

# Light Horses In Iowa

## Post War Demands

*Cecil F. Rooks\**

FROM the heart of the Cornbelt comes the appearance of an improving horse industry. At one time considered the most important property owned by man, the horse has gone through a stage of decreased popularity and is once again making a bid for proper recognition. According to the 1944 census, Iowa has the greatest number of horses of any one state, that is, 612,000 head. Texas follows up closely in second place with 588,000. Minnesota, third with 539,000; Missouri, fourth with 519,000, and Wisconsin with 451,000 horses stands fifth in rank.

The exact point at which the numbers of horses will reach before leveling off or before making an improvement is unpredictable. There are several important factors upon which the future of the horse industry rests. Some of these factors are: Eastern and Southern demands, export demands, the rise and fall of labor wages and feed prices, and the post-war soil conservation trends.

The Eastern and Southern demands will bear considerable influence as soon as the war permits. With the normal rearrangement of labor and the feed availability reaching an accessible level, interest in horses, both for pleasure and for business, will rise to an important height.

The foreign demands are still unpredictable. Conservative estimates indicate that at least 3,000,000 head of horses have been dispersed of in Europe since the beginning of the war. This would be about four and one-half times as many horses as Iowa has. Should one-fourth or one-half of these

losses be made up from the United States, it would mean a very brisk horse demand.

An important factor that is governing the growth of the horse popularity is the high priced labor. Many prospective owners of horses are restricted because of unavailable cheap labor, which is so necessary to allow the introduction of animals to new owners. Necessary equipment can not be built or bought and the proper care can not be given the animals should they be purchased.

For the most part, feed is beyond the price range of those who would use it for pleasure horses and also those who would use it on horses which they owned as a business. In many cases it can not be had at all at any cost.

As agriculture is gradually being put on a scientific basis and the needs of each localized area are being recognized, post-war soil conservation trends indicate the increased acreage of hay and pasture lands and the reduction of grain and cotton crops. With the normal inhibitive factor of insufficient feed supplies removed, horse population increases in these areas look very probable.

### **Equine Competition**

In Iowa, the horse met his stiffest competition when mechanical power became important on a large scale. This is particularly true in cash grain producing areas. The transition has been much less complete and less noticeable in pasture and livestock producing sections.

Recently the interest in light horses has increased very rapidly all over the state, and especially in the areas where mechanization has been most pronounced. Evi-

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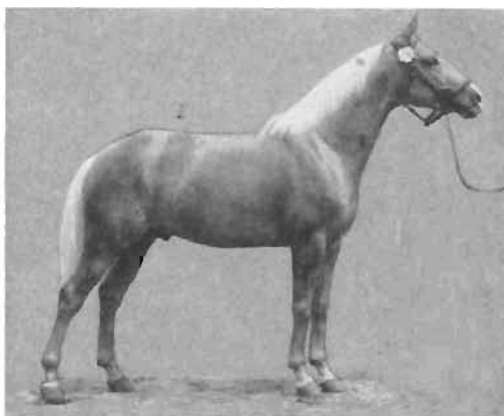
dence of this increase of enthusiasts of horses is shown by comparing the figures supplied by the State Stallion enrollment reports. In 1912, saddle horse stallions, Hackney and Morgans, American Saddle and Thoroughbreds made up .02 per cent of the stallions in Iowa. By 1930 this figure had increased to 2 per cent. In 1943, 13 years later, the enrollment reports showed the figure at 12 per cent, an accreditable percentage.

The last five years shows a large portion of this increase in light horse activity in Iowa. Three types of horses are particularly noticed on this upswing: the stock horse, the pleasure horse, and the gaited or show horse. Immediately paralleling the increase is the improvement in quality of all of these types.

A good example of this progress is the Northwestern Iowa Trail Ride Association which had its beginning in 1939 in the vicinity of Sac City in Sac County. At the start, riders would get together for a short ride, finishing with a parade through town, a picnic dinner and then a horse show in the afternoon. The horses in these first rides were almost any size, ranging from old cow ponies to 1600 pound work horses. Some were ridden bareback with work bridles, others with every other kind of equipment imaginable. In 1940, about 150 horses were present for the trail ride show and several thousand people attended the affair. Together with the enlarged attendance and extra entries went a better quality of horses and improved equipment. The idea spread rapidly and other trail rides and shows were held. County fair associations added horse shows to their program and found them a financial success. Both town and country people had a common interest and crowds gathered beyond most predictions. The true American competitive spirit manifested itself. Horse owners were continually looking for a horse that could outshow the other fellow, either from a color or a show ring standpoint.

The choice of colors soon put emphasis on two particular types, the spotted and Palomino horses. Prices for Palominos soared with the heavy demand and are still prevalent as such.

With the improvement of quality of the show ring horses came the well-bred American Saddle horses to replace the average to poor quality horses. This stepped-up quality boon stimulated the mounting interest in general light horses to even greater heights.



Colonel Sappho PHBA 3564. Grand Champion stock horse of Iowa. Owned by Anton Christensen, Morgan-Palomino Farm, Ames, Iowa.

In 1941, Sac City held two horse shows and the Trail Ride Show, alone, attracted over 350 head of horses. The County Fair that September followed through with show ring classes in which over 100 horses competed. Besides the big trail ride show, which has moved in as one day of the fair, Sac City has had two of the finest gaited horse shows in the midwest during the past two years.

In 1942 Iowa had 25 horse shows; in 1943, 67 shows; in 1944, the total ended up at 151, not considering the several short trail rides without shows as well as the three 100 mile trail rides held at Sioux Rapids, Cedar Rapids and Des Moines.

To the farmer, the light horse has become a hobby as well as a farm income. Many have purchased one or two good registered brood mares as foundation stock and are breeding them to the best stallions. A good example of the breeding is the purchase of one of the top breeding American Saddle stallions in Kentucky by an Iowa breeder. The stallion was nearly 20 years old and cost \$10,000.

The light horse has definitely established itself as one of Iowa's livestock industries.