My Horse of many colors

These days there seems to be a real edge for the show horse with multiple sets of papers from different associations. We talk to owners, trainers and association representatives about the trend and the perks available for those who take advantage

Text Katie Navarra **Photos** Jeff Kirkbride

It's a no-brainer. When you see a horse with black stockings, black mane and tail and a tawny colored coat, you'd expect them to be registered as a buckskin. At first glance, it's not a surprise that This Iz Why Im Hot (Pandora) is a registered Buckskin, though she is almost considered a grulla.

But, you might be surprised to learn that to date, the mare has earned a combined 16 world championships from the Palomino Horse Breeders (PHBA) and the American Buckskin Registry Association (ABRA).

Wait, this mare has PHBA papers? How is a buckskin eligible for Palomino papers?

Five years ago, PHBA introduced the Palomino Bred registration category, which allows horses with at least one PHBA registered parent to be registered, regardless of the horse's color. And, Pandora's dam is a registered Palomino.

The mare also has recorded multiple wins at the Pinto Horse Association (PtHA) Color Breed Congress. PtHA also offers a solid bred registration category for horses without Pinto markings.

"The more papers a horse has, the more marketable and more valuable it is," said Darrell Bilke, Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer at PtHA, "having multiple sets of papers gives trainers, breeders and exhibitors more avenues to show and market their horse."

Not only does Pandora have PHBA, ABRA and PtHA papers, she's also registered with the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) and the International Buckskin Horse Association (IBHA).

With Pandora, we've competed in shows where I can enter PHBA, AQHA and ABRA classes all in the same weekend.

"Pandora is the poster child for a horse with multiple papers," said Merle Arbo of Kingsville, Missouri, who trains the horse.

Exhibitors and owners alike welcome the increased opportunities to show. "With Pandora, we've competed in shows where I can enter PHBA, AQHA and ABRA classes all in the same weekend," said Krista Rodney, Pandora's owner and exhibitor. "It makes the show a lot busier for me, but I get to show three times as much and earn three times as many points."

North Carolina trainer, Allen Fisher agrees that more than one set of papers is a bonus.

"I'm always able to sell the horses with multiple sets of registrations," he said. "People like the option of being able to show in an APHA show one weekend and an AQHA show the next. Exhibitors also like having the chance to enter NSBA Color classes too."

Registry Changes

Expanding eligibility criteria to include foals that don't exhibit traditional coloring isn't a new concept. The Appaloosa Horse Club (ApHC) and the American Paint Horse Association (APHA) added registration categories for solid bred horses years ago.

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Krista Rodney is pictured on this page with her show partner, This Iz Why Im Hot (Pandora). On the opposite page is Darrell Bilke.

"We were one of the first color breed associations to allow horses without color characteristics to register for performance permits," said Steve Taylor, Chief Executive Officer at ApHC.

Horses that don't qualify for the "regular" ApHC category, but have two registered parents are eligible for the "N" (non-colored) category.

"Even dating back to the 1940s, nearly 25-30 percent of the annual foal crop were solid," he said. "We all strive for color, but the solids have always been a part of our breed and this allows those horses to show."

Likewise, APHA horses without the traditional coloring, but have two Regular Registry parents, are eligible for the solid Paint-Bred registration category. Beginning at the 2016 APHA World Championship Show solid Paint-breds with two Regular Registry parents are invited to compete in non-World Championship classes and take a shot at big cash prizes for the first time.

PtHA too offers a solid bred registration category that allows solid horses with documented color breed registered ancestry within two generations, solid horses registered with an approved outcross color breed and those that have two or more Pinto characteristics, to be registered with the association.

"People want to show and in this day and age these registry categories give them more avenues to do so," Bilke said.

Though these special registration categories have been in place for quite some time at ApHC and APHA, other color breed associations are realizing the benefits of registering horses that meet specific criteria, but don't display traditional coat colors.

In 2011, PHBA introduced the Palomino Bred registration category that allowed non-palomino horses with at least one registered Palomino parent to qualify for registration with PHBA. Inaugural Palomino Bred classes were held that year at the July World Championship event. It took one year for full implementation of the new registration category.

"This registry provides an avenue of recognition and competition for non-palomino offspring," Terri Green, General Manager at PHBA.

To qualify for registration, the offspring must have one or both parents registered with PHBA and one parent from an approved registry.

"Horses with multiple color breed papers are popular," Arbo said, "it's good for exhibitors because they want to go show their horses and it's good for trainers because it fills spots in the trailer."

The most recent expansion is being introduced by ABRA this year. The Buckskin Bred registration category allows offspring of registered buckskin parent to be registered even in if the offspring is not a buckskin, grulla, red dun or dun.

So far, ABRA has registered Paints, Appaloosas and a few sorrels in this new category.

"Our members breed for color. When something happens and they don't get color, the horse could only be registered as a solid bred paint horse or with AQHA," said Jo Long, office manager at ABRA.

Having multiple sets of papers gives trainers, breeders and exhibitors more avenues to show and market their horse.

Classes in the ABRA Buckskin bred category won't be available at sanctioned shows until 2017, but Long has registered nearly two dozen horses in this category thus far and anticipates that to increase steadily.

"When we started rolling the buckskin bred program out people were worried that the non-buckskin colored horses would be showing in the same classes as the traditional buckskins, duns and grullas," Long said, "once they understood there would be separate classes, they got excited about it."

While several color breed associations have broadened eligibility for non-characteristic horses, not all have. The International Buckskin Horse Association (IBHA) is holding the line. Registration is limited to horses that are buckskin, red dun, dun or grulla.

Although IBHA is not making changes to include non-characteristic buckskins, it recently added miniature horses meeting the color criteria.

"Right now we're focused on preserving our colors. But, I never thought we'd have a miniature category and here we are with miniatures so who knows what the future will hold," said Dolores Kurzeja, office manager at IBHA.

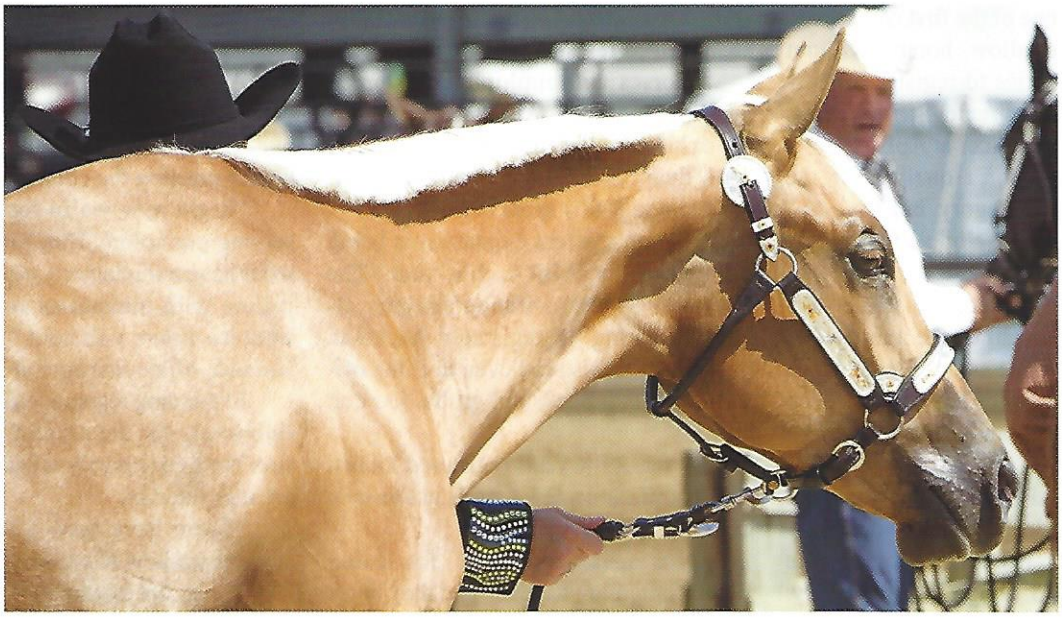
Expanding registration and membership solely for the sake of adding numbers isn't necessarily what associations are interested in.

"There have been a lot of discussions about how to expand the breed and whether or not horses with obvious Appaloosa characteristics, but unknown parentage or of sport horse breeding should be eligible," Taylor said. "We have not taken that step yet and know the owners of registered Appaloosas would not be happy about growing numbers just for the sake of growing numbers."

Reasons to Register

Horse breeders, owners and trainers are registering their horses in these newly created categories for a wide different reasons.

Registration and competition opportunities for non-traditional color horses support breeding programs and good genetics. "Since our solid Appaloosas are able to compete for World Championships and collect show records as well as compete in other color classes, we can continue to use those genetics to further our breed," said David Beck, an Appaloosa breeder based in Lodi, California.



Foals aren't the only horses being registered in newly added categories.

"We've seen several people register their older horses that are full blown buckskins, but were never registered, so that horse's non-buckskin offspring can qualify for our world show," Long said.

"The gentleman who registered the first Buckskin Bred horse did so because he wanted another place to show that was close to home because his elderly mother was unable to travel," Long said.

His horse, a sorrel paint mare with minimal white, was foaled by a buckskin dam. Although this gentleman's mother is unable to travel to watch him compete in the APHA World Championship Show held in Fort Worth, Texas each year, she can make the trip to Tulsa, Oklahoma to see them compete in the ABRA World Championship Show.

Colorful Class

Horses with multiple sets of papers aren't restricted to their respective breed associations. Horse show organizers around the country are responding to the growing exhibitor base interested in showing their horses in color classes.

The Little Futurity, hosted by Larry Little in Raleigh, North Carolina has long offered NSBA Color Classes.

"We knew there were exhibitors with solid paints," said Larry Little, an AQHA and NSBA judge and founder of the event.

Entries in the NSBA Color Classes must meet the criteria set by NSBA, but it offers event organizers like Little help in staying current with changing registry rules.

"Giving away that amount of money, we need background checks to confirm the horses are eligible for the color classes. NSBA helps us verify the horse's background," Little said.

Thus far, color class entries at A Little Futurity hovers around 10.

"Entries are getting stronger because people are realizing they can go in and show their horse that has a color background," Little said.

Across the country, in Berrien Springs, Michigan, Tom Powers has also seen interest in color classes increase to an average of 12 entries.

"The horses and exhibitors are already at our show and they like having an additional chance at winning prize money," Powers said. "We've seen a wide variety of colors in the arena."

Even the largest single breed horse show, the All American Quarter Horse Congress, has tipped its hat in acknowledgement of the growing interest in color classes. The Congress Futurity and Stakes classes is now open to horses registered with AQHA, APHA, ApHC, ABRA, IBHA, PHBA and the Jockey Club.

It may be difficult to distinguish a "color class" from any other class offered because the horses may have color breed papers and not exhibit traditional colorings, but some people believe it can help level the playing field.

"Some people have a prejudice against the color breeds. With the solid bred horses you can go in and show in the color classes at the Congress or other big shows and it's not necessarily obvious the horse is a color breed," Beck said.

A Colorful Future

Seven years ago, PtHA introduced the Color Breed Congress. It has become a popular event among exhibitors with color horses who can compete in classes specifically for their breed as well as across breeds in challenges for cash. Entries have increased by 10 percent each year.

"This year we anticipate 1,500 horses and 4,000-5,000 entries," Bilke said, "exhibitors can come and show in breed specific classes and open classes for a chance to win the 'best of the best' out of all the breeds."

Today's horse industry is smaller than it once was and the number of specialty groups vying for members has increased. The more opportunities horse owners and trainers have to participate in competitive activities with their horses benefits the entire horse community. "We are all part of one big circle and the more we help each other grow, the better it is for everybody involved," Taylor said.

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Color classes have been popular at the Tom Powers Futurity in Michigan.