



Breed All About It: The American Miniature Horse

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The American Miniature Horse is one of several recognized breeds of miniature horse. Miniature horses are believed to have originated in Europe but can now be found across the globe. These little horses affectionately called “minis” have stolen the hearts of all who meet them and are coveted for their novel size, affectionate personalities and versatility.

The American Mini was unheard of up until the 19th century. The first mention of a small horse being imported into the United States was in 1888; and research shows little public awareness of true Miniatures until 1960. Popular belief is that American Miniature horses utilized the blood of English and Dutch mine horses brought into this country in the 19th century and used in some Appalachian coal mines as late as 1950. The American Miniature Horse, as documented in the pedigrees of Miniatures today, also drew upon the blood of the Shetland pony.

According to the American Miniature Horse Association these horses should be no bigger than a large dog. The American Miniature Horses are miniature versions of well-balanced horses. They should possess conformation characteristics found in most equine breeds. As far as personality these little guys run big on personality. They are eager to please and make for affectionate companions. Minis are also extremely versatile. While their size only allows for the smallest of riders they thrive in other disciplines.

Throughout its colorful past, the Miniature Horse breed had been bred for pets, novelty, research, monetary gain, mining work, exhibition and royal gifts. Early miniature horses worked in mines, where their small size was an asset in the tight spaces. It is believed that the first miniature horses brought to the United States was for this purpose.

Nowadays, miniature horses are primarily kept as pets, though many have some sort of job. Although most miniature horses are too small for riding, some owners drive their minis hitched to carts or sleighs. Many owners also compete with their horses, including in conformation contests where a horse's physical traits are evaluated. Driving, lead-line, obstacle-running, and jumping are among the many performance-oriented competitions in which minis participate. Many of these are similar to dog sports. Moreover, miniature horses are frequently used as therapy animals. As guide animals, they assist people with vision and hearing impairments. They also can make excellent emotional support animals because of their gentle and affectionate nature.

Miniature horses come in every color and with all markings. Minis are known for having certain complications. Dwarfism is common amongst minis and breeding any minis with dwarf attributes is discouraged. Minis are also prone to obesity so care needs to be taken when formulating a feeding regimen for these horses. Further, minis are known to be susceptible to founder therefore, many owners elect to keep them on dry lots. Minis typically have longer and thicker coats than other breeds so they may require yearly clipping. With the proper planning and care these little horses can bring their owners years of joy and companionship.

