

In the Spotlight -

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Merlin

Photo: Philippe Roca © 2003

Breed

Fell Pony (Fell is the Norse word for "hill")

Specifics

Merlin's registered name is Hardendale Black Jack. He is a 7-year-old black gelding, 13.2 hands, 930 pounds.

Sire and Dam

Midtown Jack and Hardendale Jewel

Path to the Horse Park

Owner Laura Hart, of Eau Claire, Michigan, the North American Liaison Officer of the British-based Fell Pony Society, offered to loan Merlin to the Kentucky Horse Park for the 2003 season to give visitors a chance to see this rare breed. (There are less than 6,000 registered Fell ponies throughout the world, with less than 30 in the U.S.) Merlin recently won first place in the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy Rare British Breeds Show at the Horse Park. He was shown in hand, ridden hunt seat, and driven.

What is a Fell Pony?

The original Fell ponies came from the north of England and are now found mainly on the western side of the Pennines. The Fell Pony is probably descended from the early Celtic pony and foreign stock imported during the time of the Romans, when the hardy ponies were used as draft animals in local industry and in the building of Roman walls. Except for the Exmoor, the Fell Pony is considered the purest of all native British ponies. Before the days of autos, the Fell Pony was a jack-of-all-trades,

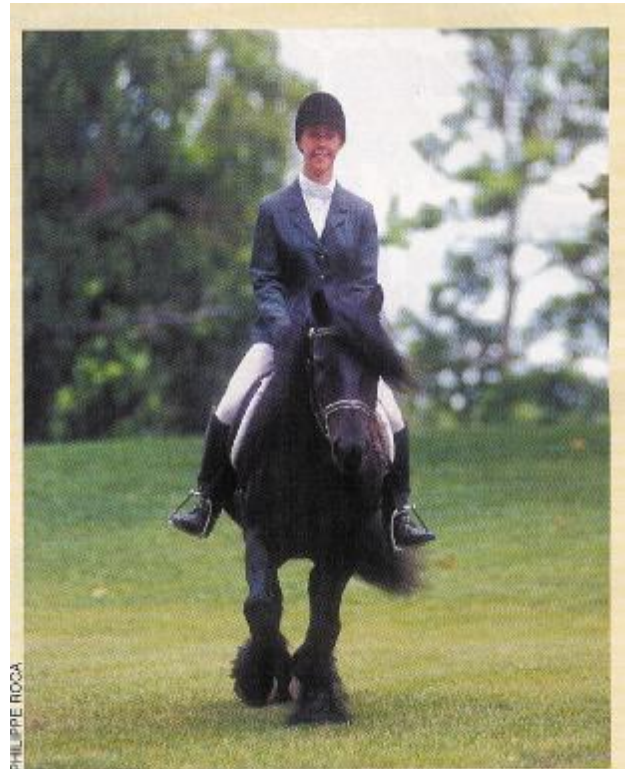
shepherding on the fells of England's Lake District, working as a light farm animal, pulling the family carriage and performing as a great racing-trotter. The breed declined alarmingly during the first half of the twentieth century, though, having lost its purpose as a work animal. The Fell Pony Society was founded to promote and conserve the breed, which rebounded in the 1950s with the development of riding schools and trekking centers to accommodate the tourist trade. Fells are large ponies, standing 13-14 hands at the withers, although the average is 13.2 hands. They are well muscled, with a well-laid back and sloping shoulders that produce comfortable riding gaits. The legs must be strong, with plenty of flat bone, and the feet are round with the characteristic blue horn and feathering. Most Fells are solid black, though browns, bays and grays are seen occasionally. The Official Standard of the Fell Pony Society states they should be "constitutionally as hard as iron."

Occupation

Merlin is ridden or driven in the Parade of Breeds.

Personality:

"He is a solid little pony," says Breeds Barn Manager Denny Chapman. "Merlin is happiest when he is working and is tickled to death to be ridden or driven.



PHILIPPE ROCA

Deyrni Henderson rides Merlin, a rare Fell Pony on loan to the Horse Park for the 2003 season.

He's good on the rail with kids, and he has shown us he has a very nice disposition with nuisances—very little bothers him. He is very attentive to the rider or driver."

Where to find Merlin:

Visit this fetching Fell Pony at the Breeds Barn, where he will be through October. For more information, go to www.fellpony.com or www.raresteeds.com/FellPony Society.

- Cathy Laws

Editor's note: Breed information was gathered from the breeds pages on the International Museum of the Horse website, kyhorsepark.com.

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