Mule And Horse Breeds For Survival

The debate about whether to keep horses and mules for survival transportation is about equally divided between those who think motorized vehicles are better and those who believe that horses and mules are necessary in a post-SHTF society. Personally, I tend to believe that they will be valuable assets for work, transportation and trade but I can see the merit of the other side, too.

Should you choose to raise horses and mules for survival, there are a few different breeds that will be good for different purposes.

Travel

As we've discussed in other articles, such as this one, horses will be valuable for transportation. There are three that stand out right off the bat. The American Quarter Horse is known for being easy to train, level-headed and sure footed. They can also sprint and, if trained properly, can have good endurance at the walk and trot. Even at the lope, they can cover several miles in a day without needing to stop much.

Quarter horses are also "easy keepers" which means that they tend to maintain muscle mass and body fat without a lot of food. Quarter horses are good survival horses because they can also carry quite a bit of weight and have the endurance and temperament to make good pack animals.

The only real downside to using Quarter horses is that most of them need to be shod in order to travel over rocky terrain in order to preserve their feet from stone bruises, chips and quarter cracks that will disable them for a significant period of time.

Quarter horses are also extremely versatile and can work on farms cutting cattle. They're the go-to animal for ranch work for a reason – they can stop on a dime, hold a cow while it's being vaccinated or branded and are physically built for this kind of work.

Other breeds, such as Arabians, are great endurance animals but require more feed to keep them going. They're fast and have incredible going power but tend to be flightier and more difficult to handle in spooky or loud situations. They aren't the best choice for survival animals unless you're an extremely skilled horseperson and the horse won't be swapped among less experienced riders. Arabians generally have good feet and may be able to go without shoes.

If you don’t need to escape in a hurry and need a horse that can travel smoothly and comfortably in a ground-eating gait, a Tennessee Walker or a Rocky Mountain gaited horse are good choices. Tennessee Walkers are larger and can carry more weight but Rocky Mountain Gaited Horses can go forever and are easy keepers. Tennessee Walkers can require quite a bit of feed to keep them in riding condition.

Hands down, if you’re looking for a steady horse for survival with speed, endurance and durability, you want an American mustang. These are wild horses that run free, mostly in the American West and into Canada. They’re often rounded up to prevent overpopulation or so that man can use the land for building purposes and sold at auction for very little money.

Be aware that when adopting a wild mustang, you’re going to have to put a lot of work into taming and training them. You can buy foals that are easier to raise and train but foals will require several years before they’re ready to ride. That’s fine as long as you believe you have that much time. Mustangs can practically live on air, have incredible stamina and strong feet that most likely won’t require shoes.

Mules bred from any of these breeds are also great for travel though there’s a reason that there’s a saying, “stubborn as a mule”. They tend to decide to do things in their own time though they’re great animals and sturdy both for riding and for pack animals. Just remember that you can’t breed mules to mules – they’re sterile and can only be created by breeding a male donkey (jack) with a female horse (mare).

Work

Belgian horses are probably the most common work horse used in America and would be great horses for survival if you're looking for a work horse. Be aware that Belgians aren't particularly good riding horses because they have a rough gait but if you need a horse to pull a plow or a heavy wagon, a Belgian is well-suited for the job. That's not to say that they CAN'T be ridden because they can, but they're not the best draft horse suited for it.

Belgians are compact, stocky horses that are typically 16-17 hands tall and they weigh up to a ton. Because they're built rock solid from head to tail, they're up to any heavy lifting or pulling work. Because they're comparatively compact, they're good for getting logs out of tight spots. They're fairly easy keepers, too but will likely require shoes to remain sound.

Clydesdales

Better known as the Budweiser horses, Clydesdales are gentle animals that are well-suited for pulling wagons. They're built much more delicately than a Belgian which makes them better suited for riding as well as working and are extremely trainable. They range in size from 16-18 hands and are agile for their size. Many people even use them for competitive jumping.

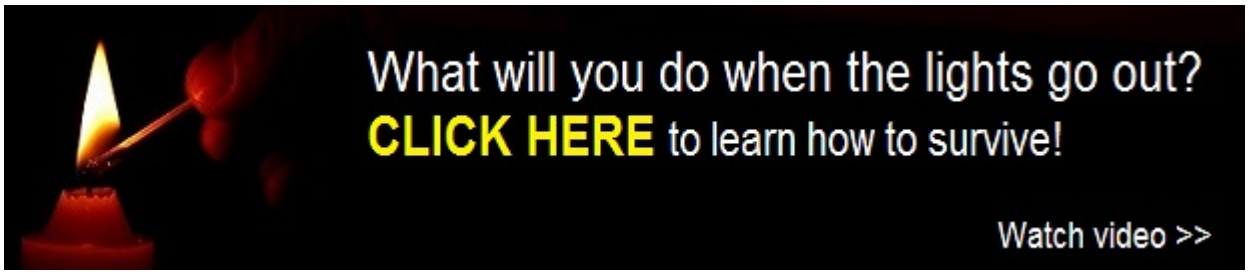
Clydesdales have great endurance but aren't the best horse for pulling a plow. They can definitely work if you need them to and since they're also good riding horses as long as you're not looking for quick speed, I recommend them because they are multi-use.

Percherons

A Percheron is a great horse for survival because it has the strong working power of a Belgian with the gentle nature and versatility of a Clydesdale. They range in size from 15-17 hands in height and can weigh up to 2000 pounds. Despite their size, they're easy keepers and have extremely good feet even without shoes.

Since Percherons are relatively compact and have strong shoulders, they're good work horses in both tight situations such as logging and in pulling situations such as plowing. Percherons are not as smooth to ride as a Clydesdale but they're not as rough as a Belgian. They can cover plenty of ground in a day but they're not going to do it with the speed of any of the riding horses listed above.

There are most certainly other breeds out there that many may think are supreme to the ones that I've listed here. I have personal experience with each of the animals that I've discussed above but if you have any other suggestions, we'd love to hear them, along with the logic, in the comments section below.



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