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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.

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 handcrafted, 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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THE BUDWEISER CLYDESDALES – MARVELS OF MAIN STREET

The scene has become a familiar one throughout the years. No parade is complete without the world-famous Budweiser Clydesdales pulling a red, white, and gold beer wagon down a main street that comes to life with the cheers and applause of onlookers.

It was in 1933, shortly after the signing of the Cullen-Harrison Act effectively ending national Prohibition for beer when the Budweiser Clydesdales became a part of Anheuser-Busch. August A. Busch Jr. and Adolphus Busch III decided to present a hitch of the mighty horses to their father to commemorate the first bottle of post-Prohibition beer brewed in St. Louis.

Mr. Busch told his father that he bought a new car and asked him to step outside and take a look at the new vehicle. But instead of a Model “T,” Mr. Busch’s father gazed upon a Clydesdale hitch pulling a red, white, and gold beer wagon. The Budweiser Clydesdales were formally introduced to the nation on April 7, 1933 in St. Louis, Mo.

Realizing the advertising and promotional potential of a horse-drawn beer wagon, the company sent a second team by rail to New York City, where it picked up a case of Budweiser beer at New Jersey’s Newark Airport. The beer was later presented to Al Smith, former governor of New York and an instrumental force in the repeal of Prohibition. From there, the Clydesdales

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continued on a tour of New England and the Middle Atlantic States. The hitch even delivered a case of beer to President Franklin D. Roosevelt at The White House.

Before truck transportation was introduced in 1940, the horses, wagons, harness, and equipment traveled by train for long hauls and then by local trucks to wherever the horses were stabled. Now, the horses travel in style aboard custom designed tractor-trailers.

The Clydesdales travel to hundreds of appearances each year throughout North America and occasionally overseas to meet millions of cheering crowds and happy faces. Whether they're seen at a parade in Iowa or a rodeo in Texas, the Clydesdales are always a crowd pleaser. The Clydesdale hitches travel thousands of miles each year, and with each mile they cover, so continues the Anheuser-Busch tradition.

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CLYDESDALE FACT SHEET

THE CLYDESDALE BREED

Farmers living in the 19th century along the banks of the River Clyde in Lanarkshire, Scotland, bred the Great Flemish Horse, the forerunner of the Clydesdale. These first draft horses pulled loads of more than 1 ton at a walking speed of five miles per hour. Soon their reputation spread beyond the Scottish borders.

In the mid-1800s, Canadians of Scottish descent brought the first Clydesdales to the United States where the draft horses resumed their existence on farms. Today, the Clydesdales are used primarily for breeding and show.

THE BUDWEISER CLYDESDALES

The Budweiser Clydesdales have been the symbol of Anheuser-Busch for more than 75 years. They were formally introduced on April 7, 1933, to celebrate the repeal of Prohibition for beer. August A. Busch Jr. and Adolphus Busch III presented a hitch of horses to their father to celebrate the day. To their father's delight, the hitch thundered down Pestalozzi Street carrying the first case of post-Prohibition beer from the Anheuser-Busch brewery in St. Louis, Mo.

HITCH REQUIREMENTS

To qualify for one of the traveling hitches, a Budweiser Clydesdale must be a gelding at least four years of age, stand 72 inches at the shoulder when fully mature, weigh between 1,800 and 2,300 pounds, have a bay coat, four white legs, a white blaze, and a black mane and tail.

FEED

Each hitch horse will consume as much as 20 to 25 quarts of whole grains, minerals and vitamins, 50 to 60 pounds of hay, and 30 gallons of water per day.

HITCH LOCATIONS

The Budweiser Clydesdales can be viewed at the Anheuser-Busch breweries in St. Louis, Mo., Merrimack, N.H., and Ft. Collins, Colo. They also may be viewed at Grant's Farm in St. Louis and at Warm Springs Ranch, the 300-plus acre Clydesdale breeding farm located near Boonville, Mo.

CLYDESDALE OPERATIONS

Based in St. Louis, Mo., Clydesdale Operations is responsible for maintaining and scheduling the traveling hitches. Thousands of requests for the “gentle giants” are received each year. Events are typically requested and sponsored in part by the local Anheuser-Busch wholesaler. Each request is evaluated on the type of event, dates, and history of appearances in that particular area.

STABLES

The official home of the Budweiser Clydesdales is an ornate brick and stained-glass stable built in 1885 on the historic 100-acre Anheuser-Busch brewery complex in St. Louis. The building is one of three located on the brewery grounds that are registered as historic landmarks by the federal government.

HANDLERS

Expert groomers travel on the road with the hitch. They are on the road at least 10 months every year. When necessary, one handler provides around-the-clock care for the horses, ensuring their safety and comfort.

TRANSPORT

Ten horses, the famous red, white, and gold beer wagon and other essential equipment are transported in three 50-foot tractor-trailers. Cameras mounted in the trailers are connected to monitors in the cabs that enable the drivers to keep a watchful eye on their precious cargo during transport. The team stops each night at local stables so the “gentle giants” can rest. Air-cushioned suspension and thick rubber flooring in the trailers ease the rigors of traveling.

DRIVERS

Driving the combined 12 tons of wagon and horses requires expert skill and physical strength. The 40 pounds of lines held by the driver plus the tension of the horses pulling creates a weight of over 75 pounds. Hitch drivers endure a lengthy training process before they assume the prestigious role of “Budweiser Clydesdale Hitch Driver.”

HARNESS

Each harness and collar weighs approximately 130 pounds. The harness is handcrafted with solid brass, patent leather, and stitched with pure linen thread. The harness is made to fit any Clydesdale; however, collars come in various sizes and must be individually fitted to the Clydesdale like a finely tailored suit.

NAMES

Duke, Captain, Mark, and Bud are just a few of the names given to the Budweiser Clydesdales. Names are kept short to make it easier for the driver to give commands to the horses during a performance.

HORSESHOES

Clydesdale horseshoes measure more than 20 inches from end-to-end and weigh about 5 pounds which is more than twice as long and five times as heavy as the shoe worn by a light horse. A horse's hoof is made of a nerveless, horn-like substance similar to the human fingernail so being fitted for shoes affects the animal no more than a manicure affects people.

WAGON

Turn-of-the-century beer wagons have been meticulously restored and are kept in excellent repair. The wagons are equipped with two braking systems: a hydraulic pedal device that slows the vehicle for turns and down hill descents, and a hand-brake that locks the rear wheels when the wagon is at a halt.

DALMATIANS

Dalmatians have traveled with the Clydesdale hitch since the 1950s. The Dalmatian breed long has been associated with horses and valued for their speed, endurance, and dependable nature. Dalmatians were known as coach dogs because they ran between the wheels of coaches or carriages and were companions to the horses. Today, the Dalmatians are perched atop the wagon, proudly seated next to the driver.

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