



Breed All About It: The Irish Sport Horse

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The Irish Sport Horse is one of the examples of what horses can accomplish in the competition world. This breed has won more than 15 Olympic medals in eventing, as well as being one of the predominant breeds in top levels of showjumping, dressage, cross-country and fox hunting. This breed also boasts the gentle and brave nature that makes for an excellent pleasure companion.

The Irish Sport horse originally was a cross between an Irish Draught mare and a Thoroughbred or Warmblood stallion. The breed was formally created in the 1920s after generations of breed combinations and was originally used for agriculture and

transportation. In the U.S. they are referred to as the Irish Draught Sport Horse, and the horses in North America will undergo inspection in their lifetime to maintain the integrity of the breed.

"Inspecting is a way to keep the breed true to type with the traditional qualities: athleticism, soundness, durability, and sensibility are the main qualities we look for in the Irish Draught, the foundation horse, which when crossed with a Thoroughbred or warmblood creates the sport horse," says Ann Morss, vNortheast regional chair of the IDHSNA. This differs from Ireland where any horse from Sport Horse approved parents is considered to be an Irish Sport Horse. This difference is mainly due to the lack of Irish Draught mares in Ireland; many were slaughtered with the introduction of the tractor, and many more were sent to fight in the Kings Infantry during both world wars. The shipping of horses to war is also why we see many more grey Irish Sport Horses, as well all know a darker horse is much easier to keep clean, making them preferred to their lighter colored counterparts in the infantry.

Even with the attempt to keep the Irish Draught lineage within the Irish Sport Horse line, two schools of thought have emerged. One favors the naturally heavy body while the other is more refined from having the Irish draught essentially diluted through the lineages. Both will feature large heavy hindquarters (perfect for jumping), a short back, long neck with sloping shoulders, and a deep chest. These horses average from 15.3hh-17hh, but can get larger! For competitive purposes, horses with $\frac{3}{4}$ tb lineage are now becoming more and more popular than their more Draught heavy counterparts, but the sensibility and soundness of the Irish Draught are really what create these showstopping horses.

The Irish Sport Horse is an overall healthy breed without any breed specific issues. They are large and can be high energy if not being regularly exercised, while they are well suited for novice and even beginner riders, this high level of energy matched with being a larger horse can make them more intimidating to a less experienced horseman. These horses are also easy keepers for the most part, and the level of feed will be dependent on the level of exercise they receive.

Famous Irish Sport Horses include: the highest scoring event horse of all time Ballynoe Castle RM (Reggie), multiple Grand Prix champion Cruising, Olympian Mr. Medicott (sired by Cruising), and Smartpak Grand Prix winner Flexible (sired by cruising).

See article on Cruising on page 29.



Phillip Dutton and Mr. Medicott. Callie Heroux Photography Photo.

Ballynoe Castle RM takes a bite of his carrot bouquet during his retirement ceremony at Kentucky 2017. Photo by Leslie Threlkeld.