



CASPIAN

PREHISTORIC – IRAN – RARE

HEIGHT	defined withers, with markedly slender though dense bone in their legs. Extraordinarily tough, oval-shaped hooves.
10–12 h.h.	
APPEARANCE	COLOR
A small, fine head with an Arabian-like look; the occipital bone gives a slightly hooded look. Nostrils are wide but low on the nose and the ears tiny. A very sloped shoulder and very	Bay, chestnut, gray, or black.
	APTITUDE
	Riding, light draft, showing, dressage, jumping

THE TINY, BEAUTIFUL CASPIAN IS TOTALLY UNIQUE among horse breeds, and one of the oldest and most important breeds still in existence. All breeds of light horse are thought to descend from the Caspian and its ancestors, and as such it provides a tangible link between early *Equus* and the modern horse.

These exquisite creatures lived undiscovered in northern Iran for centuries, subsisting among the rocky mountains and dense forests and leading a largely undisturbed life until they were “rediscovered” in 1965 by the American Louise Firouz, who had established a small riding school in Iran. It was on a trip to the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, looking for suitable ponies to use in her school, that she came across three magnificent but tiny horses. Despite their diminutive size, they were decidedly horses and not ponies, exhibiting horse-like conformation and character; today the Caspian is still recognized as a small horse, not a pony. Firouz realized the importance of these animals, which bore a striking resemblance to those seen on the Seal of Darius (c. 500 B.C.E.) and other ancient artifacts, and instigated a five-year study of the horses in their environment. Through dedicated searches and study it was estimated that approximately fifty of these horses were living all along the south coast of the Caspian Sea. Because the area in which they were found was so large, it was also conjectured that they could not be totally purebred, but had retained the strong genetic base of their predecessors.

Extensive study and research has been undertaken into the history of the Caspian, and skeletal examination has

revealed that the horses have certain unique characteristics among modern breeds, and that they also bear a significant resemblance to the postulated Horse Type 4, theorized by leading experts on equine prehistory F. Ebhart, J. G. Speed, E. Skorkowski, and R. d’Andrade. Further, many artifacts, such as the Seal of Darius, which depicts the Persian king in a chariot pulled by two minute but magnificent horses, and artifacts of the Oxus Treasure (fifth to fourth century B.C.E.) testify to the existence of a very small, fine and beautiful breed of horse in use during prehistory. Tracing this link reveals that it is possible that the Caspian and its ancestors were also the ancestors to the Arabian horse and the breeds of fine, desert horses that ranged across Eurasia from prehistory to the present. The frequency with which they are mentioned or appear in pre- and ancient history is not insignificant and attests to the great value placed on them. Despite their small size they were widely used for chariot racing and were as prized for their speed and endurance as they were for their appearance.

Unlike other breeds of horse the Caspian reaches its full adult height very rapidly, often within the first six months of life, and then gradually fills out and matures. They reach sexual maturity at under two years old, and most significantly mares tend not to ovulate after foaling for up to a year, which makes continuous breeding programs difficult. Louise Firouz established a stud for breeding the Caspian in Iran, but in 1976 her herd was attacked by wolves. To ensure the safety and continuance of the breed, which was extremely rare at that stage, some of her herd were flown to a stud in Shropshire, England, where they were successfully settled. Today the Caspian horse is a greatly refined model of its prehistoric ancestor, but retains the essential elements that make it such an extraordinary animal. They are wonderful athletes and make fantastic show ponies, but of more importance is their immense historic significance and their impact on the development of modern light horse breeds.