

## *The Fell Pony: A Hardy and Hardworking Breed*

### **By the UK Fell Pony Society**

Over the past three years, numbers of Fell ponies have more than doubled in North America to approximately 100 via imports and live births. The Fell Pony Society (FPS), located in the United Kingdom and formed in 1916, is the mother breed registry. The FPS is the only authorized registry for North America until such time as we demonstrate enough ponies, breeders, and knowledge to warrant daughter registry of our own.

The Fell is a hard-working native British pony breed historically raised semi-feral out on the rugged hills of northern England. The breed derives its name from the word 'fell' which in Britain means 'hill'. The lifestyle Fells endured in this rugged hill environment ensured that the breed would continue to be hardy and useful for work since only the healthiest of the animals could survive to pass on their genes. Today more ponies are being raised off of the hills in more 'modern' settings where they receive more medical intervention that often weakens, rather than strengthens, the gene pool. This presents a challenge to those breeders who wish to preserve the original toughness and utilitarianism of the breed, especially outside of the Fell's homeland. A quote from British equine scholar and author Clive Richardson echoes this challenge: *"By obtaining sound breeding stock, replicating the ponies natural environment as far as possible, maintaining close links with the parent society, using Fells in a wide range of activities, and keeping in mind a clear picture of what a Fell pony should look like, the dangers of breed type being lost are minimized."*

The breed's desired height is 13.1-13.2 hands, but the maximum height allowable is 14 hands. Over the last few decades black has become the predominant color, followed by brown, bay, and gray. It is of paramount importance that all of these breed colors are promoted and preserved to maintain genetic diversity and to preserve the best type of Fells that still exist. Fells are renowned for their stamina, ground-covering trot, leg feathering, and profuse mane and tail. Many of these attributes all are indicative of the Fell's needs as a hard worker and survivor. Their stamina and trot were needed over the centuries for performing various work disciplines such as delivering goods over far distances, farming, and cart work. Their feather and hair helped to keep them warm and dry out on the hills of northern England where the weather is famous for being wet and chilly.

Fells have survived cultural changes over the centuries by adapting to activities such as packpony work, farming, trotting races, and deer stalking (carrying game for hunters). They are currently used in areas such as driving, pleasure, showing, and

farming. HM Queen Elizabeth II is patron to the breed and her husband, HRH Prince Philip, often can be seen driving his four-in-hand team of Fells for pleasure and competition.

A DNA study was undertaken by Dr. Gus Cothran in 2000 that mapped nearly 40 ponies, and the prognosis of diverse genetic growth was promising. Since this original study the North American Fell population has more than doubled and a second phase is underway. As with any rare breed, we need more breeders and a viable number of ponies to represent a wider variety of the available UK bloodlines.

*Although there is currently no North American affiliate, the Fell Pony Society has appointed a North American Liaison Officer, Laura Hart, to assist Fell enthusiasts in learning more about the breed and to facilitate communications between breeders and owners and the Society. You can contact Laura at PO Box 174, Eau Claire, Michigan, 49111, e-mail [FeatheryFeet@yahoo.com](mailto:FeatheryFeet@yahoo.com) - fax (508) 519-6533. At the Fell Pony Society website, [www.Fellpony.com](http://www.Fellpony.com) you will find separate North American and Educational web pages with more resources.*

