

BREED SPOTLIGHT

The Stylish Saddlebred

THE AMERICAN SADDLEBRED IS FLASHY, ENERGETIC AND KIND-HEARTED.

BY KIM KLIMEK

The American Saddlebred is often called the peacock of the horse world, and is loved for its proud look and flashy gaits.

Alex Rudder, 16, from Kentucky, knows a thing or two about Saddlebreds. She has nine world championships, the most recent being in 2016: Road Pony Under-Saddle World Champion and World Grand Champion, and Three-Gaited World Champion in the 14- to 17-year-old division.


"I love American Saddlebreds because of their elegance and attitude," says Alex, whose family has been breeding Saddlebreds for generations. "Their high-headedness and the way they move across the ground is unbelievable."

Alex currently competes in the five-gaited pony division with her 5-year-old mare, RWC Roxie In Vegas. "Riding Roxie is what I think it would feel like to drive a sports car!" says Alex.

Alex loves the Saddlebred's elegance and attitude.



HOWARD SCHATZBERG PHOTOGRAPHY

A woman wearing a black top hat, a white tuxedo jacket with a white bow tie, and a red ribbon on her lapel is smiling while riding a brown horse. The horse is adorned with a red halter, a red floral garland around its neck, and several colorful ribbons (red, yellow, blue, pink) draped over its back. The background is a white tent structure.

Alex enjoys the thrill of showing and seeing her hard work pay off.

History Lesson

The animated gaits that Alex loves come from a breed that existed in the 1700s, the Narragansett Pacer. The Saddlebred's tall, sleek frame and quick action come from the Thoroughbred.

During the Civil War, famous generals, such as Robert E. Lee, rode Saddlebreds (known then as the Kentucky Saddler). Many of these horses carried high-ranking soldiers into battle.

After the war, Saddlebreds became popular show horses because of their beauty, strength and animated gaits. The breed took on the American Saddlebred name when the American Saddlebred Horse Association was created in 1891.

Saddlebreds are still popular show horses today, most often seen in the saddle seat discipline, but they're starting to break away from the traditional rail classes. Now, you might see a Saddlebred in jumping or western classes, too.

Powerful Personality

"The Saddlebred is really versatile and special," says Michael Arquilla, 14, of Illinois. "They can do all

Michael has been riding Saddlebreds since he was 4 years old, and loves their intelligence and big personalities.



SADDLEBRED STATS

HEIGHT: 15 to 17 hands.

COLOR: Any color, including pinto.

THREE-GAITED: These horses walk, trot and canter.

FIVE-GAITED: In addition to the three standard gaits, these horses can do the slow gait and rack, both smooth and comfy to ride!

kinds of disciplines and look cool doing it!" Michael has been riding Saddlebreds since he was 4 years old. "I love the power a Saddlebred gives you in the show-ring," he says. "I like their large size, and they are very intelligent with big personalities."

Michael currently shows two Saddlebreds, Mooi Mooi ("Nelson") and Ch Eq Coco Mojo ("Mojo"). Michael and Mojo recently won the 13-and-Under Pleasure Equitation Triple Crown.

All Heart

Don't be fooled by the Saddlebred's confidence and bold style in the show-ring, though. They are softies at heart, as Courtney Hunter, 11, from Texas will tell you. "I think they have the biggest heart of any breed," she says.

Courtney and her 17-hand gelding, Cinco, have a special bond. Courtney has a medical condition

called a Chiari malformation, in which brain tissue extends into the spinal canal. Since having surgery last year to fix it, Courtney has had to limit her riding, but that's OK.

"Cinco understands this and takes care of me," says Courtney. "From the moment I climb in the saddle, he relaxes and we understand each other. I like to groom him and love on him. When I go to get him, he picks his head up and whinnies and comes to me."

Although he's 18, Cinco is energetic and young at heart, according to Courtney. This playful energy is common throughout the breed.

Learn more by visiting the American Saddlebred Horse Association at www.asha.net. *

Courtney says that her American Saddlebred, Cinco, takes amazing care of her.

