



Genetics and the Behavior of Domestic Animals:

Chapter 7. Behavior Genetics of the Horse (*Equus caballus*)

Mark J. Deesing, Temple Grandin

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Since the late 1990s there has been a substantial increase in horse behavior genetics research. This chapter reviews recent work in molecular genetics, pre-and postnatal effects on behavior, the relationship between hair whorls and temperament, and lateralization in the nervous system. These factors are critical to understanding individual differences. Advancements in molecular genetics have identified genes associated with novelty seeking and gaited horse traits. Foal “imprint” training procedures are reviewed, and a gentle method for training foals is presented. Finding appropriate methods for reducing fearfulness in horses has important practical implications. High hair whorls are associated with reactivity, but differences are less apparent in calm breeds. Behavioral asymmetry is a fundamental feature of animal brains. Left-eye systems control avoidance behavior and right-eye systems control approach behaviors. An understanding of the cognitive and perceptual abilities is necessary to ensure horses receive proper training, handling, management, and care.

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