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super rare. Some horses flaunt stand-out patterns or rare hues, thanks to unique genes. These dazzlers steal the show, as explored in our Horse Color Genetics Explained. Born dark, lightens with age. The Gray gene turns Arabians snowy over time. Learn more in our Gray Horse Guide. Our dapple gray filly highlights the gradual lightening process of gray horses. Bold white and colored patches. Tobiano or Overo genes create Pains, a breed with Quarter Horse roots. In the UK, these patterns are called Piebald (black and white) or Skewbald (any other color with white). Learn about Paint Horse colors and patterns in our detailed guide. A Paint horse showcasing bold white and bay patches with a tobiano pattern. Spotted coat, mottled skin, striped hooves. The Leopard Complex gene dots Appaloosas. See more interesting information in our Appaloosa Horse Guide. Young Appaloosa horse with a striking blanket pattern resting on the plains. Roan horses have a mix of white and colored hairs. The Roan gene blends hues in Quarter Horses and other breeds. Red roan Quarter Horse showing the striking mix of white hairs in its base coat. Brindle: Striped, tiger-like coat, ultra-rare in Mustangs. Pearl: Creamy sheen, seen in Andalusians. Dominant White: Pure white, rare in Arabians. Rabicano: White ticking at flanks, found in Thoroughbreds.Preserving these colors supports genetic diversity, vital for horse health, per the Thoroughbred Breeders' Association (Thoroughbred Breeders' Association). Genes are the paintbrushes of horse coat colors. The MC1R gene sets red (chestnut) or black (bay, black), while Agouti steers black to points. A 2025 study found 30% of Saddlebreds carry the Cream gene, sparking palominos (Ludwig et al., 2025). Dilution genes like Dun, Champagne, and Silver add stripes or shimmer, while pattern genes (Tobiano, Leopard Complex) splash spots or patches. Rare modifiers like mushroom (Shetlands) or rabicano (Thoroughbreds) add flair. Curious about speed genetics too? Check our Thoroughbred Genetics guide, backed by UC Davis VGL. Genetic testing offers breeders insights into traits like speed and stamina. Horse colors shift over time. Gray horses lighten, turning dark foals snowy by age 10, common in Lipizzaners. Foals often sport fuzzy, lighter coats—chestnut babies may look pale. Sun bleaching fades black or bay to reddish-brown, especially in summer. These changes can trick identification, so recheck as horses age. While most horse colors are simply beautiful, a few are linked to specific health risks. Here's what to know: Always consult a veterinarian or genetics lab before breeding for or managing these colors. Now that you've explored horse colors, download our chart to keep these shades at your fingertips. Frame overo foal. Certain horse breeds have specific color restrictions for registration, often reflecting the breed's historical development and desired characteristics. Here's a quick reference table: BreedAllowed ColorsDisallowed ColorsFriesiansBlack onlyChestnut, bayThoroughbredsBay, black, chestnutAppaloosa, pintoArabiansBay, chestnut, black, gray, roanDun, champagne (purebreds)*PaintsPinto patternsSolid colors (no white)AppaloosasSpotted patternsSolid colors (no spots)*Note: Half-Arabians may exhibit champagne if crossed with breeds carrying the gene. A stunning jet-black Thoroughbred racehorse with a glossy coat. Want a quick way to spot horse coat colors? Download our printable Horse Color Chart, packed with color swatches, genetic codes, and breed examples like bay Thoroughbreds and spotted Appaloosas. Preview it below to see shades from chestnut to champagne. Printable Horse Color Genetics Chart: 15 Common Coat Colors with Swatches & Codes horse_color_chart(7)Download Now that you've seen the chart, let's learn how to identify these colors on your horse in the next section. Spotting a horse's color can be a puzzle! Here's how to crack it: Check the Base: Is the body reddish (chestnut), reddish with black legs (bay), or solid black? Dark bay vs. black is tricky—look for reddish hairs at the muzzle or flanks on bays. Spot Dilutions: Golden coats (palomino, buckskin) or creamy shades (cremello) mean a dilution gene is at play. Find Patterns: White patches (pinto), spots (appaloosa), or mixed white hairs (roan) add flair. Note Extras: Sooty shading darkens toplines, flaxen lightens manes, or pangaré pales bellies. Consider Age: Foals may be fuzzy, and older horses gray out. Try our interactive tool: Select "golden body, white mane" to see palomino, or "spotted rump" for appaloosa. It's mobile-friendly and fun! Compare photos below to spot a sooty chestnut vs. a bay. Curious about horse colors, genetics, or identifying tricky patterns? Explore our most frequently asked questions below for quick answers and expert insights. Yes, gray horses lighten as they age, but most other colors remain stable. Coat colors result from a combination of base colors and modifier genes. Yes, absolutely! This is because horses can carry recessive genes that are not visually expressed in their own coat color but can be passed on to their offspring. When two horses carrying the same recessive gene breed, there's a chance the foal will inherit two copies of that gene, resulting in a different color. Brindle and dominant white, followed by mushroom and pearl, are super rare. Base genes set red or black; dilution and spotting genes add gold or patches. Think you've mastered horse coat colors?Test your knowledge with this quick quiz! From base shades to rare patterns, see how much you remember—and learn something new along the way. Dun Quarter Horse foal with a distinctive dorsal stripe, a hallmark of the dun gene. Horse coat colors are more than just beautiful—they tell a story of genetics, history, and personality. Whether you're identifying your foal's shade or breeding for color, understanding coat patterns makes all the difference. Download our free Horse Color Chart, try the interactive quiz, and tell us in the comments: What's the most unique coat color you've seen—or what color is your own horse? Keep exploring with our Palomino Horse Guide or dive into Thoroughbred Genetics to see how color connects to performance and pedigree. UC Davis Veterinary Genetics Laboratory – Horse Coat Color TestsThe gold standard for equine color genetics, with explanations of color genes and links to DNA testing services. American Paint Horse Association (APHA) – Color & Pattern GuideDetailed descriptions and photo galleries of Paint and pinto patterns, plus registration requirements. The Horse – Understanding Equine Coat ColorsA concise overview of the science behind horse colors, including health considerations and genetic basics. International Museum of the Horse – Horse Colors & MarkingsA visual and historical resource on coat colors, patterns, and their significance across breeds and cultures. Thoroughbred Breeders' Association – Genetics & Color DiversityInsights into how color genetics impact breed diversity and health, with a focus on Thoroughbreds. AQHA (American Quarter Horse Association) – Color & Markings ChartOfficial guide to Quarter Horse colors, including registration rules and color genetics. HorseRacingSense.com – Palomino Horse GuideIn-depth guide to palomino genetics, care, and breed eligibility, ideal for those interested in dilutions. HorseRacingSense.com – Thoroughbred GeneticsExplores how genetics influence both color and performance in Thoroughbred horses. HorseRacingSense.com – Buckskin Horse GuideEverything you need to know about buckskin horses, from genetics to breed standards. HorseRacingSense.com – Appaloosa Horse GuideA deep dive into Appaloosa patterns, genetic testing, and history. Downloadable Horse Color Chart (PDF)A printable chart featuring 15 common coat colors, genetic codes, and breed examples—perfect for quick reference. Equine Genetic Testing Labs: UC Davis VGL Animal Genetics, Inc. Recommended Reading: Tip: For the most accurate color identification and breeding predictions, consult with your veterinarian or a genetics lab before making decisions. About the Author: Miles Henry Lifelong Horseman | Racehorse Owner | Published Author Miles Henry brings over 25 years of hands-on experience training and owning Thoroughbred racehorses. Raised with Quarter Horses and Appaloosas, he's spent a lifetime learning from horses—on the track, in the barn, and in the field. Today, he runs a small but successful racing stable in Louisiana and shares real-world insights on HorseRacingSense.com, helping horse owners, fans, and bettors navigate the sport with confidence. Books: View Miles's books on Amazon » Podcast Guest: Animal Tales Ep. 32 | YouTube Interview Newsletter: Sign up for racing tips and horse care advice » Follow Miles: Twitter | Facebook | YouTube