. “People get to see horses in action, and get up close and personal.”



The Nygaards will be using the Stampede stage to help spread the word on Gypsy Cobs, which have been a recognized breed for less than a century and were only brought to North America in the late 1990s. Originally bred by the Romani people, or “travellers,” in the United Kingdom, Gypsy Cobs are also known as Gypsy Vanners in the United States, where they’ve gained more of a foothold.

“We guess that there’s probably only about 200 Gypsy Cobs in Canada right now,” says Cheryl Nygaard. “They’re still a very rare breed here. Most of our customers are from the U.S., because Canadians just don’t know what to do with them. But you can use them for anything — riding, driving, working cattle, even jumping and dressage.

“One of the things we like to do is have our ranch open to people so they can come out and visit with the horses — spend time with them, and absorb the peace and the pleasure of being with them.”

Equestrian vaulting, a new, must-see light horse demonstration, will take over the Big Top on Wednesday, July 14 and Thursday, July 15. A combination of gymnastics and dance on horseback, vaulting teaches children and adults to move in harmony with a horse, as well as improving balance, flexibility, strength, and teamwork skills. Spanish-themed demonstrations, courtesy of Spanish Andalusian and Paso Fino breeders, will be held under the Big Top on Wednesday, July 14, Thursday, July 15, and Sunday, July 18.

New to Horse Haven this year is a celebrity station, which will see Stampede rodeo and chuckwagon stars, as well as other luminaries of the equine world, chatting and signing autographs.

Craig Cameron, creator of the incredibly popular Extreme Cowboy Race, will also pay a visit to Horse Haven. Extreme Cowboy Racing will be making its Canadian debut with the Calgary Stampede Cowboy Up Challenge from July 10 to 12, and Cameron, who’s based in Bluff Dale, Texas, and known as the “cowboy’s clinician,” will be on hand in Horse Haven from July 9 to 12 to promote the new sport.

Meanwhile, Horse Sense 101, a relatively new Horse Haven feature, continues this year with a daily family-oriented program that teaches the basics about horses in an interactive, hands-on, educational setting. Special guests, including breeders, trainers, veterinarians, and other equine experts, will discuss important topics such as grooming, feed, and bedding, among others, to those interested in populating their own stable with a four-legged friend.

Horse Sense 101 will be augmented for this year’s show with an additional new educational display. “It’s focused on general horse knowledge,” says Schuelke, “like what they eat, how to groom them, that sort of thing.”

The boardroom will also come to the barn this year at Horse Haven, as The Natural Leader, an Alberta-based company, uses the relationship between horse and handler to teach companies how to build effective corporate leadership, communication, and team collaboration skills from Tuesday, July 13 to Thursday, July 15 in the Northern Lights Arena.

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The Calgary Stampede is a volunteer-supported, not-for-profit community organization that preserves and promotes western heritage and values. The Stampede contributes to the quality of life in Calgary and southern Alberta through its world-renowned 10-day Stampede, year-round facilities, western events and several youth and agriculture programs. All revenue is reinvested into Calgary Stampede programs and facilities. For more about the Stampede, visit www.calgarystampede.com.

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