

Breed evolution: "Single-footing is what many old-time horsemen used to describe the footfall of a horse's four-beat gait," says Sonnie Hardy of Blue Ridge Single-Footers in North Carolina and founder of the Single-Footing Horse Owners' & Breeders' Association. "It may also be called a rack or largo. The horse always has one foot on the ground at a time.

"The Single-Footing Horse evolved as breeders selectively crossed horses from existing gaited breeds that exhibited the unique ability to single-foot, instead of the standard gait for their breed," Hardy continues. "The majority are combinations of Standardbred, who contribute speed at gait, and the Saddlebred, Spanish gaited stock, and other gaited horses which add flexibility, refinement, and beauty. Some single-footers are tightly line-bred to retain desirable characteristics.

"While our registry's books are still open, many modern-day single-footers remain hybrids or crossbreeds of approved foundation gaited stock. The result is an exceptionally talented gaited horse."

The Single-Footing Horse is bred exclusively for work and trail riding. "Other gaited horses have been subject to the passing fads of the show ring, but the Single-Footing Horse has remained true to its purpose and heritage," Hardy says. "While the Single-Footing Horse comes in all colors, shapes, and sizes, it's how their four feet hit the ground that's most important."

Currently, there are two registries for these horses: SHOBA and the North American Single-Footing Horse Association. The latter is owned by Pem Myer and is located in Cave Creek, Arizona. NASHA has registered more than 900 horses since its founding in 1991.

"We're in the process of organizing trail rides for our membership, and we're always happy to promote rides that our members are taking part in," says Cy Brashears, NASHA secretary. She notes that owners are avid trail enthusiasts, as well as pleasure and ranch riders.

Both registries have similar standards for registration: Horses may be registered if they're the offspring of two registered Single-Footing Horses or if they fulfill the registries' performance standards. They must demonstrate a substantial range of speed in a natural, four-beat, single-footing gait without breaking for speed or falling into a lateral pace. Only barefoot or keg shod (those with slightly heeled shoes) horses are considered; in no case are weight or action devices allowed.

Disposition is important; when handled, horses must display a kind, willing nature. Conformation flaws may disqualify a horse for registration. Years of careful, selective breeding have produced several distinct lines of Single-Footing Horses.

Hardy says, "Those lines include descendants of the late Johnny Demetris' legendary EZD's Falcon Rowdy, from the Cumberland Mountains of Virginia; the Bayou Traveler line bred by Dr. Lawrence "Doc" Mosley in Louisiana; the Trigger line from Kentucky; and horses with largo Paso Fino stallions, like Coral LaCe, in their pedigrees.

"I felt like I'd hit the jackpot when I rode my first Single-Footing Horse," Hardy adds. "They're the horses of a lifetime."

Owners tell us: A lifelong horseman, Doc Mosely of Saddle Up Farm in Louisiana, tells us that the single-footing capability of many gaited horses is lost as they depart from the horses'

natural gaits to emphasize the animated, show-ring gaits. His strategy for a successful breeding program is to select a fleet-footed Saddlebred with a beautiful single-footing gait, and cross him on another single-footing horse.

He owned Bayou Traveler (now deceased), a foundation stallion for the Single-Footing Horse, and now stands Double Downs, a Standardbred off the track, with earnings of more than \$150,000. It's important to know which Standardbred bloodlines produce a single-footing horse.

"Double Downs comes from a line of single-footing horses," Mosley says. "Standardbred breeders don't particularly want their horses to be known as single-footers, because they pace on the track - a diagonal, two-beat gait. But many Standardbred horses are natural single-footers that are also bred for speed. When I learned that it took trainers a year to get Double Downs to pace, I knew he was a single-footer! After he was injured on the track, I bought him for my program."

The Single-Footers are surefooted horses over mountainous terrain, and cover ground quickly and efficiently in the open.

"My average horses with an average rider can do 20 miles per hour in a clean single-foot gait," Mosley says. "It's a naturally smooth gait, and you never have to post." His favorite trail rides are in the Cumberland Mountains of Virginia, where many single-footing horses are bred.



On the trail: Steve and Suzi Wright live in those lush and rugged Virginia mountains and raise Single-Footing Horses that excel on the trail. They stand Rowdy Rawhide, a son of the breed's foundation stallion, EDZ's Falcon Rowdy.

"These horses are real smooth and fast over any terrain - and we have some pretty tough terrain here!" Steve says. "In the barn, they're as docile as can be; on the trail, they want to go."

A couple of years ago, Rowdy Rawhide suffered a broken jaw and, afterward, colic. The Wrights rearranged their basement, and moved the kindly stallion in for nearly three months of recuperation. "His stud fees and colts built my house, so I figured he could live in it!" Steve says with a chuckle. Today, Rowdy Rawhide, 18, has moved back outside and is living strong.

Longtime horse owners Steven and Sandy Hambrick of Arkansas are new to Single-Footing Horses. "I showed Tennessee Walking Horses for 25 years, but quit because of the abusive practices," Sandy says. "To win, people do things to horses that just aren't right. On the other hand, the Single-Footing Horse owners are the nicest people I've ever met. They're only interested in trail riding, and their horses are a rider's dream on the trail."

