

# COLOR AND COLOR MARKINGS OF HORSES

A good horseman needs a working knowledge of horse colors and patterns. The beginning horseman should familiarize himself with the following descriptions of the five basic horse coat colors and the five variations to these colors. These descriptions will be helpful in building the foundation for a working knowledge of horse color characteristics.

The first and most important group is the basic coat colors which are applicable to all horses. These color terms are all commonly used. White feet may occur with any basic coat color pattern.

## I. FIVE BASIC HORSE COAT COLORS

The five basic horse coat colors are:

- A) Bay
- B) Black
- C) Brown
- D) Chestnut
- E) White

A short descriptive discussion of each of the colors follows:

**A) Bay** - A bay horse is one whose color is hardest to describe, but easiest to distinguish. It is a mixture of red and yellow, being probably as much the color of a loaf of well-baked bread as anything. A light bay shows more yellow, a dark bay more red. The darkest is the mahogany bay, which is almost the color of blood, but without the red overtone. Bays always have black points.

A red bay should never be confused with a chestnut, as bays always have black manes and tails; chestnuts always have red (or occasionally flax) manes and tails. The body color of a mahogany bay and a chestnut can be the same, but the mane and tail provide an easy method of identification.

**B) Black** - A black horse almost invariably has black eyes, hoofs, and skin. The points are always black. Tan or brown hairs on the muzzle or flank indicates that the horse is not a true black but a seal brown.

**C) Brown** - A brown horse is one whose coloration is brown. Many brown horses are mistakenly called black, because they are so dark. A close examination of the hair on the muzzle and around the lips will quickly tell whether the horse is brown or black. The mane and tail are always dark.

**D) Chestnut** - (Sorrel) A chestnut is a horse whose coat is basically red. His mane and tail are normally the same shade as his body. If the mane and tail are lighter in color than the body, the horse is termed a flax or flaxen chestnut. The mane and

tail of a chestnut horse are never black. Chestnut color varies from a bright yellowish red to a rich mahogany red.

**E) White** - The true white horse is born pure white and dies the same color. Very little, if any, seasonal change takes place in his coat color. Age does not affect it.

The American Albino Horse Club, Incorporated of Naper, Nebraska registers as "Albinos" white horses of clear white body color, with brown eyes (rarely blue), and pink skin. They also register as "Albinos Type A" horses with a very pale ivory body color and white mane and tail. Their eyes are blue and their skin is pink. Geneticists classify a third group of light-colored horses as "Albinos Type B". Their body color is a very pale cream; mane and tail darker than body (cinnamon-buff); eyes blue. If during the life of a white horse, hairs of color other than white are found, the chances are that the horse is not white, but grey or roan.

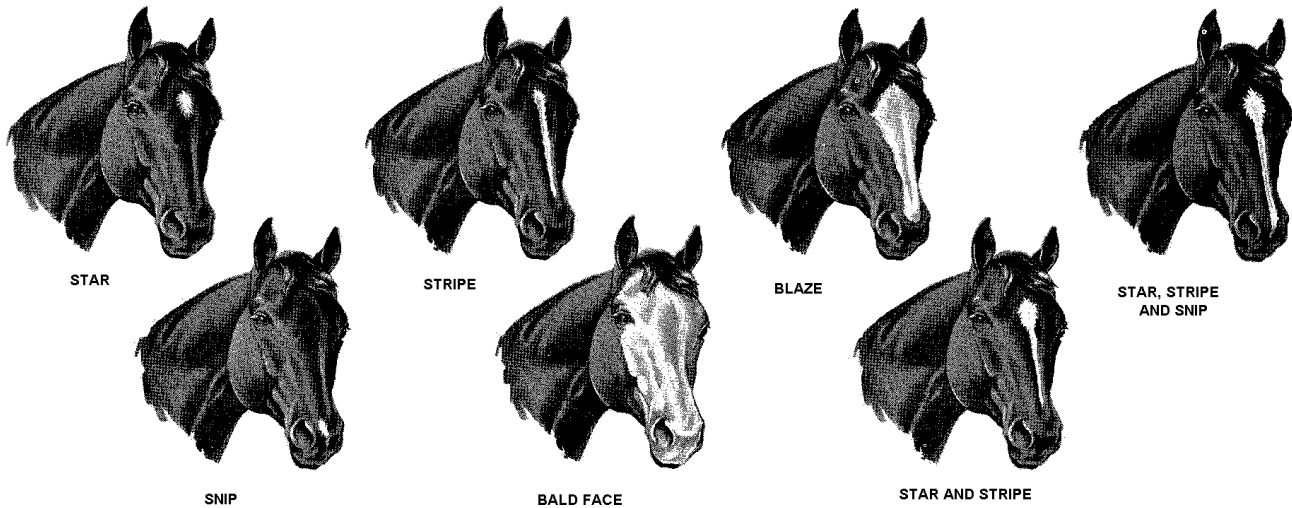
## II. FIVE MAJOR VARIATIONS TO COAT COLORS

In addition to the five basic horse colors there are five major variations to these coat colors. These are:

- A) Dun (Buckskin)
- B) Grey
- C) Palomino
- D) Pinto
- E) Roan

**A) Dun** - (Buckskin) The dun horse is one whose dominant hair is some shade of yellow. A dun horse may vary from a pale yellow to a dirty canvas color with mane, tail, skin, and hoofs grading from white to black. Duns always have a stripe down their back. There are special colors of dun ranging from cream, the lightest, through palomino color to duns with black points. A coyote dun is one with black points and a black line. A zebra dun is one with black points and a zebra stripe or stripes on legs and withers. A red dun is a dun of reddish orange cast often with a red stripe down his back and a red mane and tail. In the Thoroughbred stud book, these horses are listed as sorrels and sometimes ranchers refer to them as claybanks.

Grullo (grew yo). This a dun horse, with roan characteristics whose yellow hairs are mixed with brown or black. They always have black points. They are a smooth greyish-blue like a mouse, not a blue-roan or grey as the color is more suave and always permanent.



Some seem purple or smoke colored. Most are back-lined and have zebra stripes on legs and withers.

B) **Grey** - Most so-called white horses are really grey. Many people even call an old grey horse an albino, especially if it has light skin, hoofs, and one or more white eyes. Born blue or almost black, more and more white hairs come into this coat until by the age of 8 or 10 this horse will appear almost white. The dapple generally comes between the second and fifth year. Young grey horses are often called roan; when he has a great deal of black still in his coat, he is called steel grey. When small specks of black are present, he is flea-bitten; when more white shows, it is silver grey.

C) **Palomino** - The Palomino has body which is a golden color, varying from bright copper color, to light yellow, with white mane and tail. True Palominos have no black points. The breed description lists the ideal color to be that of a "newly minted coin."

D) **Pinto** - (Calico or Paint) A pinto is a spotted horse that has more than one color in or on his coat in large irregular patches or spots. Small non-white spots, up to the size of a silver dollar, embossed on a color other than white, do not necessarily indicate a pinto. For example, many chestnut horses have small black spots on their rumps. A great deal of white on the upper legs or face is a pretty good indication of pinto blood, as is any white spot above the knees and hocks or outside the rectangular area on the face outlined by the ears, eyes and nostrils.

E) **Roan** - A roan horse is any horse whose coat carries white hairs intermingled with one or more base colors.

Many are born and die about the same color. Whether a horse is light roan or dark roan depends on the proportions of white hairs in comparison to the colored. Most roans are combinations of bay, chestnut, or black with white hairs intermingled. They are known, in order, as red, strawberry, or blue roan. The roan coloration is generally not uniform and some patches on the body will be darker than others.

### III. VARIATIONS OF COLOR PATTERNS OF HEAD AND POINTS

A) **Head** - When discussing or describing an individual horse among many, it is necessary to be more explicit than merely using a general color term with a modifying adjective. Instead of just saying a dark sorrel, it may be necessary to say the dark sorrel with the blaze face.

1) **Star** - Designates a small, clearly defined area of white hairs on the forehead.

2) **Snip** - A small patch of white which runs over the muzzle, often to the lips.

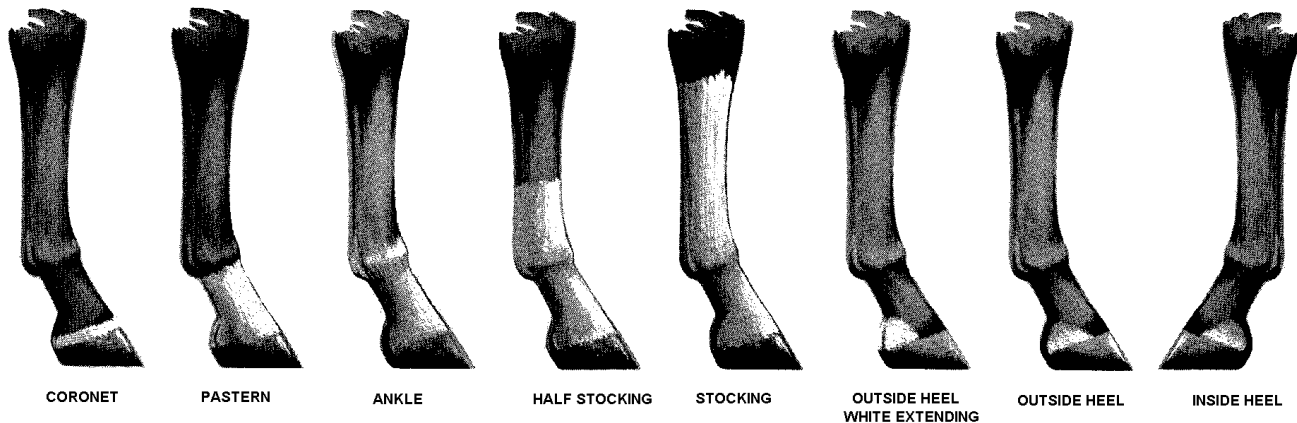
3) **Stripe** - A long narrow band of white working from the forehead down toward the muzzle.

4) **Blaze** - A white stripe down the face to the lips.

5) **Bald Face** - One which has white over most of the flat surface of the face, often extending toward the cheeks.

6) **Eyes and Face** - Normally horses have a rich brown eye with a black pupil, and no white shows around the edge. When this coloration varies, many adjectives are used to distinguish the difference.

When the eyeball is clear, some shade between white and blue, he is normally termed *China-eyed*, *Glass-eyed*, *Cotton-eyed*, or *Blue-eyed*. If one eye is



defective, he is called a *Wall-eye*. In some places, Wall-eyed refers to the white in the face covering the eye area. *Orey-eyed* is also used to denote a horse who shows, because of fright, or because his pupil is overly contracted, white around the rim.

7) A **Mealy-mouthed** horse is one whose color is faded out around the mouth, and is found especially in bays and browns. Occasionally this characteristic is called mulish because so many mules are Mealy-mouthed.

#### B) Feet.

- 1) **Coronet** - a white strip covering the coronet bend.
- 2) **Pastern** - White extends from the coronet to and including the pastern.
- 3) **Ankle** - White extends from the coronet to and including the fetlock.
- 4) **Half Stocking** - White extends from the coronet to the middle of the cannon.
- 5) **Full Stocking** - white extends from the coronet to and including the knee.

C) **Mane and Tail** - Black points always indicate a dark mane and tail, while white points or light points refer to a light mane and tail.

- 1) **Flax or flaxen**, when applied to mane and/or tail, indicates a straw yellow or dirty white. It is normally caused by a mixture of dark hair in with the white.
- 2) **Silver** is used to denote a mane or tail which is white with a few black hairs giving it a silver cast.
- 3) **True** white manes and tails have only white hairs.
- 4) **Rat-tailed** is a horse having but little hair in its tail.

5) **Broom-tailed** or **Bang-tailed** is a horse with a heavy, coarse tail.

#### IV. ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

There are a number of modifying adjectives used to further describe horse coat colors. Those listed below will be enough to cover most situations.

- 1) **Black points** - black mane, tail and extremities.
- 2) **Calico** is the same as patched, although generally applied to the livelier color combinations normally found among pintos.
- 3) **Cross** designates the dark line over the withers from side to side.
- 4) **Dappled** means darker spots are embossed on the coat.
- 5) **Dark** indicates a predominance of black hair or deep color, with little yellow apparent.
- 6) **Flea-bitten** is a gray or roan horse having small black or blue specks or spots on a predominantly white background.
- 7) **Golden** refers to the sheen which, when the light strikes certain shades of dun, chestnut, and bay, makes them seem translucent and golden.
- 8) **Light** indicates a predominance of yellow or white hairs.
- 9) **Line-back** means a darker ribbon which goes along the back from the mane to the tail. The line may be almost any color, although red and black are most common.
- 10) **Patched** indicates large roan spots on some base color.
- 11) **Piebald** - black and white spotting only.
- 12) **Pure** indicates uniformity, clarity, and depth of color.

**13) Ratty** indicates lack of uniformity in color - a dull, dirty tone.

**14) Ray** - line found along the back of some horses.

**15) Red-speckled** is a grey or roan horse having bay or chestnut specks or spots on a predominantly white background.

**16) Skewbald** - any color except black, with white.

**17) Smoky** means a blue tinge to the color; it is an obscure tone.

**18) Striped** indicates black-stripes or bars on the legs.

**19) Spotted** indicates spots of solid color on some base coat.

**20) Toasted** implies darker patches, dull finish, or dark overcast.

**21) Zebra** always means dark stripes on the legs and/or withers.

If the categories of terms listed in this topic are learned and properly used, no one needs to worry about his ability to describe or identify a horse properly.

DRAW OR PASTE A PICTURE OF YOUR HORSE HERE.