

# **THE BULGARIAN PRIMITIVE HORSE IN THE AREA OF STARA PLANINA MOUNTAIN**

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Horse-breeding in Bulgaria has centuries-old history, closely related to the historical development of the country. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were local horse groups in Bulgaria. Short in size and with ignoble exterior /Petrov, Al., 1929, 1939; Petrov St., 1937, Birchev, 1896/. The changes after 1885 – newly formed Bulgarian army and agriculture called for import of horses from various breeds and creating large farms for rearing and breeding them. Selection work with horses has enjoyed special care and interest on part of the state.

Nevertheless, primitive local horses continue to exist in some regions of the country in separate herds, some of them absolutely isolated. According to Petrov, Al., /1941/, typical representatives of that group of horses are the Deliorman, the Rila and the Stara planina and Karakachan horse. Good expert knowledge is not needed to differentiate their breeds.

The present paper aims at determining to which of the above mentioned types belong two herds in the area of the National Park Central Balkan, located between Karlovo and Kazanlak. Observations have been carried out personally by visiting the Alpine pasture grounds at the foot of Triglav peak – 2275 m altitude and Sinanitsa peak – 1600 m altitude.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The herds included in the study are average by number: the first one at the foot of Triglav peak consists of 17 mares and 1 stallion and the second one around Sinanitsa peak – of 14 mares and 1 stallion /photos 1 and 2/. There is a certain number of small foals in each herd but it hard for them to survive due to the availability of predators. The herds are used mainly for breeding purposes, which is a good reason to take them as reproductive. Horses excluded from the herd and reared under completely different conditions are used for work.

The rearing conditions are very harsh, especially in the winter. The all-year round pasture rearing is a rule for hose two herds. With the inset of winter the herds go down to lower pasture grounds where they continue to feed on pasture grass only. The grass in these pastures almost never withers and it is a source of high-caloric food which is evident from the excellent body condition of the horses. The only additional nutrition is to provide them with cooking salt twice or three times a year and horses take it with relish. Salt is spread directly on the grass or over larger stones /photo 3/.

Only own offsprings are left for breeding purposes selected by the owners themselves. The isolated rearing of the horses is a tradition for the Karakachan people and in fact the present owners are namely such people. As a result of the applied inbreeding, which according to Petrov, Al., /1941/

has no negative impact, the horses from those two breeds are equal as a type. The predominant colours are brown and grey. From information provided by the owners the change of stallions from other herds occurs rarely, all the more that herds are in geographic isolation.

Mating of mares, pregnancy and foaling take place mostly on the pasture ground. The newly born foal is able to follow its mother immediately after foaling. In this regard the herd has a specific behaviour which does not allow for the mare and the foal to be at a great distance and the stallion is a very good guard.

Stallions and mares from both herds are low in size /photo 4/, which is due to their shorter limbs. The head has a large forehead and slightly elongated facial part. The neck is medium in length, wide and well connected to the body. The withers are average in height, the back and the loin area are long, wide and slightly jutting. The croup is very well developed and the chest is wide, long, but not very deep. From the exterior this horse type have proportionate body constitution which looks massive due to the larger width and the good muscle structure.

In conclusion, by comparing the horses from the two studied herds with the description provided by Petrov, Al. /1941/, it becomes evident that they belong to the Karakachan horse type. This is also confirmed by the rearing method, which is typical for the Karakachan people. An additional fact is that the owners of the two herds are hereditary Karakachans who will not allow themselves to use stallions from other breeds.

Staying in tune with the changes of the times we should point out that the rearing method has been completely altered – the horses from both herds are on pasture grounds with no sheds all year round. It is quite probable that at present the Karakachan horses had changed their way of usage. In timber industry they are still used as pack animals /photo 5/ but probably in the field they are good draught animals as well.

### **CONSLCUSIONS**

1. The horses from the two studied herds belong to the autochtonic Karakachan horse.
2. The way of rearing and the economic usage have been completely changed. Both herds are reared on highland pastures all the year round and are used mainly as reproductive.

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