

Island's Only National Show Horse Has Unique Lineage

HORSE TALES

by Candice C. Dunnigan

There is only one National Show Horse (NSH) who resides on Mackinac Island, and that horse is named Navajo. He lives on the East Bluff, in a small turnout behind the cottage home of his owners, Paul and Maryanke Alexander. The horse is a very attractive and lively gelding, and he looks and acts much younger than his age, 19.

Maryanke has owned the horse for 12 years, and he had been a mount for her daughter, Anneke, when she was in high school in Mount Pleasant. Navajo has had a variety of experiences, from 4-H shows in both Western and English, high school equestrian team competitions, and trail, to name a few.

Because Navajo has a color pattern, he is often mistakenly called a "paint horse." His pattern is called "tobiano." That color type usually means the horse may have a head marked like a solid-colored horse, with a blaze, snip, or a star running down the nose.

The legs will have white on them, and the body of the horse will have large distinct panels of color on one or both flanks in dark brown and/or black.

The mane and tail of the horse may be tri-colored. Paints have that coloring, and so does a pinto horse. It can get pretty technical, but to be a paint, the horse must have a breed lineage that includes registered Thoroughbred and American Quarter Horse, as well as meet color and marking requirements.

Navajo's breeding is quite different. It includes a cross of two distinct horse breeds, Arabian and American saddlebred, with a bit of color to spice up the recipe.

You can see it in the way he

moves. In 1981, a new national horse registry was founded and incorporated, using this cross.

Mr. Gene Lacroix was a noted Arabian breeder, and an admirer of the American saddlebred. It was he who influenced Arab breeders to show in classes called "country day or country pleasure."

This was riding with full long stirrups in the park style of riding, such as how saddlebreds and some Morgan horses were being shown.

The saddle is a very lightweight English or "eastern saddle" that sits further back off the horse's withers. The emphasis was for a brisk high gait, lots of action, and head carriage, all the things that can be associated with the movements in an Arabian horse.

The horses are lightweights, taller than the average Arab, with lovely heads, highly held tails, and longer legs.

The National Show Horse is a very nice breed, and the Alexanders' gelding is a nice horse. The blend of the Arabian's beauty, stamina, and strength is combined with the American saddlebred's long neck, high stepping action, and rather "electric" show horse personality. These animals were originally bred just for the show ring.

The National Show Horse stands between 14.3 to 16 hands. In showing a National Show Horse, the rider does not post the trot, he sits as one would on a saddlebred or Tennessee Walker.

In the ring, the National Show Horse is required to do a "rack," where the horse moves at speed but maintains a four-beat gait (this means "way of going"). This is akin to a trot (two beats), with the extra two



The horse, Navajo, with onlooking cottagers (from left) Lorabeth Fitzgerald, Nancy Keogh, Leah Croghan, and Keith Croghan enjoying his performance. (Photograph courtesy of Lisa Brock)

steps added in. Sound complicated? Not for the horse, because the natural way of going for a saddlebred has these added steps in the action, which is free and very showy.

Navajo has not been used this way on Mackinac. Instead, he has been able to do a variety of things, many out of the ring. He has been ridden by Maryanke Alexander in the local Hunter Pace, and she enjoys riding him on the Island's trails.

Last year, he was featured as the "poster child" for the Annual 2006 Mackinac Horse Show. Navajo was a game contender in last week's Island horse show, competing in trail and the Hope Goodwin Hunter Hack classes.

For all that he has done, he

will probably be most remembered for his "free style" this July at the Horse Breeds of Mackinac Show, without carrying anybody on his back.

Dramatically, he ran around the ring and enjoyed the limelight almost a little too much, because he was very reluctant to leave the ring. He was having too good of a time.

Navajo seemed to say,

"Look at me, after all, I am a Show Horse. Look!"

Everybody did, and enjoyed his act.

Candice Dunnigan is an active member of the American Equestrian Association, the Waterloo Hunt, and the Mackinac Horsemen's Association. Seasonally she resides at Easterly Cottage.

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