

# Outlook on Halton Hills

## Royal Winter Fair

### Miniature horses come full circle



**Eager Beavers**

The 1st Acton Beaver colony held a very special ceremony Nov. 1 at the Scout Hall when 15 Beavers, one leader, and one Keewee were invested. Front row, from left, the newly invested Beavers are Bobby McGinn, Brian Ross, Paul Schiller, John Yundt, Kendall Brown, Mark Mallby, Ryan Bowen, and Andrew Martin. Second row, Marc Dagenais, Vincent Soulliers, Jason Doyle, Stephen Dunn, Bryan Boyko, Matthew Wilson, Ryan Gallagher, and Nathan Ellis. Third row, Andre Savard,

Kevin Fell, Robbie McMillan, Matthew Henderson, Eddie Hess, Matthew Morrow, Ryan Turpin, Robbie Vorne, Lucas Green, Tommy Winstone, and Michael Pawlak. In the back row are leaders Dan Green (Bear), Tom Winstone (Malak), Karen Dagenais (Rusty), Joanne Fell (Tic Tac), Doug Collins (ADC for Beavers), Kenny Fell (Keewee), Heather Savard (Reindeer), Leo Savard (Hawkeye). Absent were Blair Ferguson, and Chris Scully.

A horse is a horse... of course... of course. Or is it?

That's an often asked question at the stables of Gloria Austin, a breeder of miniature horses.

"Our stallion is only 28 inches tall. It only weighs 170 pounds," says Ms. Austin, showing her horses at this year's Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

That's small all right, especially when you compare it to a 2,000-pound draught horse, like a Clydesdale or a Belgian.

By definition, a miniature horse has all the characteristics of a standard horse, but yet is no larger than 34 inches, from the end of its mane to the ground.

Miniature horses come in a wide variety of colors - bay, chestnut, dapple, black, Appaloosa - and are known for their good disposition and

being easy to train.

"In all of North America there's no more than about 30,000 miniature horses," said Ms. Austin, adding that in Canada, there are less than 200.

"For a breeder, there's a very low overhead. It's a sizeable investment to start up but upkeep and overhead are very low. They don't each much."

Ms. Austin, who operates a 78-acre horse farm near Rochester, N.Y., has 41 miniatures, as well as a larger stock of quarterhorses, Morgans, Missouri foxtrotters and American saddlehorses.

But she loves her miniatures. "My husband and I are retired and wanted to get into breeding. We started in beef cattle, but soon realized there wasn't much money to be made."

They began to breed horses, but it wasn't until four years ago that Ms. Austin started breeding miniature horses.

The \$7,000 to \$8,000 she collects for each horse she now sells helps convince her she made the right decision.

Ms. Austin sells her horses to other miniature horse dealers, as well as showmen. Some horse owners buy the smaller breed as a companion for their full-sized horse, while some people buy the miniature as a pet.

Miniature horses are first noted in history in the 18th century, used as pets in the courts of European royalty.

The animals are said to have wandered royal palaces much like our modern dogs and cats wander our houses.

Later, the horses became companions to gypsies and were used in theatrical performances.

Their darkest days were in pre-Industrial-Revolution Europe, when the tiny horses were used to pull ore cars in coal mines.

It was that coal mine connection which helped bring the horses to North America. Horses were shipped for use in West Virginia and Tennessee coal mines and continued to be used as working horses until about 1960, says Ms. Austin.

"You might say they've come full circle and are being used for pets again," said Ms. Austin.

The breeder says she can't keep up with the demand for the horses, which are as small as 12 inches tall and weighing 10 to 25 pounds, when born.

She's hoping to introduce the horse on a large scale into Canada.

"So far the response (at the Royal) has been good," said Ms. Austin.

The New York breeder says she attends about 10 exhibitions and about 10 breeders' shows each year.

"I prefer the exhibitions. The horses don't have to be groomed so neatly and I like the chance to talk to people about the horses," she added.

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