

How the **USEF** Can Save Your Struggling Breed

By Lisa Kilian

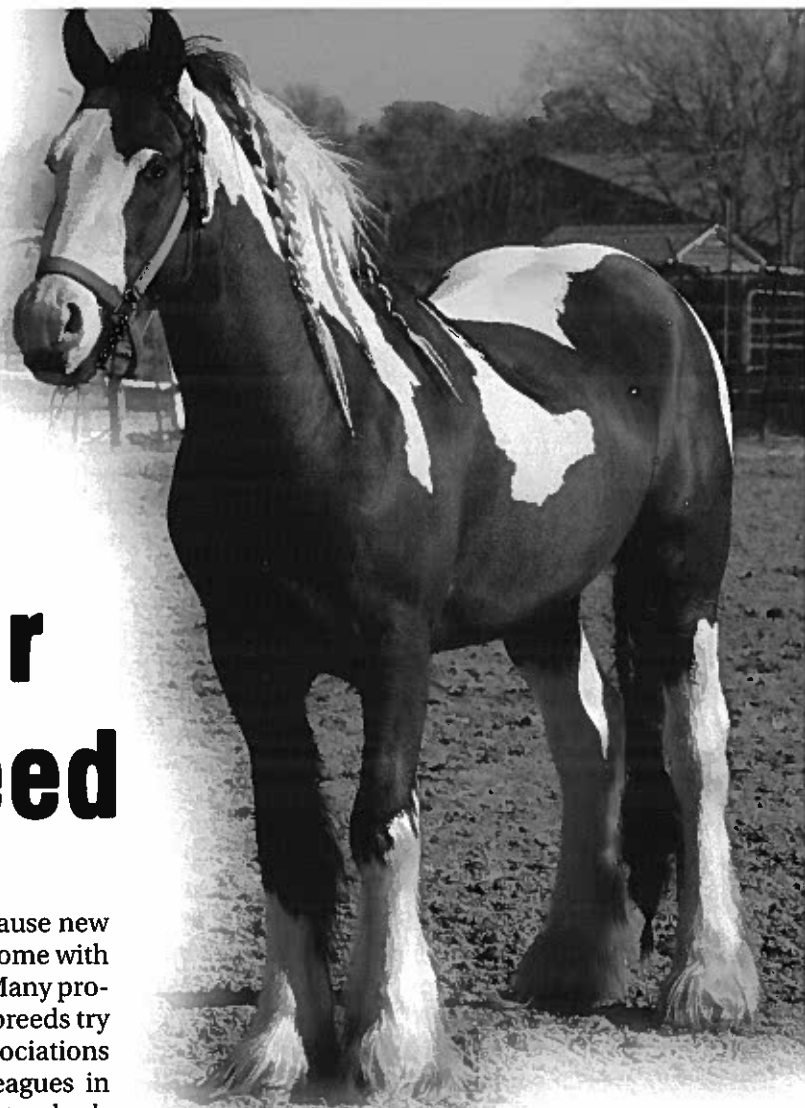
Picture this: You're at a show and your prize stallion is there with you. You've gone to plenty of shows together before, you're confident and you're used to being ribboned. You ride proudly, looking around at the competition and never minding the fact that everyone else's horses look different from yours — shorter, taller, hairier, different colors, different patterns (geez, are some of these even in the same breed?) But hey, judges seem to like you so you must be in the right, right? You stand firmly on this belief until your horse is asked to leave the arena and the horse that looks the most opposite of yours gets the blue ribbon.

Is this scenario too familiar for your liking?

If you're dabbling with a new, relatively unknown breed, chances are you have experienced this kind of confusion first hand. New breeds come with responsibilities and risks; you are responsible for marketing and promoting the breed to get the most for your money and you are at risk that others will not agree with

your ideals because new breeds do not come with set standards. Many promoters of new breeds try forming associations with their colleagues in an attempt to standardize the appearance and performance regulations for horse shows— only to find that other owners of the same breed have already formed their own associations but with different standards. Then it comes down to which association supplied the judges to determine which horses are “the best.”

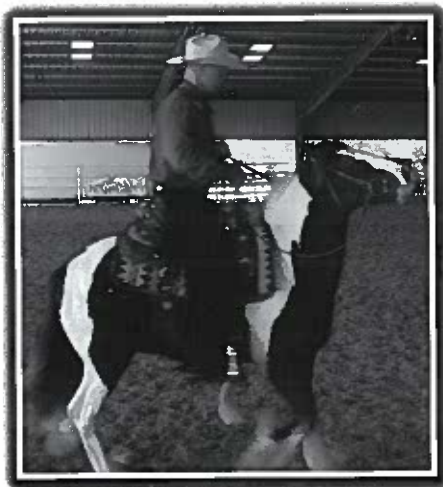
This kind of behavior only discourages ready and willing owners from bringing something new to the table. It undermines the appearance of a new breed at a nationally acclaimed show and leaves a stale taste in the mouth of future buyers. The owner is obviously taking a huge risk buying into a new breed but there is a way to eliminate that risk. Get your breed recognized by the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF).



The Gypsy breed is new to the scene and owners are learning how beneficial the USEF can really be.

For trainers, breeders, performers and owners alike, the USEF is a wonderful thing. They provide objective judges for shows, drug testing and the administration of objective hearings for those accused of abuse or other broken regulations. They ensure you have a fair show, your horses are treated well and your trainers are certain of their show preparation. Best of all, with the stamp of the USEF's approval, the breed becomes more attractive to buyers and is no longer seen as a liability.

Most owners are unaware of what it takes to be sanctioned by the USEF so we'll break it down a bit. If you've gathered enough members



for an association, you can apply to have your association recognized as an affiliate of the USEF. Once you have become an Affiliate Association, you can apply to become the Recognized Affiliate (that is, the association that sets the standards.) Then you sit down with your colleagues and start defining your breed. You hammer out specifics such as height, color patterns and performance regulations.

As you can imagine, most associations run into confusion and disagreements over their rules. Luckily, the USEF supplies all Recognized Affiliate Associations with a liaison who is thoroughly familiar with your breed to provide guidance and arbitration. This liaison sits down with your association and guides you through the rule-making process. They make suggestions for the rules based on their knowledge of the breed and other rulebooks of recognized breeds similar to yours. This way, there is less confusion between owners and trainers and your breed becomes more accessible to newcomers on the lookout for a different type of horse.

Ultimately, the rules chosen are up to your association but once they are written down the USEF will stand behind them and ensure that they are enforced at all USEF-sanctioned shows. (Yes, the shows must be sanctioned by the USEF— i.e., a judge provided by the Federation— in order to receive the USEF's benefits. But if you're not at a USEF-sanctioned show, how can you or your trainer be sure of what the judges are looking for?)

Once you have a Recognized Affiliate, it is imperative to maintain several Affiliate Associations to provide regional support. Once the breed gains the presence associated with the USEF, it is easier for other owners and associations across the nation to join in simply because the USEF makes your breed that much more visible. You may be surprised to find out how many other free-wheeling associations there are out there struggling to find a voice.

Of course, there is cost to joining the USEF; they ask for a \$150 application fee and \$150 annual renewal from each Affiliate Association. If you are applying for the Recognized

Affiliate position, the application fee is \$500 plus a \$150 annual renewal fee. Now I can hear the grumbling already— the USEF sounds like a glorified union, right? Well, it is in a way. And if you're the owner of a strong, stable breed (for example, the Thoroughbreds), then you don't necessarily need the USEF because your breed has already gone through the struggles of becoming established. There are no questions or challenges. Those breeds have a history of tradition backing them up. But new breeds do not. This is where the USEF steps in— to level the playing field and ensure the promotion of the breed. The USEF provides owners with protection and assurance. They do the work of marketing your breed for you by taking promo packets to horse shows and conventions across the nation. They've got 90,000 members and 120 other Affiliate Associations just waiting to see what you've brought to the table. They provide you with the stepping stone your breed needs to enter the competitive equine industry and they've been doing it since 1917. For \$150 a year, I'd say that's a pretty sweet deal. Go ahead— join the USEF and put your breed safely and soundly on the map.



The USEF connect trainers and owners to other professionals. A horse masseuse preps Samantha for her journey to the arena.

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