

They Turn Miniature Horses Into Great "Guide Dogs"

Miniature horses make outstanding guide dogs" for blind people and have a number of advantages over canines, says the Guide Horse Foundation, Kittrell, North Carolina.

Founders Don and Janet Burleson say they got the idea while riding rented horses in New York's Central Park. They noticed the horses had become used to auto and pedestrian traffic and could make their way through the park and surrounding urban area with hardly any rider direction. The horses even stopped for red lights and knew it was safe to proceed when the lights turned green.

The Burlesons, who have raised and trained horses for years, reasoned that if full-sized horses could guide riders through difficult situations, mini horses might be able to do the same. With that in mind, they began training a miniature mare named Twinkie to see if the idea would work. "To our delight, Twinkie quickly learned to do everything a guide dog can do," Janet says.

That was three years ago. With help from

horse donors and trainers, the Burlesons' idea is slowly catching on. The first guide horse, a little mare named Cuddles, will be placed with Dan Shaw of Maine in May 2001. Several more horses are being trained. The training regimen takes more than a year.

Guide horses are not for everyone. But they appear to have some advantages over dogs. Since the bond between owner and guide animal is important, longevity may be one of the biggest advantages. A guide dog may have a useful life of 10-15 years but a miniature horse might serve its owner for twice that long. Healthy horses have a life span of 30 to 35 years and some have made it to 50 years of age.

Miniature horses can also carry small packs and pull small carts or even specially fitted wheel chairs.

On the negative side, while horses can be house broken to some extent, they are not as reliable inside as a dog. Trainers strap on a "poop" bag when they go out among people.



Horses have good memories, can be trained easily to lead, and quickly get used to routines. Another benefit is that they have a 350 degree range of vision. One negative, according to the Guide Horse Foundation, is that they're difficult to house train.

As for health, if they're fed and cared for properly, horses need no more veterinary care than dogs. And they don't get fleas.

At 25 in. tall or so, and weighing 50 to 75 lbs., miniature horses are no larger than most guide dogs.

The Burlesons point out that horses have been guiding humans and providing companionship for centuries. Miniature horses were kept as pets for children by some royal families in the 17th century. While horses may be skittish by nature, they note that they have been trained to remain calm, even in battle with cannon going off around them, so normal urban noises should be no problem. Horses have good memories, can be trained easily, and quickly get used to routines. They have a 350-degree range of vision. Some

people say the only thing a horse can't see without turning its head is its own tail.

The Guide Horse Foundation relies on volunteers to donate, train and deliver trained Guide Horses free-of-charge to visually impaired individuals. Right now, they have a waiting list of 20 people who would like a guide horse. If you know of someone who could benefit from a guide horse, or if you would like to donate a horse or help train a horse, contact the foundation.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, The Guide Horse Foundation, 2729 Rocky Ford Road, Kittrell, N.C. 27544 (ph 252 433-4755; E-mail: info@guidhorse.com; Web site: www.guidhorse.com).



Jeff Jurgens uses a propane torch to "spin" glass into works of art. C.F. Marley hired him to create a mini tractor for the editor of FARM SHOW.

Custom Tractor Made Out Of Glass

By C.F. Marley

I've been writing for FARM SHOW for more than 20 years from my home base here in Illinois. I'm always on the lookout for a good story.

So when I first saw Jeff Jurgens at work spinning and blowing glass figurines, I asked if he'd ever crafted a tractor out of glass. He said he hadn't but that he'd be willing to give it a try.

I gave him a model of a John Deere "G" to work from and asked him to add the name of the editor and publisher of FARM SHOW, Mark Newhall, since I intended to give it to him as a personal gift.

Jurgens has an amazing talent to turn tubes of glass into works of art using only a torch. I first saw him at a local celebration and was amazed at the beautiful figurines he could create. He says he learned the art of glass blowing and spinning from an uncle. It turned into a career and he now attends many shows, fairs and exhibitions.

Jurgens told me he was not that familiar with farm equipment but that if I could get him a good model, or photo, he would do his best. I think the tractor he made is remarkable. The body of the tractor is John Deere



Jurgens worked from a toy model of a John Deere G. He's willing to take on almost any project if he can get good photos or a scale model.

green, the steering parts and tire treads are black, and the wheels yellow. He put Mark's name in black and stuck it to the rear wheel.

Jurgens is willing to take on farm projects. All he needs is a model or pictures. It makes a great conversation piece and an unusual gift.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jeff Jurgens, 34 W. Broadway, Witt, Ill. 62094 (ph 217 594-2509).

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