



# Legendary Horse Stories

By Sandra Adams

**"The Hips of a Gazelle, the Legs of an Ostrich, the Trot of a Wolf, the Spring of a Young Fox, the Wings of an Eagle, and the Head of a Man"**

Throughout the ages, amazing collections of myths about horses have had an honoured place in human history. There has been a mystique surrounding them in cultures around the globe. The lore of horses has always held a magical sway over the human imagination; no other creature has inspired the same reverence or cross-cultural fascination. Legends say:

Queen Nefertiti, renowned for the gorgeous portrait sculpture with elegant neck and classic features, the wife of the Pharaoh Akhenaton, was accorded the high status of driving her team of Egyptian horses in her own chariot during ceremonial parades. She drove her chariot, drawn by a team of chestnut horses, whip in hand, and without the usual driver.



Poseidon, the Greek God of horses, often adopted the shape of a steed. It is not certain that he was in this form when he wooed Medusa. Poseidon sometimes granted the shape-shifting power to others. One of the most notorious love affairs of Poseidon involves his sister, Demeter. Poseidon pursued Demeter and to avoid him she turned herself into a mare. In his lust for her, Poseidon transformed himself into a stallion and captured her. Their procreation resulted in a horse, Arion.

Pegasus is a mighty winged horse according to Greek myth. He was fathered by Poseidon (The Greek God of horses) and Medusa (A monstrous female character whose gaze could turn people into stone). When Medusa's head was cut off in the sea by a Greek hero Peruses, Pegasus the horse sprang forth from her drops of blood. The horse master



Bellerophon tamed Pegasus with a golden bridle provided by the goddess Athena. Together horse and rider slew the fire-breathing monster Chimera. (Legends vary, but some say Pegasus and Bellerophon performed other heroic deeds together.) Finally, Bellerophon tried to fly to heaven to join the gods, but Pegasus threw him off and the two were separated forever, with Pegasus living on as a constellation of stars. The Winged Horse, in astronomy is an autumnal constellation. Pegasus became the thundering horse of Zeus which is why he appears among the stars.

Epona was the goddess of horses, donkeys, and mules in Roman and Gallo-Roman mythology. Unusually for a Celtic divinity, most of whom were associated with specific localities, the worship of Epona was widespread between the first and third centuries CE.

Lady Godiva was an Anglo-Saxon noblewoman who, according to legend,



rode naked through the streets of Coventry in England in order to gain a remission of the oppressive toll imposed by her husband on his tenants. Only one man, called Tom, was unable to resist the temptation to peep at the Countess (hence the term 'Peeping Tom'). He unbarred his window, but before he could satisfy his gaze he was struck blind. Her ordeal completed, Godiva returned to her husband Leofric, the 'grim' Earl of Mercer

and Lord of Coventry who fulfilled his promise to abolish heavy taxes. He also freed the town from all tolls save those horses.

Rhiannon was originally the Welsh goddess of horses. Rhiannon is also known as Rigatona or Great Queen, the Celtic and Roman goddess Epona and later became Vivienne, the Lady of the Lake in Arthurian myth. Rhiannon's symbol is the white horse, which she rode when she met Pwyll and was the role she had to play in punishment. It is also told that Rhiannon was accompanied by three birds that could sing the living into death and the dead back to life. As the horse goddess, she also symbolises the characteristics associated with horses, including vitality, independence, and intuitive understanding. From Roman times, Rhiannon is depicted in carvings sitting on a horse sidesaddle or lying on a horse. The appeal of the goddess is reflected in the fact that the Romans adopted Epona as their horse goddess, and she is the only Celtic goddess to have been worshipped in Rome.

Elf horses are elven forest steeds that a rare animals, closely related to the horse. Typically only four feet high at the shoulder, these animals have silvery-white coats, silver manes and slim bodies. They travel very swiftly and silently through the forest. They are very intelligent and can be trained to respond to a dozen spoken or gestural commands. They can easily gallop across the most treacherous footing, be it a fallen tree or the stones in a river. Because of their slim bodies and smaller stature, they can fit through small spaces where a regular horse cannot go. Elven horses are always found living with elves in elven forest communities. The animal's natural habitat is the deep forest. They are almost never encountered outside of deep forests or elven communities. Generally speaking, elven steeds look, act and interact with their environment like normal horses. **HT**

