

Stable Talk

Just as any sport or hobby has its “insider” jargon, so it is with the horse world. Not only are there **many terms to learn**, but the newcomer to equine circles must also learn to differentiate between words that sound similar, but have totally different meanings. A quick look at the following definitions may help neophytes figure out what’s being discussed.

Young horses of either sex are called **foals**. Males are **colts**; females are **fillies**. An occasionally heard variation is to call male youngsters **horse colts** and female youngsters **filly colts**, but you can hardly go wrong with **foal** for any very young horse that’s still nursing. After foals are weaned, usually at four to six months old, they are known as **weanlings** until their first birthday, when they become **yearlings**. All Thoroughbreds are officially a year old on the first day of January, no matter when they were actually born. Yearlings become **long yearlings** in the fall, and **two-year-olds** the next year. A **stallion** is a mature male horse at the age of four or older; a mare is a mature female horse at the same age. A **gelding** is a castrated male horse of any age.

Stallions are also known as **entire horses** or **uncut horses**. Stallions that have produced offspring may be called **sires**. Sometimes the term **stud** is used to designate a stallion. A **stud farm**, or simply a **stud**, is the place stallions live. It’s most common in Thoroughbred circles for mares to come to the stallion for breeding; sometimes stallions travel to the mare’s home. **Pasture breeding** occurs when a stallion and a mare are left together in a pasture, and breeding occurs without human assistance. A **live cover** involves copulation, while **artificial insemination** involves collection of semen from a stallion and then the introduction of that semen into a mare, often at another location a day or so later. Thoroughbred pregnancies, and those of some other breeds, must result from a live cover if the foal is to be registered. Many other breed associations, including the American Quarter Horse Association, allow artificial insemination. **Pregnancy** lasts about 11 months, but may vary by several weeks in individual mares.

Castrating a male horse, also known as **gelding** or **cutting**, is usually straightforward, but if the horse has an undescended testicle (testicle remains in the abdominal cavity instead of dropping into the scrotum), it is difficult to remove and may be left with the horse. Such horses are known as **ridgelings**, **rigs**, or **cryptorchids**; they’re also said to have been **proud-cut**. These horses often develop stallion characteristics and behavior; they may or may not be capable of impregnating a mare. The condition isn’t limited to geldings, of course, and there are some very successful breeding stallions with one undescended testicle.

A horse, even a gelding, is acting **studdish** if he shows stallion-like characteristics such as aggression, nipping, or herding mares. Likewise a mare is acting **mareish** if she gets nervous, spooky, and hard to handle. Mares **come into heat** or **season** (become sexually receptive) about every 21 days beginning in mid-spring. While the most intense periods of heat occur in the spring, some

mares seem to stay in season practically all the time. The anestrus period (those months when the mare does not come into heat) usually runs from late fall to early spring.

In heat and **hot-blooded** refer to different things. **Hot-blooded** is a general term that refers to Thoroughbreds and Arabian horses; **warm-blooded** breeds are mostly European horses originally bred for light driving work and often seen in dressage circles; and **cold-blooded** horses are the heavier draft breeds. All horses are, of course, actually warm-blooded mammals. The terms designate temperament and physical characteristics, and are rather broad in their application.

I'm **putting my horses in** if I'm bringing them from field to stall; I'm **putting them out** if I'm taking them back to the field. However, while bringing horses in is the same as **putting horses up**, putting them out is not the same as putting them down. **Putting a horse down** is euthanizing it.

A **halter** is made of leather or nylon webbing and is buckled around the horse's head to allow a person to lead or handle the horse. There are field halters, show halter, and grooming halters, each designed a little differently for a particular purpose. A **bridle** is a somewhat similar piece of tack that usually supports a bit with reins to guide and control the horse. At a show, horses may be shown in **halter classes** in which they are not ridden.

Non-ridden classes are also known as **in-hand classes**; the horse may be shown in a halter in some classes and in a bridle for others. A **hand** is also a four-inch unit of measurement. A horse is 15 hands high or tall if he measures 60 inches from the ground to the top of the withers (the high point just in front of the saddle area where the mane ends). If this horse were two inches taller, he would be 15.2 hands high. The number after the decimal designates inches, not tenths. Of course there's no such thing as 15.4; that horse would be 16 hands tall. And finally, a **handy horse** is one that is athletic, responsive, and capable of quick changes of direction while being ridden.

Pony is another term with many meanings. Technically, a **pony** is an equine that never gets taller than 14.2 hands. However, some taller animals are referred to as ponies. For example, a **polo pony** can be any size. Exercising a horse by leading it while riding another is known as **ponying** the unriden horse; the unriden horse is **being ponied**. Also, the full-sized ridden equines used to lead racehorses onto the track are known as **ponies** or **pony horses**.

Speaking of racehorses, **Thoroughbreds** are sometimes noted by the abbreviation **TB**. An **OTTB** is an off-track Thoroughbred, usually one that has begun race training, lacks the speed to win races, and is being retrained for hunting, eventing, or another discipline. A **TBX** is a Thoroughbred cross, an animal having one Thoroughbred parent and one parent of another breed.

Finally, a horse that has a **chip** might be desirable or undesirable. A **bone chip** (fragment of bone or cartilage in a joint) could be a problem, while a **microchip** embedded in the neck as a means of identification would be an asset. You don't want a horse that **chips** or **chips in**, however, because this horse takes an extra short, choppy stride right before a jump instead of leaving the ground smoothly and out of stride to clear the obstacle.

Even those who have been around horses for a long time will not always agree on terms or meanings. In fact, anyone who has been in the horse business for a number of years could find an **addition**, **exception**, or **correction** for any of these general definitions of common stable terms. Listening to horse enthusiasts from different disciplines, and asking questions about anything that's not understood, are the best ways to **become more familiar with the extensive special vocabulary** used by long-time horsemen.



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3910 Delaney Ferry Road
Versailles, KY 40383
Phone: 859-873-1988
Fax: 859-873-3781
Order Department: 888-873-1988
www.ker.com
info@ker.com