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The History of The **Miniature Mediterranean Donkey**

Miniature Donkeys originated in the Mediterranean area of Northern Africa in ancient times and more recently from the islands of Sicily and Sardinia off the west coast of Italy. Over time the distinctions between the two island populations blurred and they are now considered one breed properly called Miniature Mediterranean Donkeys. They are simply referred to as Miniature Donkeys in North America.

Purebred Miniature Donkeys in the Mediterranean area are rapidly disappearing, as the small donkeys are being bred with the larger breeds. For this reason, the Donkeys in North America have global genetic value. At the conclusion of DNA studies done by the Department of Veterinary Science, University of Kentucky, it was found that there is a biochemical signature (DNA) for the Miniature Donkey that is distinct from the Standard Donkey.

Today in Sardinia, there are thought to be only a hundred relatively pure Sardinian Donkeys left. Fortunately numbers in the US and Canada are strong and are increasing since the first donkeys arrived in the United States in the early 1900's. Approximately 2,179 animals were registered in 1995 and the current population is estimated between 30,000 and 40,000 in the U.S.

The original Mediterranean Miniature Donkey was not miniaturised, but a proper miniature working animal, stocky, draft type, strong boned and well muscled. They have a sweet sociable disposition. At maturity (3years), it is able to pull a cart or carry a pack as it did in its native Sicily and Sardinia. Their average height is 34" with a maximum of 36" allowed for the breed registration. In the United States Donkey Breeds are determined by Size, not Lineage.

Robert Green, a New York stockbroker with a farm in New Jersey, first imported miniature Donkeys from the Mediterranean to the United States in 1929. He bought seven Sardinian donkeys, sight unseen, while on a trip to Europe. Dogs killed three of the imported Jennies only a few months after their arrival, but the three surviving Jennies, 'Miranda, Palermo and Suzanne', and jack 'Impheus', became the foundation stock for the Green herd. One of the Jennies was pregnant and on Columbus Day 1929, she gave birth to a little jack who was named 'Christopher Columbus', the first miniature donkey born in the USA.

Robert Green particularly enjoyed driving the donkeys to his extensive collection of vehicles, including sleds, chariots, woven baskets and imported Italian antique carts.

He is 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's.*"

In 1935 Green had a herd of 52 donkeys. He only sold a few of his cherished little donkeys when his herd became too large. Among his buyers were Mr. Richard Sagendorph, Henry T. Morgan and

August Busch, Jr. (Whose donkeys one can find in pedigrees with the 'Belleau' prefix, and whose stud still survives today). These families also imported more of the little donkeys as well and were the original developers of today's donkey stock.

In the early 1950's, Daniel & Bea Langfeld bought their first miniature donkey, Pepi, from August Busch, Jr. of St. Louis, MO, as a pet for their daughter who had cerebral palsy. The Langfelds established the Danby Farm in Omaha, Nebraska where they raised show quality Shetland ponies and Miniature donkeys. They were the first professional breeders of miniature donkeys in the United States, eventually having as many as 60 to 225 miniature donkeys in their herd.

Mrs Langfeld's concept of breed perfection was the original stocky, draft type animal with straight legs and head held erectly. She preferred jennies to be 32" or under and grey-dun in colour. Bea Langfeld established the original registry, The Miniature Donkey Registry of the United States in 1958. She turned the registry over to the stewardship of the American Donkey and Mule Society in Denton, Texas in 1987.

Record of Imported 100% AMMD Donkeys registered in New Zealand.

In May 1997, **Jack and Maisie Hurst [Chateau Stud]** imported the first three 100% AMMD donkeys into New Zealand from the USA. They were two in-foal spotted jennies, 'RCP Pocahontis' and 'Boone's Little Special' and one grey jack, 'Boone's Little Gray lad'. These were followed in 1999 by another jack and jenny 'Lil' Half Pint's Lil' Caesar II' and 'Lil' Half Pint's Tinkerbelle's Lil' Darling USA'. In 2001 Jack and Maisie imported a further three donkeys from Texas known affectionately as the TEXAN's, 'Country Music's Spade Cooley' and 'Country Music's Marty Brown' (two brown jacks) and 'Country Music's Billy Jo Spears' (a dark brown jenny).

Peter and Marion van Dijk [Clovercrest Stud] imported two jennies in 2001. From Canada the dark brown /black 'Hiwest Pizzaz' and from Vermont, New York, the sorrel, 'Ass-Pirin Acres Show Baby'. In 2003 Peter and Marion also imported the American bred sorrel jack, 'Riverside Sparky Magnito of Ass-Pirin Acres' from Tasmania. Sparky was imported to Australia in February 1996. He has the distinction of being the first American Miniature Mediterranean Donkey to be imported into Australasia. These three donkeys were followed in 2005 by a further importation of another three donkeys (a jack and two jennies) from Cyder Bay Farm, Mishicot, Wisconsin, 'Cyder's Spartacus, Cyder's Marmalade' and 'Cyder's Red Violet'.

In 2005, **Ged and Kim Gordon [Island Time Stud]** imported two Australian bred 100% AMMD jennies from Tasmania, 'Grawood Magic Touch', (a brown donkey) and 'Grawood Bubby's Sweet Heart', (a grey-dun).