

## Mustangs feel sting of rejection

Demand to adopt the horses declining

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*THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH*



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The mustangs defiantly turned their tails toward the crowd

**Prospective bidders, as well as people who just admire wild horses and burros, look over the animals up for adoption at the state fairgrounds. The auction at Cooper Arena continues today.**

of people who were supposed to be saving them.

Their jet-black eyes fixated on the back of their shared 570-square-foot pens. Their hooves kicked up dust from the floors.

The auctioneer called out the starting bid: "\$125? \$125? "

The crowd was silent.

"I can't believe this," Joseph Shivak, a horse owner from Wellington in Lorain County, whispered to his wife. "Nobody."

Of the 66 horses up for auction at the state fairgrounds yesterday, 38 received new homes.

That was better than expected, but it continued the trend of declining numbers of bidders.

The crowd favorite, a creamcolored pinto colt, went for \$325.

Rounded up by the federal government to alleviate overpopulation in the Western states, the mustangs are put up for adoption across the country to save them from starvation, slaughter and hunters.

More than 200,000 horses have been adopted through the program, run by the federal Bureau of Land Management. But the demand for horses has declined sharply since the program started in 1973.

"There was a point where people were waiting in line to take horses home," said Dave Berg, a wild horse and burro specialist for the bureau. "Times have changed."

Shivak and his wife drove two hours to the auction yesterday. But like many in the crowd, they had no intention of adopting a horse.

"Our barn is full, but I like coming down to see them," Marlene Shivak said.

It's becoming a critical problem for the government.

Horses that are not adopted, which amounts to about 20 percent of the 6,000 made available each year, are sent to holding facilities in Oklahoma, Kansas and other states. But the tens of thousands of acres of government-leased land are nearing capacity, said Randy Anderson, the lead wild horse and burro specialist for the bureau's Eastern region office.

Federal law prohibits giving the horses away for slaughter, so the government must find either more land or more ways to adopt out the horses, Anderson said.

The mustangs often are adopted for pleasure, he said. Some become show animals.

Six of the 10 burros, often used to chase predatory animals from farms or to carry loads, were adopted yesterday.

Grove City resident Karen Sayre adopted a dark-brown colt from Nevada for her 8-year-old grandson's 4-H horse shows. It will join the four domesticated horses she owns.

"Mustangs are extremely smart, and they domesticate really fast," she said. "They're a part of

America."

That's what drives Cindi Mendenhall. She's considered adopting a mustang for more than 10 years as a nod to her American Indian ancestry.

"It's a part of our heritage," she said. "I'm interested in saving them."

But she left empty-handed again yesterday.

"It just wasn't a good time," she said, her 7-year-old and 22-month-old daughters in hand.

"We've had babies."

Bureau officials said the mustangs are not for first-time horse owners. Only someone who is experienced or can hire a professional trainer should buy the animals, they said.

The horses that were not adopted yesterday can be adopted for \$125 from 8 to 11 a.m. today at the state fairgrounds' Cooper Arena. A buyer must meet certain guidelines, such as having access to adequate shelter and transportation for the horse, and sign an agreement prohibiting its sale or slaughter.

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