

Caspian horses in Canada

A Williamsburg woman's adventure with a breed of tiny, very exotic horses.

In 2005, Tracey Adams, of Williamsburg, was searching for a pony that didn't look like a pony. Little did she know that her taste in horses would start her on a journey into a mysterious realm of the equine world. When asked what led her to discover the rare and exotic Caspian horse, Adams said "I have always liked the pony size, but was not a fan of their heavy build and typically difficult personalities."

And why a desire for such small horses? "I don't have children to ride them; I just like little things. I have a tiny cat, and bantam chickens too. At first, I thought I'd have to settle for Welsh ponies, but after looking on the internet, I stumbled upon the Caspian horse." Having read about them as a child, Adams immediately knew that she had found what she was looking for.

But, the trick was actually finding them. More time was spent on the computer, in an attempt to find a Canadian breeder. After a call to the Caspian Horse Society of the Americas, the answer was simple; there were no Canadian breeders.

At that time, the closest breeder was in Texas. Adams discovered that Caspians had only been imported there in the past ten years. "So, I flew to Houston, where I met the horses, and immediately fell in love with them," said Adams.

So, what is so special about Caspian horses? The Caspian is an ancient breed of small horse, rediscovered in 1965 in the mountains of northern Iran, south of the Caspian Sea. It predates all others, and may be as old as 5,000 years. Long thought to be extinct, it has evolved entirely



Tracey Adams with her Caspian stallion MCCs Mirab.

separately, in near isolation, from all other horse and pony breeds.

Although very small, the Caspian is a horse, not a pony. The proportions and general impression are that of a well-bred, elegant horse in miniature. Standing from ten to thirteen hands high (averaging 44 inches at the top of the back), Caspians excel at driving. Their calm temperament make them ideal for children. In shows, they typically out-run, out-jump and out-manoeuvre ponies.

Since the discovery of about fifty of these tiny horses in 1965, a handful of Caspian lovers have worked diligently to reestablish the breed. Several bloodlines were exported to England in the 1970s, and from there, offspring spread to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and eventually the US.

In the back yard of her country estate, Tracey stands, watching her Caspian stallion, Mirab. She exclaims, in apparent awe, which has not faded over the years, "He is the most exquisite thing I have ever seen on four legs." He spies one of his mares in the next paddock, and prances around, letting out a high-pitched scream. Smiling at his actions, she comments, "I call it the mini whinny."

Currently, the world population is around 1,600. With only about 300 active breeding mares, this endangered breed is listed as critically at risk of extinction.

The faculty at Guelph University in Kemptville have taken a keen interest in these horses. Last winter, Mirab was incorporated into research studies, and also

the Reproduction and Genetics program. He was perfectly safe around students of all competence levels, and easily trained for semen collection, making the study of live samples possible.

The university is keen to have Mirab back in January, along with two mares that are due to foal in March. During his stay at the university, Mirab also made a cameo appearance at their Medieval Festival. He was presented as a birthday "gift" to the king. Adams overheard a student next to her in the audience excitedly say, "That's the Caspian stallion! I want a Caspian!" Adams said, "That is the sort of exposure this breed needs." In the past four years, Adams has bred several foals, and traded her

stock with breeders in Michigan and South Carolina. The current population of Caspians in Ontario is eleven, six of which still belong to Adams. These horses are all well-started in training programs, and excelling in harness and under saddle.

At this point, Adams believes that she has done all that she can, to promote and propagate the breed. "It's time to hand over the reins," she says, explaining that since her divorce, it is too hard to manage so many horses. Due to the rarity of the breed, Adams is hoping to find another caring person to take over the stallion and two or three mares. She also has a two year old gelding for sale, who would be ready to start training in the spring.

In closing, Adams offers some words she originally wrote for a presentation she made at Guelph University, "What luck, for us to have stumbled upon such a perfectly preserved specimen of the equine species. After 1,000 years of obscurity, the Caspian horse has walked out of our imagination and into our hearts. Words and pictures are insufficient to truly portray their exquisite beauty and unusual personalities. When you finally meet a Caspian, if you open your mind, you will feel the same wonder you might, if you were to touch a unicorn."

Feel free to contact Tracey if you would like to meet her Caspian horses. Her web site is www.carouselcc.ca.