

# CLIPPITY CLIPS



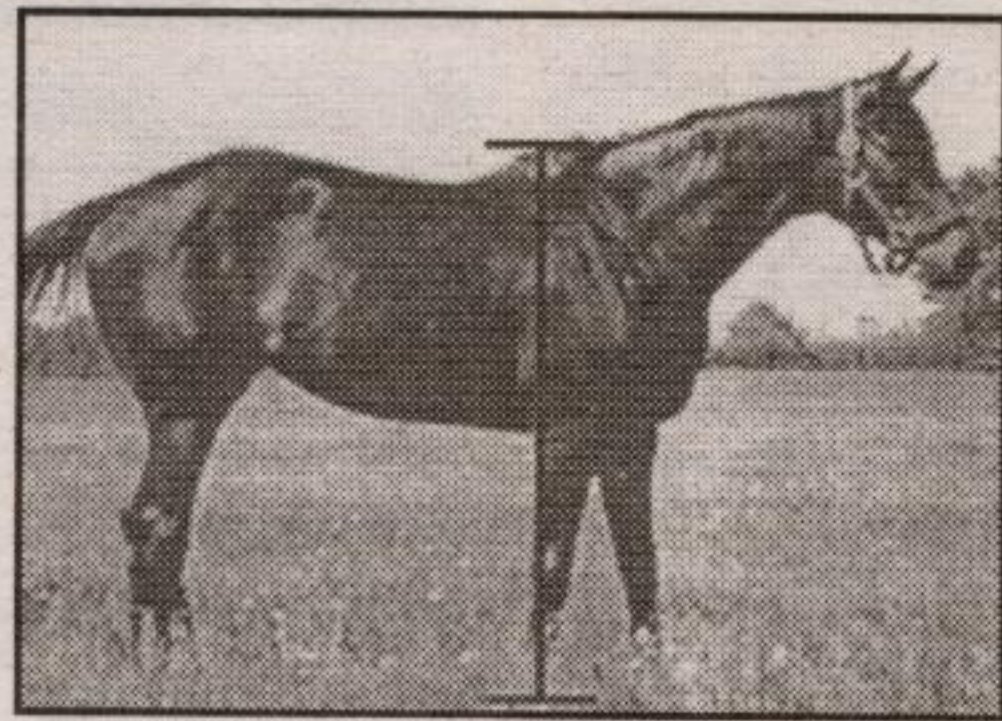
## The hand, the horse and height - what does it mean?

by Greg Unger, The Racing Network, Toronto

When someone asks "How tall is this horse?" the answer usually comes in units known as the "hand."

It is a common unit of measurement now used only for quantifying the height of the horse.

Tracing a tradition backward is a dicey proposition. We know that today a "hand" is four inches, with one inch increments, and the measurement is from level ground to the highest non-variable skeletal structure on the horse - the withers.



Height of a horse is measured from level ground to the highest non-variable skeletal structure on the horse, the withers.

History suggests at one time, perhaps 5,000 years ago, it was as rudimentary as stacking a man's clenched fist one upon another, which tells us it was rather rough and inaccurate. At some point, horse owners, and especially traders, agreed that the "hand" will always represent four inches and will always measure the height from level ground to the withers.

But why a "hand?" In the ancient Mediterranean cultures, the hand unit developed - along with other measures - based upon

references people of the time could relate to, such as body parts (e.g. foot). The problem was, whose foot, or whose hand? There were some inaccuracies.

**Ancient Egypt - 3,000 BC**  
According to the encyclopedic sources, the "hand" measurement was four fingers wide at one point in time, and at others it was four fingers and a thumb wide. The

rules of trade demanded the same measurement everywhere, and the hand was eventually standardized by the Egyptians around 3,000 BC based upon a complex system including the "cubit". Because of the enormous influence of the Egyptian culture, use of this system migrated to other countries and cultures.

### The Cubit

In the Egyptian system, measurement was based on the cubit (sometimes mentioned in reference to the construction of the pyramids or Noah's ark). The Egyptian cubit is generally recognized as having been the most widely accepted standard of

**Withers:** The top of the shoulders, between the neck and the back. The highest point of the withers is used in measuring the horse's height.

The highest point of the a horse is the top of its head (called a poll). But since a horse can move its head up and down, it is impossible to take an accurate measurement from the ground to the top of its head. The height of the horse is therefore measured in a vertical line from the ground to the withers.

linear measurement in the very ancient world.

The cubit was based on the length of the arm from the elbow to the extended fingertips, an arbitrary distinction, which was then standardized by a royal master cubit of black granite. It was kept in a royal vault and all the cubit sticks in use in Egypt were measured at regular intervals.

The royal cubit (524 millimeters, or 20.62 inches) was subdivided in an extraordinarily complicated way. There were 28 subunits, known as digits, likely a fingers breadth, in the royal cubit. Five digits equalled a hand, four digits, a palm.

This was not a planned system. It evolved, growing out of custom and popular usage, unlike planned systems of measurement like the Metric or the International System of Units (ISU) that we are more

## Old Orchard Farm/System Fence 2001 Overall Awards

- Beginner under 10 - Heather Chamberlain
- Beginner 10 and Over - Sarah Gordon
- Low Adult - Kirsten Ball
- Pony - Native Colours (rider Skye McBride)
- Equitation - Skye McBride
- Children's Hunter - Hot Cup of Cocoa (Candice King)
- Hunter - Golden Eye (rider Yvonne van Hoof)
- Intro Jumper - Not So Orphaned Annie (Dylan McPhail)
- Jumper - Its All Good (rider Wes Morrison)

familiar with today.

The standardized "hand" has become as good an increment to use in the determination of a horse's height at the withers as any other. But it is by no means the only means.

Regardless of its origin, the hand has become a tradition of British measurement. In the rest of Europe however, height was - and still is - measured in metres and centimetres. In some places, like Europe and South Africa, there exists the dual situation of measurement in hands and centimetres. At some sales for example, the height (at the withers) of a horse for sale is catalogued as 16.3

hh.170/181+3.

16.3 hh.170/181+3 - explanation 16.3 hh. (hands high) is equivalent to 16x4 inches, plus three inches, equals 67 inches. The height in hands is given solely for the benefit of buyers from English-speaking countries. 170 European buyers would know that the "Stick Measurement" (Stockmass) of that particular horse is 170 centimetres, measured the same way to the withers. 181+3 Now comes the interesting and not well-known part. The informed buyers will also note that the "Tape Measurement" (Bandmass) of that particular horse is 181 centimetres and that it is expected to grow another three centimetres as it matures. (This is called the Gypsy Measurement.)

One can argue which system is better, the hand is accurate to one inch whereas the metric system can be as accurate as the decimal places you include. But in measuring a horse, how much accuracy is required, especially with growing horses?

If measurements within an inch are good enough, and there are 5,000 years of tradition behind the system, just how easy is it going to be to change it?



## Percy W. Merry News

by Kim Pickering

All the Christmas activities at Percy W. Merry, held in December, were a great success.

The Christmas Craft Night and Raffle was very well attended and enjoyed by everyone. The Hot Turkey Dinner for the whole school and guests was delicious. All the food was prepared by the students and their parents/families. Leftovers were taken to Halton Women's Place and Halton Recovery House for Men.

A Christmas Carol sing-along and donations to the Salvation Army completed the winter festivities.

This winter all students at Percy Merry will participate in ice-skating. Each class will be involved in three, one hour sessions. This activity will provide the students with the opportunity to improve their skating skills and enhance their physical education program.

The Percy W. Merry web site has been updated and improved. The goal is to update this web page

on a regular basis and to display students' work. The Percy W. Merry web site is: <http://perps.halton-bc.on.ca>.

Noon hour indoor games have started. The primary and junior students alternate Wednesdays.

The Grade 5/6 class are writing, producing and acting out a comic operetta on Little Red Riding Hood. This is a satire based on the original story. An evening viewing of their work will be planned once their work is polished.

The Grade 5/6 class has also won another skywatcher award from Environment Canada. A presentation will be made to the students in the near future.

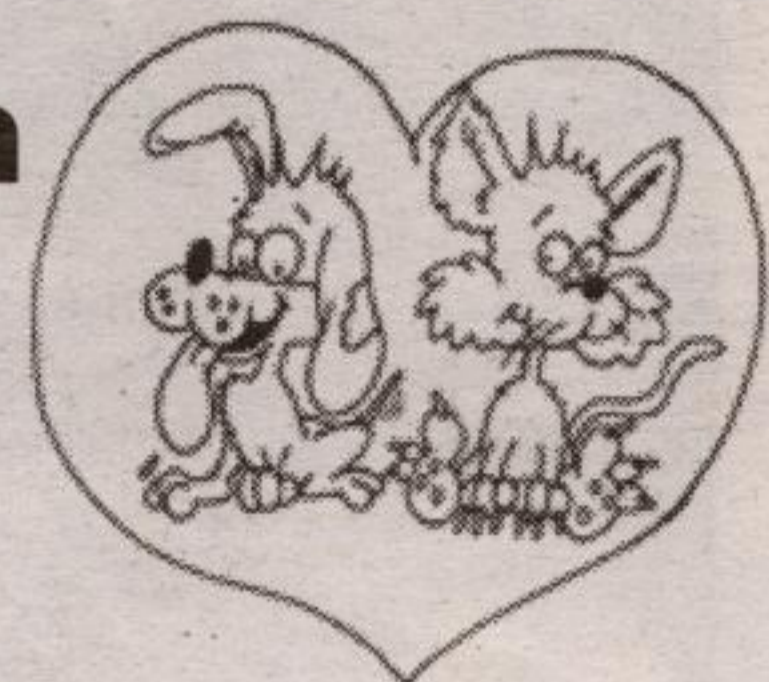
The Junior Kindergarten and Senior Kindergarten students will be visiting Halton Region's Safety Village to review pedestrian rules.

Registration for Junior and Senior Kindergarten is currently taking place at Percy W. Merry.



Ruth Bailey and daughter Lisa, complete a Christmas tree decoration at the Percy Merry Craft Night.

Wishing you a  
a very  
**Happy  
Valentine**



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