

# What is a

# "BREED STANDARD"?

By Gale Rempel, GVHS President, Chardon, OH

*From time to time, I am asked the question, what is a breed standard, and why is it important? I will try to provide an insightful response for all GVHS members, and Gypsy Vanner enthusiasts with the intent to broaden the base of knowledge for those interested in the foundation and preservation of our breed, "breed standard."*

A 'Breed Standard' is the illustrated and written guideline that creates a visual image and written description for the ideal conformation and structure of the most highly desirable example of a Gypsy Vanner horse. Over 100 years ago, this was described as the Standard of Perfection, and was created by all livestock studbooks for all species of livestock. Regardless of the era, the standards make an important statement about the unique traits and characteristics to set the Gypsy Vanner horse apart from all other breeds of horses. Perhaps more simply stated the standard is created to compare and evaluate all Gypsy Vanners. Beside the typical conformation and structural descriptions, 'breed standards' also include the overall appearance, behavior and temperament along with athletic functionality of gaits.

The 'breed standard' is created by the breed society, GVHS, as a part of its establishment and preservation of the breed. The GVHS has the responsibility of creating an official standard from which all Gypsy Vanners are to be evaluated and judged. Therefore, the standard is an assessment tool for all breeders to measure their ability to produce, through the proper breeding selection, horses with the most desired observable phenotypes, in their quest for the 'perfect' Gypsy Vanner horse.

The horses produced by a breeder should conform to the specific standards set for their breed. In essence, a breed standard is a 'visual blueprint' for the breeders to determine if the horses fit the conformation and structural function it was bred to perform such as dressage, jumping, reining, roping, racing, farming or pulling the family caravan.

A Gypsy Vanner breeder must assess their horse without prejudice, recognizing any traits and characteristics that could be considered detrimental to their soundness, health or welfare, while realizing only those of outstanding quality should be worthy of reproduction and breed registration. The standard provides all breeders with a common goal, to breed the perfect Gypsy Vanner horse. To achieve this goal, each breeder must recognize and support their role in the guardianship and preservation of the breed standard.

To accomplish the goal of creating the perfect horse, the GVHS must use proper oversight, rigorous checks and balances along with education for all breeders and owners. This means the periodic review of the standards, much like a person would inspect the roof on their house or barn, recognizing the impact of time.

Some of the additional factors associated with the preservation of the Gypsy Vanner are the genetic health of the breed and its freedom from hereditary defects. With new genetic testing tools, the breeder has access to many new methods to monitor and control their breeding programs, including coat

color predictions.

The GVHS implemented an important program to assist in the maintenance of evaluating horses to the breed standard through the Evaluation Program. This is where trained, independent representatives from the GVHS assess, evaluate and record their findings on an individual horse, as it compares to the standard.

Despite the magnitude of changes in lifestyle in the past 100 years, the GVHS's goal must be to maintain an accurate breed standard for the future of the Gypsy Vanner Horse. Form to function and fitness for use are important factors when evaluating a Gypsy Vanner. Therefore, the visual illustration and written description of the horse must serve to remind us of the function and origins of the breed. Words like feathering, abundant mane and tail, willingness, structural correctness, intelligence, temperament and quality of gait are important descriptions for the foundation and maintenance of the breed.

All written breed standards are 'word pictures' depicting the perfect horse. The 'word picture' must be complimented with a companion, illustrated standard. The challenge is how a breeder, show judge or evaluator interprets those words into the assessment of the living horse is crucial. Hence, the need and reason for the creation of an illustrated standard, to bring together more universal acceptance of one, single standard.

It takes both the left and right sides of the human's brain to put everything together. The right side is the creative side, the artistic side that sees the beauty, the symmetry and the nuances of the breed. The left side interprets the standard in a more intellectual, logical way. The breeding of Gypsy Vanners is both an art and a science. Breeders, show judges and evaluators must think with both sides of the brain to carefully and accurately assess an animal of beauty and functionality. So, conversely, an accurate and properly illustrated breed standard is accompanied a written description.

A standard can be a few or as many words as deemed necessary to describe the ideal horse. Caution should be taken when the written breed standard is limited or abbreviated, because this allows too much independent interpretation of the descriptive words, which results in lack of standardization. Interpretation is the key word. The breed standard itself is not changed or modified, but an under informed person applying their personal interpretation can be the greatest source for potentially changing the breed away from the standard. This is why the visual illustrated standard must be the primary source for creating a uniform breed standard in the minds of all observers.

Without the combination of illustrated and written guideline, the danger is breeders, show judges and evaluators may be

## HINDLEGS

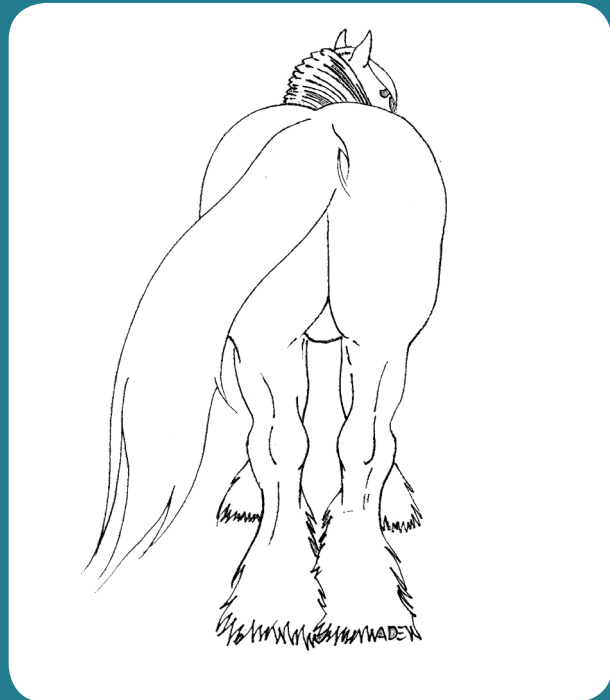
The hindlegs of the Gypsy Vanner have many of the same characteristics and traits of the forelegs. Those include the definition of the bone and joints, size and shape of the hooves, length of the pastern, and the slightly base narrow leg position.

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.



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prone to exaggerate or place a stronger emphasis for some conformation qualities wrongfully over others. This is known as expressing their personal preferences in deference to the official breed standard. To prevent this from occurring, the unified illustrated and written guidelines remove doubt and create a 'like image' in the minds of all who observe the Gypsy Vanner.

The official periodic review for clarification of a breed standard is a normal process, as it is a semi-dynamic document. However, it must be perfectly clear, a review is not for changing the breed standard. An official review is about clarification of the descriptive word(s) as compared to the illustrated standard and fresh eyes on the illustrated standard in an effort to keep the Gypsy Vanner Horse true to its genetic standard. The review process is not about changing the unique image of the Gypsy Vanner breed.

The breed standard answers questions like the following, recognizing this is a very short list of the questions:

- What is the correct conformation type for a Gypsy Vanner?
- What makes the Gypsy Vanner unique from other horses?
- What coat colors might I expect to see in Gypsy Vanners?
- What is the correct style of movement for the Gypsy Vanner?
- What is the correct placement of neck attachment of the Gypsy Vanner?
- What is the correct hip and croup profile for the Gypsy Vanner?
- How tall is a typical Gypsy Vanner?
- What is the temperament of a Gypsy Vanner?
- How important is the feather, mane and tail on the Gypsy Vanner?
- What shape and length is the neck on the ideal Gypsy Vanner?
- Are prominent withers a fault of the Gypsy Vanner?
- What is the desirable profile of the Gypsy Vanner's head?

And on and on.....

And so, when the questions are asked about the Gypsy Vanner Horse, the illustrated and written breed standard should be the place to seek the answers.

***The information in this article was prepared in collaboration with Wayne G. Hipsley, BSc, MSc, who assisted the GVHS with the development of a more comprehensive breed standard in 2008.***