

It's taboo in America, but horsemeat (on sale in Paris) is low in fat and cholesterol.



ENTRECOTE DE CHEVAL
Translation
HORSE MEAT



WHOA!

Horse lovers rally to stop rustlers and ranchers from turning their ponies into food

Willie Nelson's love affair with horses stems from a boyhood in Abbott, Texas, where he idolized Roy Rogers and his famous Golden Palomino, Trigger. Nelson has recorded songs about horses, and today keeps 12 on his 600-acre ranch in Spicewood, Texas. So it's little surprise he can't imagine eating one. "I love horses," says Nelson, 73. "To me they're pets, and you don't eat your pet."

In a country where Mr. Ed and Seabiscuit are household names, Nelson's sentiment is widely shared. He is part of a growing number of Americans protesting the slaughter of horses that, they say, are crammed into trucks built for cows and sheep while on their way to the butcher's block and sometimes, against regulations, remain conscious as they're killed. Many are stolen. Some 40,000 horses go missing each year, and the rustlers who nab them earn an average of \$400 for a horse. (An average steer sells for \$1,170.) The meat is then sent to countries like Belgium, France and Japan, where it's sold for chops, burgers and even horsemeat tartare. (In the Netherlands smoked

horsemeat, known as *paardenrookvlees*, is a popular breakfast treat.) "Horses are part of our cowboy tradition and pioneer spirit," says food historian Jeanne Freeland-Graves. And yet the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which

regulates the industry, says almost 800,000 horses—nearly all of them healthy—have been slaughtered in the last decade.

The crusade to keep Silver off dinner plates received a boost Sept. 7, when the House of Representatives approved the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act (AHSPA), which would ban transporting and selling horses for human consumption. The bill now goes to the Senate. "The House today took us one giant step closer to halting the barbaric and needless slaughter of American horses for foreign consumers," said Wayne Pacelle, CEO of the Humane Society of the United States.

AHSPA opponents, which include the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Equine Practitioners, say slaughtering horses makes economic and environmental sense. They contend it prevents thousands of unwanted animals from being simply abandoned by their owners. They also say tales of inhumane slaughterhouses and cramped compartments are exaggerated. In fact, the USDA reports that

"I don't think slaughtering horses so some rich guy can eat a Palomino steak is a good idea," says Nelson (in 2004).



FROM TOP: EISEN/REX USA; FARMING ASSOCIATION; COOPER/REX USA; ANDREW POSENER/REX USA; WELLS/DAILY RECORD/AM

violations for illegal conditions have decreased dramatically the last four years, after the agency informed the shippers about offenses and sent out more warning letters.

The trade is profitable; last year horsemeat exports brought in \$61 million. Helmut Blume, a veterinarian who was a USDA inspector for 37 years, sold for \$300 each two of his own horses, which were suffering from an incurable foot disease, to buyers he knew were sending them to be butchered. "I felt I at least got some of my money back," says Blume, who currently has six horses on his 12-acre Salem, Ore., farm. "[Horse owning] is a business. You want to make a profit."

But the business has left a trail of broken hearts. On Sky Dutcher's 13th birthday in 2004, she realized her beloved Arabian-Morgan mix, Cimmarron, had been stolen from the pasture of her Roscoe, N.Y., home. "I loved him," says Sky wistfully. Within two days police caught the thief: a relative who had sold Cimmarron for \$342 to an auction house, which sent him to a slaughterhouse. The man paid restitution but the loss still angers Sky's father, Dale, 46. "Someone had proven to me that I couldn't protect my daughter from this type of pain," he says.

Texas state representative Charlie Howard understands that pain.



Anti-horse-slaughter advocates rally Sept. 5 in D.C. Below, a butcher shop in Paris.

By The Numbers: The Horse Trade

94,037 Number of horses slaughtered in the U.S. last year

9.2 million U.S. horse population

\$400 The average price a slaughterhouse pays for a horse

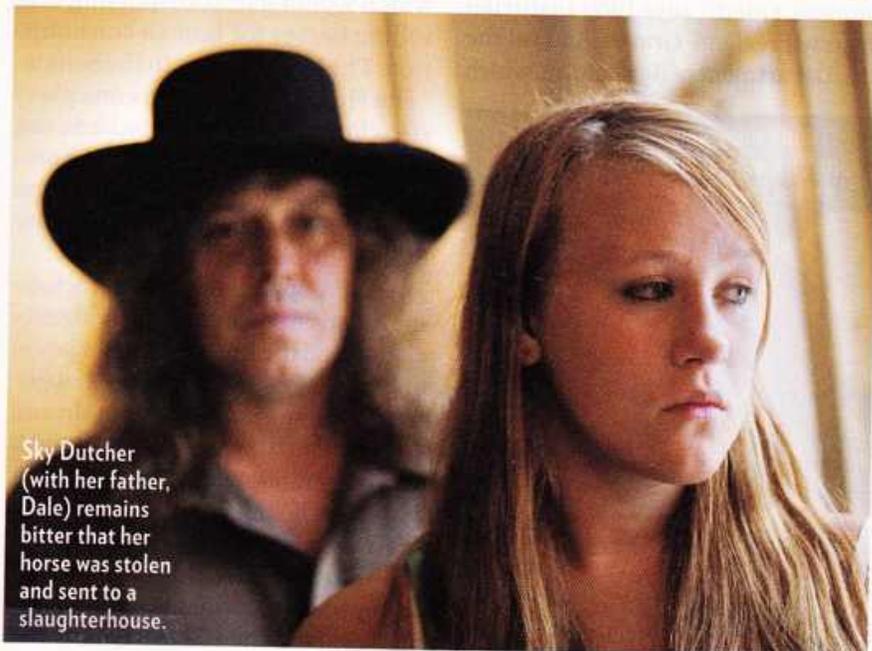


Twenty years ago someone stole one of his mares. He feared the horse was sold to a slaughterhouse, inspiring him in 1997 to sponsor state legislation that required inspectors at the plants to check for identifying marks on the animals. But the law isn't fool-proof. In 2003 thieves struck Howard

again, stealing three of his Tennessee Walking Horses. This time the culprits were caught, and they admitted selling the horses to a slaughterhouse. "I simply broke down and cried," he says.

Nelson understands that sometimes horses have to be euthanized, but he would be devastated if one of his animals ended up in a sandwich. "There is a humane way to end a horse's life, and slaughter is not the way," he says. "I know there are people who have different opinions of eating horses, but I just don't think it's a good idea."

By Bob Meadows. Anne Lang in Austin and Marc Zavel in Washington, D.C.



Sky Dutcher (with her father, Dale) remains bitter that her horse was stolen and sent to a slaughterhouse.

“ I love horses. To me they're pets, and you don't eat your pet” —WILLIE NELSON



MailBag

“Are there not ‘curvier’ best dressed women in this world too?” Nancy Ortega Santa Maria, Calif.

BEST & WORST DRESSED

Loved most of your choices, but I couldn't believe the section on cocktail dresses. You failed to include the one woman who wears the dress best: Reese Witherspoon.

Shaun Smith-Gray Saint John, N.B.

My 17-year-old daughter Hilary and I were thrilled to see that actress Charlize Theron has made your Best Dressed list, especially since she is an antifur advocate. As attractive and warm as fur looks, it looks best on the creatures that nature intended.

Pamela Quarterly Paget, Bermuda

Thank you for including Andy Roddick in your Best & Worst Dressed issue, but he should really be in your Sexiest Man Alive or Bachelors issue. But I'd rather see him here than not at all.

Name Withheld via e-mail

Sarah Jessica Parker is one of the most genuine, classy celebrities of her generation. She dresses in elegant formal wear while sparing us overexposure of her cleavage or legs. But PEOPLE managed to find one undated photo of her in an unattractive dress. She belongs in your Best Dressed category.

Anne Rogers Taylor Mill, Ky.

Justin Timberlake is the Trendiest Best Dressed Man? Sporting brown shoes and a black belt? Even my 10-year-old nephew knows better.

R. Fort Novato, Calif.

ELDERLY DRIVERS

While I am all for mandatory driving and vision tests, I worry that people will take the terrible event of the 90-year-old man who drove into a crowd and killed 10 people as an excuse to deny seniors driving licenses. Many seniors rely on their vehicle for access to the necessities of life. However, this unfortunate event has brought attention to an important issue. As the article stated, accident rates among drivers 65 and older are higher than for any group other than teens. But senior drivers, like teens, require a greater amount of monitoring, not having their licenses revoked.

Vanessa White via e-mail

When are old people going to realize that driving is a privilege, not a right? I never thought getting old would make someone care less about human life. If you can't drive, stay off the road. States should do a better job [of monitoring] and should be held liable for elderly drivers

like that 90-year-old man. I am sorry if I feel that human life is more important than being able to get to bingo.

Michelle Ruth Granger, Ind.

ANNA NICOLE SMITH

My heart goes out to Anna Nicole Smith. Regardless of what I may think of this provocative star, the recent blessing of her daughter's birth coupled with the tragedy of her son's death is beyond anything I would wish upon anyone. I can't imagine what she must be going through and hope she has a strong support system to help her through this time.

Christine Forney Ephrata, Pa.

WRITE US

TO CONTACT EDITORIAL: Send a fax (212-522-0794), e-mail (editor@people.com) or mail (Letters to the Editor, PEOPLE, Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, N.Y. 10020). Letters should include the writer's full name, address and daytime phone number, and may be edited for clarity and space.

HORSE SENSE

Many readers were upset by our story about horses that are slaughtered in the U.S. and sent overseas for human consumption. "America is a civilized nation; we do not eat our pets or send them off to the dinner plates of others," writes Bobbie Henderson of North Ft. Myers, Fla. Other readers wondered whether Americans should question another culture's differences. "While I personally find the thought of eating horses reprehensible, other cultures do not," writes T. Bruser of Jenkintown, Pa. "Who are we to say that slaughtering horses for meat is wrong, but slaughtering other animals is okay because it's accepted as food here?"

