NEED TO KNOW

The difference between draft & light horses

Horse breeds were developed to produce horses that were best suited for particular functions or activities. The pedigree, or the family history, of a particular breed is often tracked by groups or associations interested in that breed. Horse breeds are often named after the place in which they originated or an activity at which they are skilled.

Selecting a horse breed involves a number of considerations. There are many different purebred breeds of horse to choose from in North America. They differ in size, shape, colour, disposition, conformation, ability and adaptability. Some are "specialists," which means they might excel at a particular skill. Others are "generalists," adapted to many tasks.


Breed refers to a group of horses that have common origins and specific characteristics and traits that can be passed on to their offspring.

DO YOU KNOW

enough about the anatomy of horses to understand the differences between draft and light horses? If you think you need to know more, go to Horses’ body characteristics & functions in the inquiry topic. Know your horse’s anatomy & conformation at www.etsanimals.ca/ va2070/anatomy.html.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DRAFT & LIGHT HORSE BREEDS

Horse breeds are characterized by distinctive traits:

• Size and weight
• Appearance
• Temperament

There are two main groups of horse breeds – heavy, or draft, and light.

Draft horses

Draft horses are also called heavy horses and are recognizable by their height and muscular build. They have confirmation that is well-suited for tasks like pulling and heavy work. They tend to have short backs with powerful hindquarters. Many have a straight profile or "Roman nose," which is characterized by a convex profile. Draft breeds average about 16 to 19 hands in height and from 635 to 910 kg in weight.

Draft horses were developed to carry heavy loads, pull plows and wagons and perform other farm work. Their height and strength made these horses a source of "horsepower" for farming and transportation. Draft horse breeds include the Clydesdale, Belgian, Percheron and Shire.
Feeding, caring for and housing a draft horse can require a larger commitment of resources. Most are fed a significant amount of food and hay per day.

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, thousands of draft horses were imported from Western Europe into the United States. Percherons came from France, Belgians from Belgium, Shires from England and Clydesdales from Scotland.

As mechanization increased and farm machinery, like the tractor, was invented, the use of draft horses decreased and some breeds declined. Today, draft horses are still used for agricultural activities, including driving and pulling, although much of this happens at competitions and shows. Draft horses are sometimes crossbred with light horses to produce offspring with increased height, weight and strength.

Light horses

Light horses often refers to those breeds that can be used for activities such as riding, racing and "light" work, such as driving buggies. Light horses can also be classified according to their uses, including racing, working cattle, showing, jumping, hunting, pleasure riding and pulling light carriages. Light horse breeds tend to be lean-legged and athletic, and are recognizable by their speed and agility. Some light horses can be classified according to colour characteristics or special gaits.

Many modern light horse breeds can be traced back to the Arabian, the oldest breed of light horse. Arabians have small, triangular shaped heads, pointed ears, a broad forehead, a small muzzle with large, flaring nostrils and large eyes. Their backs are short and straight with a high tail carriage and long, flat croup. This breed is well suited to endurance racing.

Other light horse breeds include Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, Standardbreds and Morgans. The Thoroughbred was developed primarily for speed and is used for racing, hunting, jumping, showing and pleasure. Quarter Horses have a heavily muscled, sturdy body, and are bred for running short distances. They are widely used on cattle ranches and as cutting horses, trained to separate a single cow by quickly moving to cut it off as it tries to return to its herd. They are also used in English riding and racing.

Need To Know: The difference between draft & light horses

Light horses are more suitable for activities that require agility and speed, while draft horses are better suited for tasks that require strength and power.
The Morgan is the only horse breed to originate with, and be named after, a single horse — a dark bay called Justin Morgan. Used originally to pull light carriages, the Morgan is now considered a multipurpose breed and is used as a saddle horse. The Standardbred, developed from crossing Thoroughbreds with Morgans and other light horses, is often used in harness racing.

Colour breeds include the Appaloosa, Pinto and Paint. Appaloosas have white sclera around the eye, mottled skin and striped hooves. Paint and Pinto horses have natural white markings on their bodies with underlying pink skin.

Some light horse breeds are identified by their gait — how the legs move and the feet land when the horse is moving. All horses share the natural gaits of walking and galloping. Other gaits — including the pace and running walk — are taught or trained by people. Over centuries of selective breeding, some unnatural gaits can become natural to these breeds and can be performed with little or no training. The American Saddlebred, Tennessee Walking Horse and Paso are examples of gaited breeds.