



AMERICAN QUARTER HORSE

Perissodactyla
Family: Equidae
Genus: *Equus*
Species: *caballus*



Range: origins in Virginia and Carolinas, now widespread across the United States

Habitat: domesticated, found in pastures and farms

Niche: Terrestrial, diurnal, herbivorous

Wild diet: n/a

Zoo diet: hay, feed

Life Span: (Captivity) 20 - 40 years

Sexual dimorphism:

Location in SF Zoo: Children's Zoo Family Farm

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Quarter horses vary in coloring varies from the most prominent color of sorrel (brownish red to bay, black, brown, buckskin, chestnut, dun, red dun, gray, grullo, palomino, red roan, blue roan, bay roan, perlino and cremello. The quarter horse breed is known for its small, short and refined head and straight profile as well as its broad chest and powerful hindquarters. Standing between 14 and 16 hands, about five-feet-tall at the withers, they are bred with two main body types. The stock type, which is shorter, more compact and well muscled, yet extremely agile, and the racing type that may be slightly taller with smoother muscles than the stock type. The racing type more closely resembles the Thoroughbred and is typically trained for running quarter mile sprints, hence the name.

Weight: varies (~ 1100 lbs)

SH: 14 – 16 hands
(Hand = 4", hand's breadth)

The dental formula is $I3/3-C1/1-P3-4/3-M3/3X2= 40-42$. The incisors are shaped like chisels; the enamel on the tips folding inward to form a pit, or "mark" that is worn off in early life. The first permanent incisors spear at about 2.5 to 3 years in domestic horses. Age in horses is often estimated by the degree of wear of the surface pattern on the cheek teeth, but the rapidity of wear depends to a great extent on the abrasive character of the food.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

The American Quarter Horse is the most popular breed in the United States today.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

These horses are generally very sensible, intelligent mounts that are easily handled. They are well known both as a race horse and for its performance in western riding events such as rodeos, horse shows and as a working ranch horse. It may also be shown in English riding events.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Males use the lip-curl (Flehmen response) to assess the female's sexual state. Mares are seasonally polyestrous, have an estrous cycle of about 3 weeks and are receptive for 3 to 7 days. They commonly first enter estrus in the early spring or within 11 days postpartum. Usually there is a single foal, twins occurring rarely. Young are precocial and are usually up and standing within an hour of birth. Foals are born with nearly white eyes that darken to amber or hazel by maturity. Large breeds are not fully grown until 5 years, but physiological sexual maturity is attained after only one year. Females are potentially capable of producing a foal annually from the age of 2 to at least 22 years, but the actual reproductive rate depends on various environmental, physiological and social factors. Few horses live past the twenties, though maximum known longevity is ~ 50 years.

Estrous Period: Seasonally polyestrous

Gestation: 332 – 342 days

of Mammae: 1 pair located in groin area

of Young: one

Sexual Maturity: 15 – 24 months

Weaning Age: 5 – 9 months

Weight at birth: ~ 100 lbs

MISCELLANEOUS

The origins of the breed can be traced to Colonial America and Virginia & the Carolinas. English settlers crossed their own stock of horse with the descendants of horses brought to the New World by Spanish Conquistadors and being bred by the Chickasaw Indians. When the new English horses were bred to the native stock, a compact horse with heavily muscled hindquarters began to develop. These horses were used for the various farm chores like plowing, pulling logs, pulling light carriages, and riding. After doing chores all day, the farmers would take their horses into town for friendly quarter mile races. The fastest over this distance would win, and consequently be bred more often, creating a versatile horse that could now sprint extremely fast over short distances.

Sources:

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Walker's Mammals of the World Vol II © 1999 R. Nowak, Johns Hopkins Press, p 1015-1018

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