

DONKEY



Donkey & Child

By Frank O'Suillivan

Business

Donkeys have long been associated with Ireland but a new type of Donkey "The Miniature Donkey" is soon set to become a familiar sight. Currently there are about 60 Registered Miniature Donkeys in Ireland and their popularity is steadily growing



Johnny

The miniature donkey stands at a maximum 36" high at the shoulders but the vast majority of them are about 31". The minis are characterised by their sweet loving nature and its enjoyment of human contact that make them so unique. Donkeys are an ideal rural / lifestyle pet and are very companionable with children. Donkeys are also companionable with other livestock such as goat's sheep and horses. Although miniature donkeys do not like dogs, they will adapt to a dog that is yours, but if another dog were to come onto the property your donkey would defend its territory.

Donkeys most willingly accept a child on their backs and small saddles are readily available to purchase. Donkeys are cautious; if they come across a situation that they fear may hurt them or that they are unsure of, they will stop and look everything over before proceeding. The old wives tale of donkeys being

stubborn is actually their sign of intelligence. It is a rarity indeed for a donkey to kick their handler. It is also extremely rare for a donkey to show anger at a human. Another form of enjoyment people get out of their donkeys is driving them and miniature donkeys can be trained to pull carts.

Miniature Donkeys have a long life span and with proper care can live to 35 years or older. A female donkey is called a jennet and they give birth to a single foal after a gestation period of one year but this can vary between 11 and 13 months, a jennet should not be bred before 3 years of age. Male foals are called jacks and one can serve several jennets; the majority of jacks are gelded before they reach 21 days. Geldings by nature are very docile and make great pets.

The Miniature Donkey is a distinct breed originating in the Mediterranean islands of Sicily and Sardinia; they were originally bred to turn grindstones in flour mills carry water from wells and to negotiate steep island slopes pulling carts laden with fire wood.

In 1929 a wealthy New York stockbroker by the name of Robert Greene heard about these animals on a trip to Europe. He subsequently imported six jennys and a jack to his stud farm in New Jersey. Mr Green is famously quoted as saying "Miniature Donkeys possess the affectionate nature of a Newfoundland, the resignation of a cow, the durability of a mule, the courage of a tiger and the intellectual capability only slightly inferior to man The first miniature donkey was born in the USA in 1929 on Columbus day and was called Christopher Columbus. Further importations were made by August Busch the founder of Anheuser Busch and a herd of Miniature Donkeys are still kept there along with the world famous Budweiser Clydesdales.



Christopher Columbus; The first miniature donkey born in the U.S. from the 1929 original imports

Sadly they, soon after, became extinct in their native land. In 1980 Lord and Lady Fisher from the South of England made two importations from the USA; miniature donkeys were once more back in Europe.

There are now about 50,000 miniatures in North America; showing is very popular there and there are large classes at the State Fairs. I was fortunate to be able to attend the World Miniature Donkey Show in 2005. This was held during the Calgary Stampede, a very popular outdoor event held in Calgary each year, a showcase for Canadian agriculture. It was interesting to meet people from as far away as southern Texas who drove to Calgary to show their donkeys.

The most common colour for the miniature donkey is grey dun with a black "cross" running over their shoulder and down their back. Their underbelly and noses are usually white, although dark noses and points do occur. Donkeys do come in other colours such as spotted, brown, black, red, or the very rare blue eyed ivory.

Miniature Donkeys are registered and have pedigrees dating back to the original donkeys that were brought into America in 1929. It is compulsory for your miniature to have a passport and a microchip for identification and security purposes.

Miniature donkeys are easy keepers and require the same basic care as their larger cousin. They are very hardy animals and require very little special feeding and cost very little to maintain. During the summer months a donkey's nutritional requirements can be met on a pasture. Donkeys can graze on coarser pastures than horses, and lush pasture is not recommended as donkeys have low energy requirements and can be prone to obesity and foundering. They love nothing better to get stuck into than a ditch of briars and furze. Donkeys are very adaptable to their environment however and will adjust to either more or less space. Ideally a pair of donkeys would need about 1 acre. The main consideration that needs to be taken is in regards to feed, if there isn't enough pasture for grazing you will have to supplement their feed. Growing young stock, pregnant and milking Jennies will benefit from a little hard feed.

Donkeys are herd animals and one donkey is a very lonely donkey. Companionship is most important. Worming is essential for a donkey's good health. This should be done about every 12 weeks. Hooves need trimming at regular intervals; depending on the weather, probably every 3 to 4 months. Donkey's feet were not designed for wet weather, so a hard surface to escape a muddy field is a great help. Give gentle grooming during winter months to remove dried mud and then in the spring when the winter coat starts to shed extra vigorous grooming will be much appreciated. A donkey's coat is not waterproof. A good field shelter positioned out of the wind for the cold, wet winter days and for shade in the summer is a must. Stabling at night is not essential, but can give you peace of mind when you are tucked up in bed.

Miniature donkeys cannot be house pets. They are livestock, while they might like to come and visit you on your front steps, they cannot be housetrained so you would set yourself up for some very large messes!

Donkey owners come from all walks of life. Because donkeys are easy to care for, they make an ideal animal for anyone to own.

I hope you enjoyed this brief introduction to the Miniature Donkey World. If you ever want to find out anymore about these little creatures please send me an email and I will be happy to talk donkey. f.o.s@ireland.com