



THE WORLD-FAMOUS BUDWEISER CLYDESDALES: A SPECIAL BREED IS BORN

A look into the rich, colorful history of the special Clydesdale breed begins in the early 19th century, along the River Clyde in Lanarkshire, Scotland. The region, located in a valley, or “dale,” was known for its rich soil and abundant crops. The farmers were in great need of strong horses for hauling, plowing, and carting all the necessary farm equipment and workers.

One of the Dukes of Hamilton, a local, wealthy landowner, imported six Great Flemish Horses, a breed that already had been regularly shipped to Scotland to be used as war horses and for farm work. The Duke made his six prize horses available for breeding to local mares and the Clydesdale breed was born. People from outside Lanarkshire began to refer to the big, powerful horses as “the Clydesman’s horse,” a name that eventually became “Clydesdale.”

The early Clydesdales quickly garnered attention as a breed more powerful than any breed available before. The horses were said to be capable of pulling loads heavier than a ton at a walking speed of five miles per hour. It was the breed’s hauling power and confident style that attracted the interest of North Americans. In fact, in the early days of brewing, it was said that a brewer’s success was directly related to how far his draft horses could pull a load in one day.

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Today's Budweiser Clydesdales are even bigger than their Scottish ancestors. To qualify for the world-famous eight-horse hitch, a Budweiser Clydesdale must meet certain size, color, and disposition requirements.

Standing at 18 hands high (about 6 feet) at the shoulder when fully mature, Budweiser Clydesdales weigh approximately 2,000 pounds. They must be geldings, bay in color, have four white legs and a blaze of white on the face, as well as a black mane and tail. A gentle temperament is a very important characteristic, as hitch horses meet millions of people each year.

In two daily meals, a Budweiser Clydesdale hitch horse will consume 20 to 25 quarts of feed, 50 to 60 pounds of hay, and up to 30 gallons of water.

Once a Clydesdale is selected to be among the chosen few to travel with one of the company's traveling eight-horse hitches, he can expect to spend many of his days on the road, performing at hundreds of events each year.

The Clydesdales travel in a style befitting a king. In order to provide rest for each of the eight "first-string" horses, the Clydesdale hitch teams always travel with a total of 10 "gentle giants." The traveling caravan includes three 50-foot tractor-trailers custom-built for the horses with rubber flooring, air suspension, and vent fans to ease the rigors of hours on the road. Two tractor-trailers carry the Clydesdales and a third carries everything else including the iconic beer wagon and a full set of hand-crafted, patent leather, and solid brass harness.

Performance days for a Budweiser Clydesdale are a combination of excitement and perfection. While the horses are groomed daily, special attention is given to their appearance on performance days. The expert groomers who travel with the horses spend approximately five

hours washing and grooming the horses, polishing the harness, braiding red and white ribbons into the manes, and inserting red and white bows into the tails.

Harnessing all eight horses is a process that usually takes 45 minutes. The wheel team, the horses closest to the wagon (and generally the strongest), is harnessed first proceeded by the body, swing, and lead teams. After each Clydesdale is harnessed, they are individually hitched to the red, white and gold 1903 Studebaker-built beer wagon. Finally, after all eight horses are hitched to the wagon, the driver adjusts the lines. Driving the 12 tons of wagon and horses requires strength, experience and stamina. The 40 pounds of lines the driver holds, plus the tension, equals over 75 pounds. During long parades, the driver and the assistant often alternate driving in order to remain fresh and alert.

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