

# Gypsy Vanner Breed Standard<sup>©</sup>

Gypsy Vanner Horse Society [GVHS]



The Gypsy Vanner Horse Society's role in the preservation of the traditions and legacy of the breed can only be accomplished through officially recording the generally accepted characteristics and traits that make this breed unique from all other breeds of horses.

A breed standard is a document created by a breed society which carefully describes the genetically acceptable inheritable characteristics and traits of the animals' representative of the breed. The breed standard establishes a visual and written "target" for breeders to continuously replicate their horses for future generations, while placing a strong emphasis on the characteristics and traits that make the breed unique.

## General Appearance and Impression

### Image

The first glance, impression of the breed is its stature as a small draft horse. The image is enhanced with feathering, muscular development and size. The presence and quality of the breed reflect in its personality of being gentle, cooperative and willing, yet powerful. The head is characteristically pleasant reflecting gender, with an intelligent eye. The neck comes up high and forward off the shoulder, yielding a positive set and arch to the neck. The topline is level from wither to tail head, with a slight turn to the croup to enhance the powerful abilities of the hindquarters. The muscling is balanced throughout the body with the harmonious blending of all anatomical regions. The limbs are straight and correct, of such size and definition to be proportional to height and muscular development of the animal.

### Coat Color

The acceptable descriptive terms for the coat colors of the Gypsy Vanner horse are:

Piebald – Black and White Tobiano

Skewbald - Combinations of Brown, Red and White including tri-colored Tobiano

Blagdon\* – Solid color with white splashed up from underneath

Odd Colored\* – All other colors

It is important to note, the Gypsy Vanner is not a breed based on color, although the easily recognizable coat colors set the breed apart from others.

### Markings

The facial and leg markings follow the traditional descriptive terminology when it is applicable in defining identifiable true white markings. All true white markings have underlying white or 'pink' skin pigmentation. The color of the hooves may be solid or vertically striped, depending upon the leg marking and coloration of the skin immediately about the eruption of the coronary band. White hooves or partially white hooves will have a white leg marking immediately above it.

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\* Descriptive phrases used to define the coat colors of the Gypsy Vanner breed, although another term may be used by other equine organizations to describe these colors and patterns.

## **Height**

The height as measured at the withers will normally be between 13.2 hands to 15.2 hands although there may be individuals outside this range. Simply stated, larger or smaller versions of the identical conformation profile and standards are all equally acceptable.

## **Unique Characteristic**

The body, mane and tail hair coat of the Gypsy Vanner may vary from smooth straight and silky to slight waves and curl yet fine. One of the unique characteristics of the breed is the abundance of feathering found on the rear of the fore and hind legs, starting from the knee and hock and extending down and over the hooves. The natural feathering is the term to describe the excessive amounts of long hairs on the lower legs, hence the term *horse feathers*. The leg feathering provides natural protection to the legs from the weather and working conditions. The profound hair covering the hooves is referred to in the singular "feather".

The horses should have long natural flowing manes and tails, only trimmed or braided for neatness of appearance when being shown. The forelock should be full and long covering the eyes, as a natural sort of protection.

The natural Gypsy Vanner may have a beard, whiskers and muzzle hairs. These are often trimmed or removed in preparation for competition in the show ring.

## **Temperament**

The temperament of the breed is reflected in its personality and willingness to cooperate with man when given tasks. Coming from a cold blooded background, the breed should be relaxed, mannerly, and respectful of its environment. Their willingness should be expressed in their innate attitude of being capable of serving as a riding and driving animal. When evaluating temperament, gender must be considered.

Granted, from time to time individual horses will not display exemplary behavior, the reason needs to be determined, and if this behavior is innate, with the horse having a propensity for vicious and unmannerly behavior making it unsuitable for practical use, the individual could be considered a poor representative of the breed.

## **Gender**

The gender characteristics of the Gypsy Vanner Horse are of vital importance to maintain quality within the breed. Stallions must resemble the male, masculine characteristics within the breed, having presence ["a look at me attitude"], curiosity, muscling, and pride, yet always controllable and willing. Mares must reflect the quality and highly feminine qualities. The attitude of the mare is critical in the raising of her foal, as the foal will learn by example; the mare should be easy-going, sensible, and willing.

A stallion three years of age and older must have two fully descended, normally shaped testicles. The ability to observe the descended testicles may be dependent upon environmental temperatures. Stallions under the age of three may be difficult to observe due to development and maturation of the individual.

## **Head**

The overall impression of the head conveys an image of intelligence. It's size, shape and structure is proportional with the remainder of the anatomical regions. The refinement and delineation of facial features as well as the definition and shape to the lower jaw all contribute to the image of the head. The forehead must be flat and broad. The frontal facial bone should be flat to slightly convex, as it blends into a muzzle with sufficiently large nostril openings for the free exchange of air. The lips should be tightly closed.

A pleasant, intelligent head must be the trademark of the breed.

### **Ears**

The size, shape and position of the ears reflect the horse's personality as well as desirable characteristics of the breed. The length and width of the ear should be proportional to the head. The shape should be moderately wide at its middle, providing adequate space for collection of noises and sounds. The originating placement of the ear should be with a slight forward slant, with the ability to rotate from a forward alert position to a backward defensive maneuver, such as pinning the ears. A mare's ears tend to be a bit longer than the stallion, whose ears are short and shapely. The ears contribute to the overall image of the horse,

### **Eyes**

The expression and placement of the eye convey alertness, intelligence and kindness.

The eyes must be prominent, placed on the outer edge of the head to maximize the ability of the horse to see peripherally as well as with forward binocular vision. The eye should be large in its external structure and appearance. The distance between the eyes should be wider than the base of the ears, and located about 60-65% of the distance between the poll and the muzzle.

The color of the eyes will vary according to the color and color pattern of the horse. Partial white and dark color combinations are acceptable, along with a white sclera.

### **Bite**

The point where the central incisors meet must be equal and even as viewed from the side. A slight deviation is possible without fault if the teeth vary no more than one half the width of the tooth's surface. The slight deviation could occur with either the upper or the lower jaw. The accuracy of the bite may vary according to age, and the dental maturation due to the growth and development of the pre-molars and molars. As the pre-molars and molars move into location, the alignment of the jaw could vary during this process.

## **Neck**

The set, length and arch of the horse's neck are very important to its use and athletic ability. The neck serves many vital functions all associated with its ability for lifting, elevation, flexion, and lateral movement. The length of the neck needs to be sufficiently long for the horse to graze without shifting foreleg positions or standing with an offset foreleg position to enable the ability to reach the ground. Conversely, the neck should be sufficiently long enough to elevate the head for the horse to survey its surroundings, as a defensive posture. The neck should be sufficiently long enough for the horse to shift the horse's body weight into a balanced frame, thereby placing more body weight

proportionally on the hind legs than normal, enabling the ability for impulsion from the hindquarters.

The neck should rise upward from a well sloped shoulder, departing sufficiently above the point of the shoulder. The underline of the neck should be inwardly rounded, following a parallel line created by the arch of the upper neckline [crest] from wither to poll, while the underline tapers into the throatlatch. The definition of the jugular groove should be prominent.

The upper neckline [crest] should be arched and well muscled in both the mare and stallion, with more prominence desired and expected in the stallion. When standing at the rear of the horse, the neckline from the top of the withers to the poll must be a straight line, with only slight deviations. The upper neckline must demonstrate power, strength and flexibility.

The length, shape and ability for the horse to use the neck determine its natural athletic ability. It must be remembered, the Gypsy Vanner necks tend to be shorter with more powerful muscling than many breeds, due to the genetic selection for these horses to be used in draft related activities, strong necks that easily fit the philosophy of form to function.



## **Body**

The overall impression of the Gypsy Vanner's body is one of harmony and muscular proportionality with all of its collective anatomical regions. The balance and proportions go from the point of the shoulder to the buttock, point of the hip to stifle, wither to elbow, and foreflank to rearflank, and length of the back in relationship to the coupling and croup to tail head. All from the profile view provide a balance and proportionality, with the blending of the anatomical regions.

From the front and rear views, the width of the point of the shoulders, the spring and shape to the ribs, width and development of the chest, width of the hips, width of the stifles, definition of muscling in the rear quarters and stifle region and shape to the hip and croup, contribute to the balance and harmony, and more importantly the powerful athletic ability of the horse.

In viewing the body of the Gypsy Vanner, the muscle structure must convey the image of an athletically muscled horse, with smooth round muscles. Short, bunched, bulky muscles are not desired. Likewise, the amount and size of bone should be substantial and yet, refined. The substantial bone must reflect the workmanlike image of a draft animal, to sustain loading and stress. The limbs of the horse should clearly exemplify defined joints in the leg, in proportion to the diameter of cannon and pastern bones. The knee, hock and fetlock should be very obvious junctures of the leg structure, all proportional to the substance and muscle of the body.

### **Shoulder**

The shoulder is an important attachment point of the neck and the forelegs. Therefore, it is one of the most important anatomical regions impacting upon form to function, providing a natural 'home' for the collar and hames, as well as the ability to flex forward for the extension and reach of the movement at the walk and trot.

As viewed from the side, the shoulder should have an angle of 50 to 55 degrees, with deviations observed +/-5 degrees. The angle of the shoulder can be viewed from the most prominent [center] point of the withers with an imaginary line being drawn to the point of the shoulder. When a base horizontal line is added to the point of the shoulder, the angle of the shoulder should be apparent. The shoulder angle of the Gypsy Vanner tends to be more toward the vertical [90 degrees] due to the historical genetic selection of a shoulder to be easily fitted to a draft collar.

In partnership with the angle of the shoulder is the arm, the bone connecting the point of the shoulder with the elbow. The length and angle of attachment of the arm to the elbow joint affects the shoulder's ability to lift and move the forelimb forward for all gaits. A long arm is more desirable, resulting with the placement of the foreleg under the center of the body, closer to its natural center of gravity. It is undesirable to have legs appearing to attach close to the point of the shoulder, as this affects stride and support of the body by the forelimb.

The shoulder must be covered with sufficient muscling to protect the shoulder while allowing the horse to have the full ability to perform as a powerful athlete.

### **Withers**

The withers are the departure point of the neck up, and forward, as well as the jointure of

both shoulders [scapulas]. The withers should be prominent with sufficient muscle cover to protect this jointure. Horses with round withers are not desirable as this affects the ability to provide the proper position for harness.

### **Back and Coupling/Loin**

The Gypsy Vanner's back starts at the withers and goes toward the tail, until it reaches the last lumbar vertebrae. The topline of the back must be short and strong, with a slight curvature allowing the horse the ability to become 'round', flexible through the middle upper body.

As the back terminates at the last rib, the coupling/loin area connects the back with the croup. The coupling/loin area adds to the horse's strength and lateral flexibility of the body. The length of the coupling/loin area will vary but must be proportional and balanced to all other anatomical regions of the horse. The proportional length of the combined back and coupling/loin of a horse is important in establishing a strong, athletic topline.

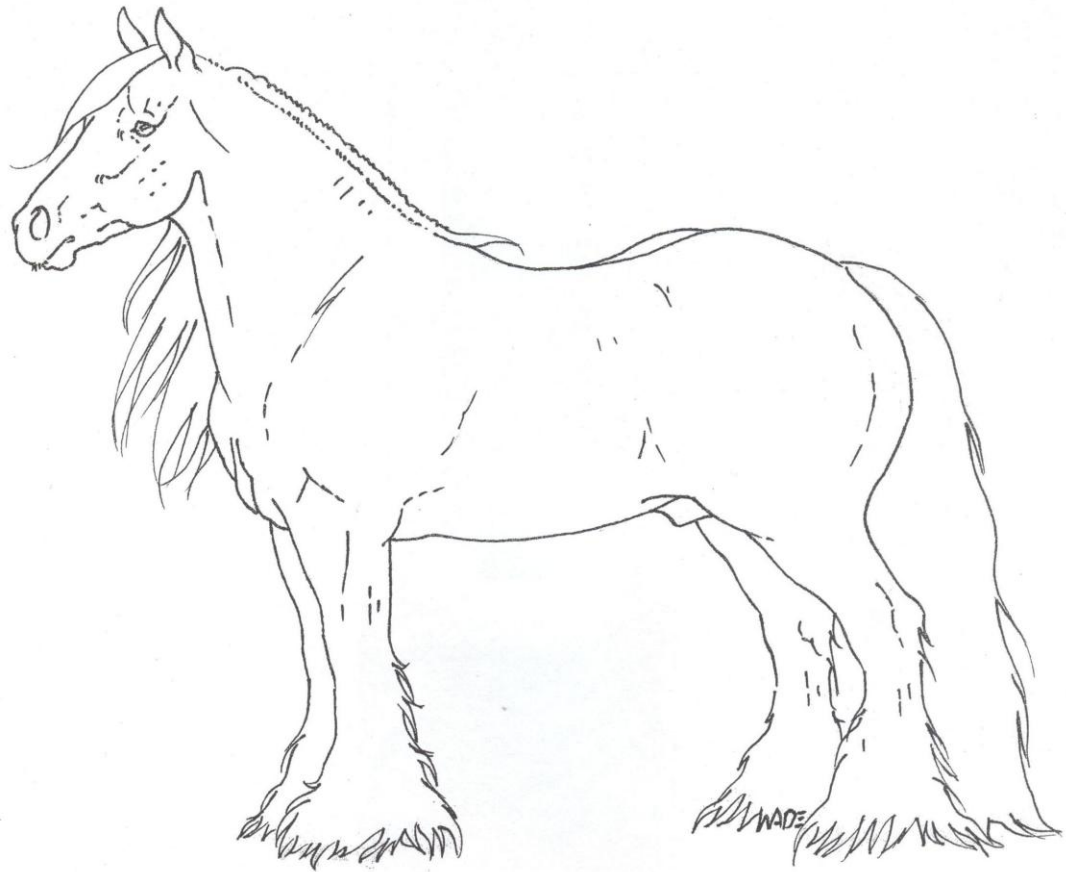
The length of the coupling/loin area is often confused with the observation about the horse's "back". A short, strong coupling/loin is usually associated with a "short back", while a longer coupling/loin is associated with a "long back". When in actuality, the length of the back remains the same, the true variable is the length of the coupling/loin, hence, the descriptive terminology is incorrect. Mares may have longer coupling/loin areas than stallions, which permits greater capacity for expansion of a pregnancy, giving the mare a "broody look".

### **Croup/Hip**

Blending from the coupling/loin region toward the rear, the croup follows the dorsal topline to the Gypsy Vanner's tailhead. When the croup is combined with the back and coupling/loin, the three anatomical regions make-up the region referred to as the topline. The croup serves as a point for visually measuring the length of the hip and to define the amount of muscling in the hindquarters.

When viewed from the side, the mid-line of the croup should be rounded, with a gentle slope and long, with a tail setting high on a powerful hindquarter. From the rear, the muscles from point of the hip over the top to the other point of the hip, coming back to the tailhead, must be round, wide and reflect powerful athletic ability. The strength of the hindquarters defines the breed as being a small draft horse, a horse designed for strength and power, but with class, presence and style.

To establish the length and angle of the hip, an imaginary line from the point of the hip is drawn to the tailhead. The length of this imaginary line should be slightly longer than the overall length of the topline. The point of the hip and the tailhead should be on a horizontal line which defines the length of the hip. If the tailhead is lower than the imaginary horizontal line from the hip, the hip/croup will be approaching too steep an angle for the Gypsy Vanner.



### **Chest**

The chest must be viewed from the front, with prominent, well developed powerful pectoral muscles, providing sufficient separation of the forelegs for correct movement of the forelimbs at all gaits. The width of the chest is an important indicator of the muscular strength of the horse and the capacity of the thoracic cavity, allowing for sufficient space for heart and lungs.

A horse with a narrow chest means the horse's lower forelegs will have the increased ability to interfere while in motion. Whereas, the horse with the excessively wide chest requires outward, forward rotating movement of the forelimbs, which reduces the ability to provide the continuous powerful forward movement expected for draft type horses.

### **Barrel of the Body**

The body of the Gypsy Vanner must be deep, and wide, reflecting the capacity to protect and provide capacity for the vital organs, including the heart and lungs. The ribs must be curved, not flat as observed from the front view. From the side view, the line from just behind the elbow to the rear flank should follow a gentle curve terminating just in front of the stifle. A Gypsy Vanner should not be 'cut-up' in the rear flank, giving the appearance of being tucked up, lacking abdominal capacity.



### **Forelegs**

From the elbow to the ground, the forelegs must be structurally, straight, correct columns of strength to support the weight and movement of the horse. Although the entire leg is additionally comprised of the shoulder and arm, it is the lower regions of the foreleg that command attention for assessment of structural correctness.

When viewed from the front, the legs must be plumb and true, with front view imaginary lines passing vertically down through the center of the knee, on through the center of the



fetlock joint, continuing down through the pastern to the center of the hoof. When viewed from the side, the leg follows a similar alignment, passing down the leg through the center of the knee, down the cannon through the center of the fetlock, to the heel of the hoof.

Deviations from these imaginary lines are considered defects in structure and may be the cause for unsoundness of the limbs when stress, strain and concussion are applied through use. Therefore, the amount and size of bone should be substantial and yet, refined, and clearly defined. The substance of bone must reflect the workmanlike image to sustain loading and stress of a draft animal.

The limbs of the horse should clearly exemplify defined joints in the leg, in proportion to the diameter of cannon and pastern bones. The knees, hocks and fetlocks should be very obvious junctures of the leg structure, with heavy to middle bone.

The forearm to cannon ratio needs to be at least 55% to 45%, respectively, with the forearm always longer than the cannon. The length of the pastern needs to be proportional to the remainder of the leg. The fore-pastern and hoof angle should be equal to provide strength and support to the lower leg.

The hooves of the horse must be of a size and proportion to properly support the horse in all athletic uses. The hooves must have symmetrical shape, with ample width and angle at the heels. Flat hooves with low heels are not desirable. Although the lower legs of the Gypsy Vanner are typically covered with feather, the pasterns and hooves must not be ignored and need to be correct and sound.

Historically in some draft breeds it was preferred that the width between the forelegs at the base should be less than the width at the chest in order to more efficiently work in furrows. Given the core genetics of the breed there may be a tendency in this direction. Care must be taken to not exaggerate the acceptance of the base narrow condition, while maintaining form to function structure.

## **Hindlegs**

The hindlegs of the Gypsy Vanner have many of the same characteristics and traits of the forelegs. Those include the definition of the bone and joints, size and shape of the hooves, length of the pastern, and the slightly base narrow leg position.

When viewed from the rear, an imaginary line can be dropped from the buttock, passing over the point of the hock, down the center of the rear cannon, passing to the rear of the fetlock onto to the ground terminating in the center of the heel of the hoof. Upon viewing the hind hooves from the rear, the placement of hooves and lower leg will be slightly turned toe-out, with the horse being narrower in the placement of the hindlegs than the forelegs.

When viewing the imaginary plumb line from the profile, the line will touch the point of the hock, lying parallel to the back of the cannon to the fetlock and then directly to the ground in the center of the heel. From the profile view, the leg should be plumb and true.

The muscular composition of the hindleg begins in the hindquarter and buttocks, and carries downward to the stifle and onto the inner and outer gaskin. The rear view of the

hindleg must reveal heavy smooth muscles in the gaskin, with the outer gaskin being large and round, whereas the inside gaskin will be less muscular, appearing flat when comparing the inner and outer gaskins. The muscular strength of the horse is defined in the area from the gaskin to the stifle up to the point of the hip and back to the buttock.

The pastern and hoof angles of the hindlegs will be more toward the vertical, usually over 50 degrees, when compared to the same anatomical region on the forelegs.



### **Movement at the Walk**

The walk for the Gypsy Vanner is a natural forward flowing four beat gait.

The length of stride reflects the power of impulsion from the muscular hindquarters, with a slight over step of stride. The shoulder must move forward in a free, unrestricted reach, with this motion carried down the entire length of the limb. The knee and hock action must be balanced in elevation and reach as the horse moves forward with pride. The pride in the breed is expressed in the head and neck carriage, being elevated in the movement, alert with presence, naturally shifting the center of gravity toward the hindquarters, keeping the horse in balance and form.

It must be remembered, the walk is the initial gait for a draft type of horse to move their load, therefore the Gypsy Vanner must move with deliberate forward, powerful strides

### **Movement at the Trot**

The trot for the Gypsy Vanner is a natural forward, free-flowing two beat diagonal gait.

The pride of the breed is best expressed in watching these horses trot, with a snappy animated style of movement, yet with the natural ability to extend the gait when requested. The knee and hock are synchronized in their elevated, flexed and extension movement. The horse will travel with its head up, flexed at the poll, and neck carried with a natural arch. The shoulders are supple and the hocks are engaged.

The animated trot of the Gypsy Vanner is a “trademark” of the horse’s powerful fancy image. The Gypsy Vanner’s conformation allows them to trot willingly and freely under a load and at liberty.

### **Movement at the Canter**

The canter for the Gypsy Vanner is a natural flowing three beat gait. The Gypsy Vanner is very capable of performing a natural three beat canter when the horse is collected and ridden in a balanced frame. Although the horse can perform the canter, to many of the horses, the trot is a more comfortable gait.

### **Unacceptable Characteristics and Traits**

Clean legged horses are undesirable.

Horses with ‘kinky’ hair coats are not desirable.

Horses with broken crests are not desirable.

The stallion 3 years of age and older must have 2 fully descended normal testicles.

No definable malocclusions are acceptable.