

Heavy Horse Village



Majestic Suffolk Punch horses at the Suffolk Show.

Picture: SAA

Support the Suffolk Punch

Horses are always a popular attraction at the Suffolk Show but the star of this year's show is the majestic Suffolk Punch – a critically endangered species which is in desperate need of your support. The Suffolk Punch is rarer than the Giant Panda and the breed could be extinct by 2027 if numbers continue to decline. This year, the Suffolk Agricultural Association is aiming to raise greater awareness of the Suffolk Punch and help people to fall back in love with this very special breed.

The history of the Suffolk Punch

As Britain's oldest native horse, the Suffolk Punch can be traced back to 1768 with a long history as a strong, hardworking

breed, ploughing fields and pulling heavy carts.

As times have changed in farming and agriculture however, the breed has gone into rapid decline and it is now critically endangered with only 23 foals born last year and a global population of less than 500.

Mark Donsworth, senior steward for the Heavy Horse Village, has a real passion for the Suffolk Punch. He says: "The Suffolk Punch holds a very special place in my heart, to see the power and majesty of these animals is amazing, and while 'gentle giant' is a phrase often used they are a power house that is and are controlled by some amazing horsemen. "I think we have grown complacent in

Suffolk as we see these chestnuts giant at many of the shows and events in East Anglia, but we forget the true fragility of the breed. Unless something drastic is done, the breed could be extinct very soon! That is a truly sobering thought and while I, and the Suffolk Agricultural Association, can play a small part in helping the breed to survive, we will."

What's new to this year's show?

The Suffolk Show is proud to introduce a brand new Heavy Horse Village – the biggest ever area at the show which will be dedicated exclusively to heavy horse breeds like our very own Suffolk Punch. Horse-lovers can learn more about these wonderful creatures, and watch the horses being braided and prepared for their grand entrance to the show rings.

Mark Donsworth adds: "This year we have the first Heavy Horse Village where visitors can get up close and talk to the exhibitors about the preparations they are carrying out. The aim of this area will be to introduce more demonstrations and interaction, which we hope will garner support to protect this very rare breed. "There are now less than 30 four-horse teams left in the country and we are lucky to have so many attend the Suffolk Show for visitors to experience them and learn how they were the backbone of this country, pre-industrialisation. "The heavy horses have become a passion for me and I think it is unforgivable to think that our children and grandchildren may not ever see these animals do what they were bred for."

Preparing a heavy horse for the show

Traditionally a working breed, Mark explains how heavy horses get ready for their grand debut in the ring:

1. Preparation of all the breeds will start months before the show season so that they are in peak condition for show day.
2. Before arriving at the show, the horses will be washed and groomed so that they're looking their best!
3. On the day of the show it is very likely that exhibitors will be up at about 4am for feeding. Shire and Clydesdale horses will need another wash of their 'feathers' (the hair around their hooves)

before drying off with sawdust.

4. After this, the comprehensive grooming begins before the tails and manes are plaited up.
5. For the harness and turnout classes, the brass will have been polished prior to the show. For a full set this can take up to eight hours but will be buffed up ready for the ring. You will see judges with white gloves checking to see whether it is clean behind the face of the brass – in this game, standards are everything down to the very last detail!
6. The hooves will be brushed with oil just prior to them going into the ring – just to give that final little touch.