

Though commonly associated with the Native American for its legendary magical qualities in battle, the early origins of the Pinto horse appear to have descended from Spanish Horses exported to America in the sixteenth century. After the arrival of these European horses to America, great wild herds infused with the flashy colour patterns we see today began to develop, and eventually they became domesticated by the Native American. The early imported Spanish breeds crossed with the wild Mustang creating a type of riding horse suited to the working conditions of the day; this type became a fixture of America and became the popular light horse we see today.

The American Indian favoured the Pinto horse for its type and unusual colouring; the blotched coat was a natural camouflage and defence against predators; the American Indian was quick to appreciate this advantage. They also loved colour and decoration; they painted their own bodies and did not hesitate to paint their horses if nature had been less than generous in the coloration. These horses were perfect for the Indian; they were hardy, versatile horses that were relied upon for hunting for food, defending their people and ridden on a daily basis. The Pinto horse became part of the Indian way of life.

The Pinto horse was also popular with the American 'cowboy' who was not adverse to ornamentation in dress and equipment and therefore favoured the colourful horse. The cowboy also preferred the Pinto type for its ridden qualities as they required a versatile mount; one that was nimble footed over hilly terrain, capable of herding cattle and possessing a quick turn of speed when needed and able to work for prolonged periods of time as required, of a height that was easy to mount & dismount, not too big or heavy for the day to day workload, and attractive enough to ride into the nearest town for a visit to the local Saloon!

Neither the American Indian or the 'cowboy' of America selected their mounts solely on colour; there is no documentation to suggest that an Indian preferred a Clydesdale for riding to hunt or into battle purely because it was a horse of 2 colours; nor would the American 'cowboy' select the same as a suitable mount to work cattle or travel the distances they did daily – these horses, despite some being 'coloured' were simply not suited to their riding requirements; however heavy horses of all colours were used to pull wagons and heavy loads. The lighter Pinto horse weighs less than the heavier draft horse and cart horse breeds - they were selected for their body type and riding qualities; being agile and swift, suited to stock work, hunting etc; whereas the heavier draft breeds were developed for their muscularity, build and type suited to perform the task of pulling heavy loads, resulting in a different type of build to that of a lighter riding horse type. The Pinto has always been primarily a riding horse, from the early ancestors to the modern day horse, it is not a horse that was selectively bred and developed to perform the pulling duties of a cart horse, being of lighter frame and different build to that of the draft breeds.

There are some breeds of horse that although being of a lighter type have undergone selective breeding to develop a specific style of horse for other purposes i.e: Gaited Horse breeds – these breeds have been developed to enhance their natural gaited tendencies, resulting in a different body type. Gaited horse breeds include the Standardbred horse - selectively developed for harness racing, resulting in a horse with a longer body and shorter legs, or the Saddlebred which notably differs in the head, neck, legs and pasterns, the high wither and topline.

The argument that any horse with 2 colours has to be a Pinto is incorrect as not all 2 coloured horses meet the type of horse some Pinto associations accept, including the PHPA.