



**Marsh Tacky Horse Description**  
By D. Philip Sponenberg

Marsh Tacky Horses are a landrace, and that means that they are a local breed developed for local purposes. Landraces tend to be more variable than more modern breeds, and this can be difficult for people to appreciate as they decide what should be included in the breed. The following table describes a whole range of traits as to most typical and least typical. Breeders should favor horses that are most typical, and should breed away from those that are not typical.

A matrix of characters can be used to effectively evaluate horses for their relative consistency with Spanish type conformation. All horses vary, as do all populations. This matrix scores a variety of conformational traits related to Colonial Spanish Horse type. A score near 1 for each trait is most consistent with an Iberian origin, those with a score near 5 are much less typical.

| most typical  | allowable, but not ideal   | not typical  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>HEAD PROFILE</b>   |  |  |
| either<br>1. concave/flat on forehead and then convex from top of nasal area to top of upper lip (subconvex)<br>2. uniformly slightly convex from poll to muzzle<br>3. straight with some convex "drop off" at nose | 1. moderately dished<br>2. straight with no "drop off" at nose                                 | 1. dished as in Arabian.<br>2. markedly convex.                    |
| <b>HEAD FROM FRONT VIEW</b>   |  |  |
| Wide between eyes (cranial portion) but tapering and "chiseled" in nasal/facial portion. This is a very important indicator, and width between eyes with sculpted taper to fine muzzle is very typical.             | Straight and boxy from level of eyes to muzzle with no change of line or finely sculpted lines | Wide and fleshy throughout head from cranial portion to muzzle.    |
| <b>NOSTRILS</b>   |  |  |
| Small, thin, and crescent-shaped. Flare larger when excited or exerting.  | Small but round instead of crescent-shaped   | Large, round, and open at rest.                                    |
| <b>EARS</b>   |  |  |
| Small to medium length, with distinctive notch or inward point at tips  | Short, wide, and straight with no hook or notch at the tip                                     | Long, straight, with no inward point at tip. Thick, wide, or boxy. |
| <b>EYES</b>   |  |  |
| Vary from large to small (pig eyes). Usually fairly high on head  | Medium-sized, and lower on head.   | Large and bold, low on head.                                       |
| <b>MUZZLE PROFILE</b>   |  |  |
| Refined, usually with the top lip   | Straight and even with upper and   | coarse and thick with lower lip                                    |

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| longer than the bottom lip  | lower lip the same length.   | loose, large, and projecting beyond upper lip.  |
| <b>MUZZLE FRONT VIEW</b>  |  |   |
| Fine taper down face to nostrils, slight outward flare, and then inward delicate curve to small, fine muzzle that is narrower than region between nostrils.                             | Fine but rounded rather than tapering.                                 | Coarse and rounded, or heavy and somewhat square as the Quarter Horses, rather than having the tapering curves of the typical muzzle. |
| <b>NECK</b>   |  |   |
| Wide from side, sometimes ewe-necked, attached low on chest   | Narrow but attached low on chest.                                      | Thin, long, and set high on chest.  |
| <b>HEIGHT</b>   |  |   |
| 13 to 14.2 hands high.  |  | Under 12 or over 15 hands.  |
| <b>WITHERS</b>  |  |   |
| Pronounced and obvious. "sharp"   | Moderately high but thick.   | Low, thick, and meaty.  |
| <b>BACK</b>   |  |   |
| Short, strong.  | Moderately long.   | Long, weak, and plain.  |
| <b>CROUP PROFILE</b>  |  |   |
| angled from top to tail. Usually a 30 degree slope, some are steeper  | Thickly muscled and rounded, but still with an angle instead of flat.  | flat or high  |
| <b>TAIL SET</b>   |  |   |
| Low, tail follows the croup angle so that tail "falls off" the croup.   | Tail somewhat above the line of the croup.                             | High, tail up above the angle of the croup.   |
| <b>SHOULDER</b>   |  |   |
| Should be long, and 45 to 55 degrees  |  | Short, and steeper than 55 degrees  |
| <b>CHEST SIDE VIEW</b>  |  |   |
| Deep, usually accounting for half of height   |  | Shallow, less than half of height   |
| <b>CHEST FRONT VIEW</b>   |  |   |
| Narrow, and "pointed" in an "A" shape. This is strong conformation, not related to weakness or inbreeding.  | Moderately wide but without obvious broadness.                         | Broad, with chest flat across.  |
| <b>CHESTNUTS</b>  |  |   |
| Small, frequently absent on rear, and flat rather than thick  | Round and moderate on front, or obvious on rear.                       | Large and round. Thick chestnuts are especially nontypical.   |
| <b>COLOR</b>  |  |   |
| Any color. Most are black, bay, chestnut, dun, grullo, or roan. White marks are usually small.  | Large white marks are less typical, but to be expected on some horses. | No color is penalized. Rare colors occur, and are included within the breed.  |
| <b>HOOVES</b>   |  |   |
| Balanced for weight and size. Not obviously small nor large and flat.   |  | Either obviously small or large, flat, and shallow.   |
| <b>REAR LIMBS FROM REAR VIEW</b>  |  |   |
| Straight along whole length, or inward to have close hocks and then straight to ground ("close hocks"), or slightly turned out from hocks to ground ("cow hocks") but not extreme. Legs | Moderately heavy muscle.   | Excessive "cow hocks." Heavy, bunched gaskin muscle, tight tendons.   |

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|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| very flexible. Muscle is long and tapering. At trot the hind track often lands past the front track.   |   |  |
| <b>FEATHERING ON LEGS</b>  |   |  |
| Absent to light fetlock feathering, though some have long silky hair above ergot and a “comb” of curled hair up back of cannon. Some horses from mountain areas have more feathering than typical of others, and lose this after moving to other environments. |   | Coarse, abundant feathering as is seen in some draft horse breeds.   |
| <b>REAR</b>  |   |  |
| Contour from top of croup to gaskin has a “break” in line at the point of the butt.  | Moderately heavy muscle.  | Contour from top of croup to gaskin is full and round “apple butt” with no break at the point of the butt. |
| <b>HIP FROM REAR</b>   |   |  |
| Spine higher than hip, resulting in “rafter” hip. Usually no crease from heavy muscling  | Muscle to extent that croup is flat across rather than “rafter” hipped. | Thickly muscled with a distinct crease down the rear.  |
| <b>HIP FROM SIDE</b>   |   |  |
| Long and sloping, well angled, and not heavy.  |   | Short, poorly angled.  |
| <b>MUSCLING</b>  |   |  |
| Long and tapered   | Moderately heavy  | Short and thick “bunchy”   |
| <b>FRONT CANNON BONES</b>  |   |  |
| Cross-section is round. Best to palpate this below the splint bones.   |   | Cross section is flat across the rear of the bone.   |
| <b>GAIT</b>  |   |  |
| Smooth and long strides. Some have a four-beat gait. Ground-covering and comfortable.  | Distinct trot with less smoothness.                                     | Rough, short trot or other gaits.  |
| <b>TEMPERAMENT</b>   |   |  |
| Bold and brave, but also kind and responsive. Safe.  |   | Nervous and prone to panic.  |