

HORSES.

Action in Shires.

Canadian horsemen note with approval the increasing attention being paid to action by breeders and judges of Shire horses in England. Action and quality have been the two characteristics which have entrenched the Clydesdale so firmly in the estimation of discriminating horsemen on this side of the water, while the relatively short, upright pasterns, with corresponding formation of shoulders, and resulting clumsiness of action, have seriously retarded the popularity of the Shire, notwithstanding his usually greater scale. It would appear that the discerning Old Country breeders of this heaviest of draft-horse stock have concluded to develop the desired length and obliquity of pastern calculated to permit of free, elastic action, and some of the recent shipments of Shires to Canada have borne marked evidence of progress in this direction. This was particularly noticeable at the Chambers' sale, in St. Thomas, a year or two ago, while illustrations of winners at the English shows, as seen in the accompanying photogravures, plainly indicate development in regard to length and slope of pastern and the obliquity of shoulder which is the anatomical counterpart, as, for instance, the champion mare at the recent London (Eng.) Shire Show. In this connection we note the comment of the Live-stock Journal on the exhibits at the show in question: "Without doubt, there is more razor-like shape of the bone below the knees and hocks, a silkier touch to the hair or feather, a bigger and better-shaped foot, and less uprightness of joint, are to be seen in the winners of this week than there was even a few years ago."

In another column of the same journal, a writer, discussing the subject of action in heavy-draft horses, correctly insists that it should be free, elastic or springy, regular, comparatively light, and last, but not least, sufficiently wide so that the feet are kept well clear of one another when the horse is moving. Though the style in which a cart horse moves must to some extent depend upon its general type, particularly as regards size and weight, yet, however heavy the type, a certain springiness of gait is always desirable, and the feet should be put down as lightly as possible in order to minimize concussion and wear.

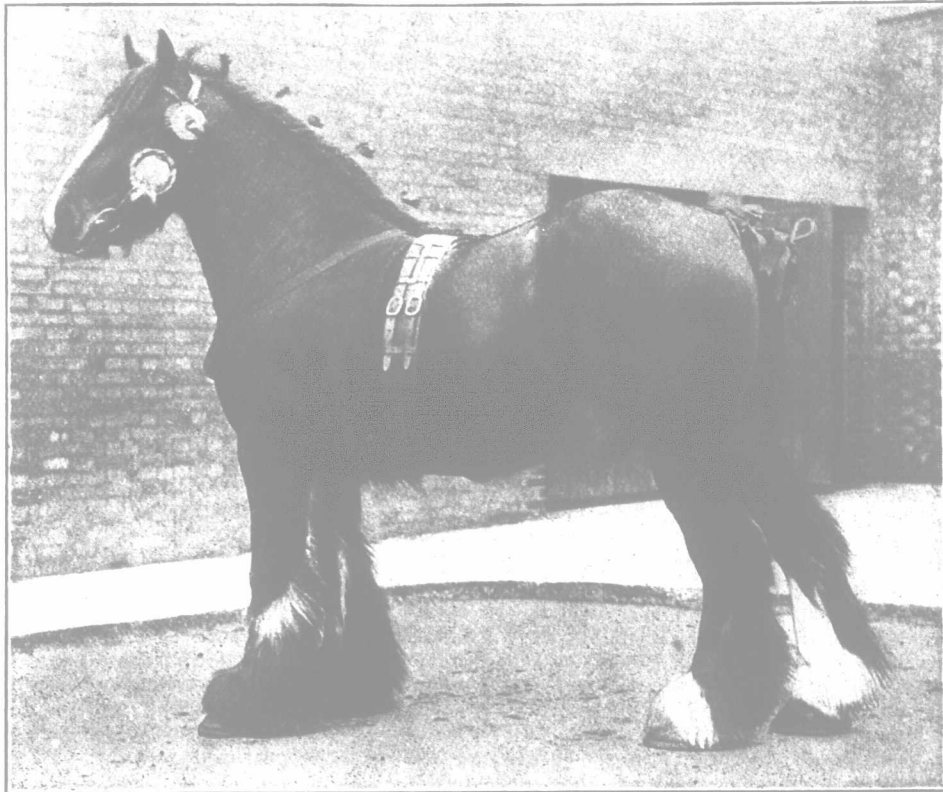
"When the action of a cart horse is very clumsy or stumpy, and lacks elasticity, the feet being planked down on the ground very heavily, and striking it with great force at every stride, the limbs are subjected to a great deal of jarring, and suffer much from the injurious effects of concussion, which causes them to wear out comparatively quickly, and often brings about unsoundness of foot. Consequently," he goes on to say, "draft horses that have poor and clumsy action do not last long at street or road work, owing to their legs and feet giving out so soon, as the result of the great amount of jar they have to sustain. In order that the action may be springy, light and free, it is necessary that the shoulder blades and pasterns should be nicely sloped."

"The position of these parts has, indeed, a most important bearing upon style of action in cart horses. The more obliquely the shoulder and the pastern are placed, the lighter and more springy is the gait, whilst very upright shoulders and short, straight pasterns are always associated with cramped, clumsy and more or less stiff action, which is short of stride, and altogether lacking in elasticity. It is useless to expect a cart horse to be a good mover and speedy walker unless its shoulders are well placed and the pasterns possessed of a fair degree of slope."

"The action must, of course, be good all round, and, as regards the hind action, it is important that this should be as powerful as possible. The hind legs are the propellers, and the amount of propulsion a cart horse is able to exert with them governs its powers of draft. Cart horses should use their hocks well, and the hind feet should be brought well forward under the body at each stride. Powerful action behind is largely dependent upon the thighs and gaskins being very muscular, and the hock joints broad and strong. Similarly, it is essential to vigorous action in front that the forearms and shoulders should be well clothed with thick muscles. The hind action should be perfectly true. Any tendency to twist the hock and foot outwards at the end of the stride is a serious fault."

"In walking, the draft horse should pick up its feet well, so as to clear the ground properly, the pasterns in front and behind being nicely flexed, and when one watches the animal moving, standing behind it, the shoes and the soles

ought to become fully visible when the feet are lifted off the ground. That shows that they are being well picked up, and that the action is vigorous. In the show-ring particular stress is usually laid upon Shire horses flexing the pasterns well and lifting their feet high, and this certainly makes the action look all the better and more taking; but, for ordinary working purposes there is no object in this feature being carried to excess in the draft horse, and, provided



Halstead Royal Duke (25255).

Shire stallion; bay; foaled 1906. First and champion, Shire Show, London, England, 1909. Sire Lockinge Forest King.

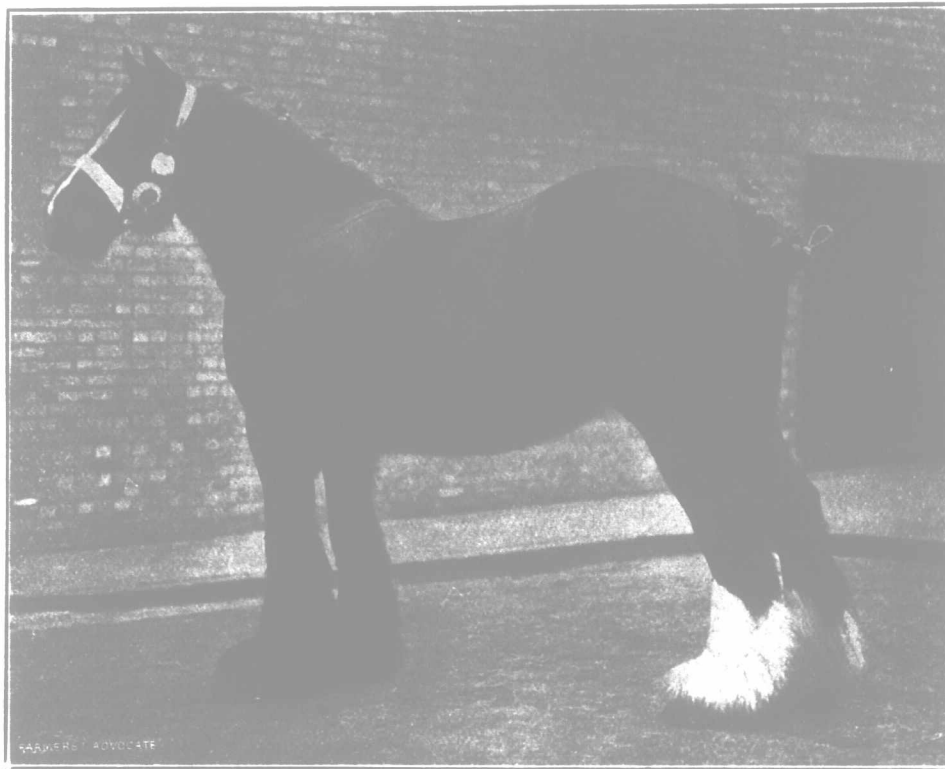
the ground is well cleared, nothing further need be insisted upon in this respect." However, the writer proceeds, the fact that flash action may be a little more emphasized in the show-ring is not to be deprecated from a utility viewpoint, "because the perfection of action attained in show specimens is never reached in the ordinary cart-horse stock, as bred by the farmer for working purposes. It must be borne in mind that, on his being bred to mares of average class, the

Overdraw Checks on Road Horses.

The use and abuse of overdraw checks on horses are questions that have been discussed for many years. Like other debatable questions, extreme views are taken on both sides. Many people condemn them; and not only the overdraw, but all checks, in most cases, not because they have any experience in driving horses, and hence are qualified to intelligently discuss the

matter, but because they occasionally notice a horse whose head is so tightly drawn up by an overdraw as to make him exceedingly uncomfortable. On the other hand, a few owners and drivers of horses, probably having noticed that the heads of most horses racing in harness are tightly checked, usually by overdraws of some pattern, and probably knowing or having heard that they can go faster when driven that way, have decided that it is wise to check their horses until their heads are high in the air and their noses protruded, for ordinary road work. Those who take the first stand claim that the use of either overdraw or any check is cruel, and, if they had the power, would legislate so that the use of a check on a horse would become a punishable offence. These, we claim, are extremists; they do not give the subject careful consideration, and they speak from neither experience nor common sense. At the same time, we cannot but deplore the too frequent abuse of the checkrein. The principal reasons why overdraws are used on the road horse are: (1) He is a light-harness horse, and the overdraw is less bulky than other kinds; (2) it is the kind of check usually driven on race-horses, and, the road horse being of the same breed or class, it is the kind usually adopted. The intelligent and humane use of the overdraw causes no more discomfort to the horse than that of other kinds; but the abuse of any kind of check—that is, when the horse's head is held up too high for a considerable length of time—without doubt, causes extreme discomfort, and, we might say, agony. There are different manners of using the overdraw. Some attach it to the driving bit. This, we think, is not good practice, as the check works directly upon the bit. Others are attached to a small bit especially designed for the purpose, which plan, we think, is better, as the driving bit is not interfered with; while others are attached to a short, soft strap, with a ring in each end.

This is called a jaw strap, and passes under the under jaw, hence has no direct action upon the mouth. This latter plan, we think, is the best. Some claim that no check whatever should be used for ordinary driving; that a horse should have free use of his head; that he is more comfortable under these conditions, and that he will not tire so soon. These arguments have considerable weight with the average horse, but those using them have probably had little actual ex-



Chiltern Maid.

Shire mare, 4 years old. First in class and champion mare, Shire Show, London, 1909.

fine action of a high-class Shire stallion which has gained honors at shows becomes considerably toned down in transmission to his progeny. Scottish breeders, in looking over Clydesdale horses, and particularly stallions, usually make it a practice to have them trotted, so that they may see how the animal they are inspecting moves at this pace, they holding that the manner in which a cart horse trots affords the best criterion of its walking action."