



Breed All About It: The Mustang

Shannon Ott



The mustang is a breed native to the western United States; derived from horses brought by Spanish settlers. This breed, often referred to as “wild”, is the result of the breeding mixture escaped (and freed) horses through many generations.

The name mustang comes from the Spanish words “mestengo” and “mostrenco”, while these terms give the mustang a name that means “wild/masterless cattle”; these horses are considered feral and not wild horses at all, as they are from a domestic population originally. Spanish settlers were responsible for bringing horses, but it was the Native American population that spread the mustang across the western United States.

That spread led to there being as many as 2 million mustangs in the Western U.S. in the early 1900’s, however, as land developed that changed drastically. In 1971 only 17,300 mustangs remained in the wild, mainly from slaughter for development. Congress then signed The Wild and Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act declaring the mustang protected. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees the mustang population over 26.9 million acres of public land. In order to control the population of these horses, mustangs are rounded up for public adoption periodically. An estimated 30,000 mustangs are currently in the wild, since the mustang is a breed of horse and not its own equine species, it cannot be considered endangered.

This breed is known for a stocky build, surefootedness, and a small stature of 14-15hh. These characteristics make these horses ideal for ranch work, trail riding, and dressage. They are an easy keeper and may need grass management on lush pasture. The mustang is also a beautiful horse coming in a variety of colors from bay to palomino. Mustangs are typically adopted through the BLM and have been handled very little, making them better suited for someone with a lot of time, experience, and of course patience.

