

Percherons in Western Canada

A visit to the largest Percheron horse ranch in the world

By H. Higginbotham

"Show me the horse of a people, and I will tell you what are the manners and character of that people."

In this sentence the French writer Tousselet explains the liking of various nationalities for the horses of their own country. Thus the Scotchman swears by the Clyde, big, strong, active and of sterling quality; the Englishman insists upon the excellence of the massive, big-boned, somewhat slow-moving, but powerful Shire; the Frenchman enthuses over the Percheron, graceful, enduring, docile. There is no distinctive type of German horse; in Prussia one finds a horse of Belgian origin; in Schleswig they have the Danish horse; in Bavaria the horses closely resemble those of France. In America all the equine races of Europe are represented.

All domestic animals owe their present form and tendencies very largely to the selection of their masters; it is not surprising, therefore, to find that they partake of and resemble the qualities of the people by whom they are moulded. It is this close connection between a nation and its horses that led the Frenchman to believe that a Percheron horse could not be raised to perfection outside Le Perche. No doubt many Scotchmen and Englishmen possess the same belief regarding the Clyde and the Shire. With the French breeder of Percherons, however, the belief amounts almost to a creed. He will explain to you that it is the soil, or the grass or the climate of Le Perche which has given to the Percheron the qualities you admire, and he will shrug his shoulders and smile pityingly at you if you ask him why the soil and the grass and the climate of England or America would not do as well.

In his introduction to Georges Trousset's book "Le Cheval Percheron," Dr. M. Ch. Deloncle, honorary inspector of agriculture for France, declares that although the best representatives of the breed have been purchased at big figures and taken to foreign countries, the descendants of these horses have not retained in the same degree the excellence of their sires. In recent years George Lane, of the Bar U ranch, Pekisko, Alberta, owned by Geo. Lane, Gordon, Ironsides and Fares, has bought many horses and mares in France, paying long prices in order to get the best obtainable. In making these purchases, Mr. Lane had the advice and the assistance of Louis Aveline, one of the biggest Percheron breeders in France and son of Charles Aveline, president of the Percheron Horse Society of France. M. Aveline did not mind parting with the best of his own horses. "We are not a bit afraid of you. You can take our best, but you will not be able to produce their equal in your country," he told Mr. Lane.

Biggest Ranch in the World

At the outbreak of the war Louis Aveline went into action with the ar-

tillery. Being wounded, he was invalided home, and on his recovery he was entrusted with a horse purchasing commission from the French government. He has been in America over a year, and has bought over 15,000 horses for his government. Since he has been on this continent, M. Aveline has visited the establishments of the biggest Percheron breeders both in Canada and the United States. The writer had the pleasure of meeting M. Aveline in Calgary after his visit to the Bar U Ranch at Pekisko and Geo. Lane's ranch at Namaka, Alberta. M. Aveline said he was very much surprised to see such a splendid collection of Percherons in Canada. Nowhere in the world, he said, could they be equalled in numbers and quality. Never before had he seen anything approaching the sight of 200

produce Percherons the equal in every respect to those grown in Le Perche. The soil, climate and the wonderfully nutritive qualities of the prairie grasses of Western Canada, judged by the quality of the horses produced on the Bar U and Namaka ranches, are, in his opinion, splendidly adapted to horse raising; and if Canadian breeders secure the best sires they should undoubtedly be able to produce the very best Percheron horses. M. Aveline was particularly pleased with the quality of feet and bone of the horses seen at the Bar U and Namaka. As to size, he was inclined to be conservative, and rather deprecated the tendency he observed all over the American continent to breed a heavier type of Percheron than that favored in France. "In my country," he said, "we think a horse

kept out on the range and are not allowed to become over fat. This also applies to all the Bar U horses.

It is not always the biggest horses, however, that are the best, and Geo. Lane admits that one of the biggest mistakes he ever made was to part with the horse "Presbourg." This horse never weighed more than 1,925 pounds even when he was in good condition, and Mr. Lane thought he was rather too small. It was not until his colts came to maturity that he realized the real worth of this sire. By that time the horse had been for some years in other hands and had past his usefulness. After he left the Bar U, "Presbourg" never had a chance to prove his worth, being sold to men who kept no pure-bred Percheron mares. "Presbourg" possessed in a remarkable degree the ability of transmitting to his colts all his own best qualities. Strange to say, all his colts exceeded himself in size, for in this respect he bred back to his own ancestors, which had the size "Presbourg" lacked.

Trace to "Jean Le Blanc"

While Geo. Lane has made some mistakes—and what breeder has not?—future historians of the breed in Canada will recognize in him the biggest single factor in the introduction and popularizing of Percherons in Western Canada. One has only to glance at the Percheron stud book for Canada to see that a large proportion of the horses whose names have been made familiar by their successes in the show rings at western fairs were owned by Geo. Lane, Gordon, Ironsides and Fares. The first Canadian Percheron stud book was published in 1912. A second edition is now contemplated. The first edition contains the registration of 2,193 stallions and 2,111 mares. The horse "Presbourg" is No. 1 in the Canadian stud book, his number in the French stud book being 29983. He was sired by the noted French horse "Bisique," out of "Coquette." Most of Mr. Lane's stock traces back to that greatest of all sires of the Percheron breed, "Jean Le Blanc," which in turn was a direct descendant of the Arabian horse "Gallipoli," to which many of the best qualities of the Percheron of today are attributed.

Looking over the ranch record book it was noticed that the two-year-olds all have names beginning with "L." On the Bar U all the colts born in any one year receive names beginning with the same letter. In this manner the name of the horse or mare at once indicates the age. Every horse raised on the Bar U has a number branded on the neck, in addition to the registration number. The brand is covered by the mane, and as it would not be noticed, except by someone who knew it was there, it is no disfiguration.



Five of the seven young stallions recently sold by the Bar U Ranch to Dunham's, Illinois. Left to right, "King George," "Lucifer," "Lorenzo," "Luffy," "Leonidas."

high class registered mares on one ranch; Dunham's, the biggest Percheron breeders in the United States, have not more than fifteen mares, and Mr. White, the president of the American Percheron Society, has only some ten head. In France there are no large horse ranches. Breeders, as a rule, keep only stallions, while the mares are in possession of the small tenant farmers. The small farmers retain all their filly colts, unless tempted by high prices offered by foreign buyers; but the horse colts are sold at birth to the breeders. As soon as a horse colt is dropped, the farmer notifies the breeder, who comes and inspects the colt. If he likes the colt, he makes the farmer a price on him. The breeders pay for these colts an average of \$200 to \$250, the farmers agreeing to keep the colts till they are six months of age.

M. Aveline told the writer quite frankly that his visit to the Bar U and Namaka ranches had completely changed his opinion regarding the possibilities of breeding the best class of Percherons in Canada. He said he was convinced that Western Canada could

is heavy enough if he weighs 1,700 pounds, but here you always want a horse to weigh a ton." M. Aveline thought the desire to raise big horses might result in some sacrifice of quality and action.

Good Size Desirable

On this point, Mr. Lane thinks that it is possible to retain the most desirable qualities of the Percheron and gradually grow into a heavier type of horse. "American buyers will not look at a horse unless he weighs a ton," says Mr. Lane, "and if a man comes to buy ponches you cannot offer him pears." Weight is a commanding feature of the Percherons produced on the Bar U Ranch during the last few years. "Leare," the Bar U horse which won the championship at Edmonton last summer, is seven years old and weighed 2,450 pounds. Many of the best mares on the Bar U are in the ton class, and there is no indication that size has been obtained at the expense of quality. In fact their weight is largely accounted for by the fineness and density of bone, as the mares are



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