COLOR GENETICS AND THE CHAMPAGNE GENE

The dilute champagne colors have been around for some time, but have only recently been recognized as being distinct.

Champagne horses vary in appearance according to the base color and any other color modifiers present, such as flaxen. Before champagne was recognized in its own right (and sometimes now) champagne horses were often registered as being palomino, buckskin, and grulla or even dun (though champagne horses do not have primitive marks like duns). The champagne gene is completely separate from the cream and other dilution genes.

In addition to coat color the champagne dilution affects eye and skin color. Champagne horses are born with blue eyes which gradually turn amber as the horse matures. This color is quite distinct from the brown eyes found in other colors. They also have pink skin, like horses homozygous for the cream dilution gene.

COLORS

GOLD CHAMPAGNE (COOL) horses resemble palominos, having a golden coat. They may have a white mane & tail, or these may be gold too. Gold champagne horses are usually registered as palomino. However the resemblance to palomino is purely in the phenotype (external appearance) as gold champagne horses do not have the cream dilution.

CLASSIC CHAMPAGNE occurs due to the effect of the champagne gene on a black base color. The coat is a very attractive lilac tan color, with the point's being a darker version of the same color. Classic champagne horses are sometimes mistaken for grulla, and sometimes called "lilac dun".

AMBER CHAMPAGNE occurs with a bay base color. These horses are usually a golden tan with dark brown manes, tails and points. Horses of this color are often registered as buckskin or dun but they actually have brown rather than black points and also have pinkish skin with freckles.

SABLE CHAMPAGNE horses have a brown base color. Their coat color is between amber and classic, but resembling classic more than amber, and often with more shading than either. If it is not clear from the phenotype and pedigree this color could be distinguished from classic champagne by genetic testing at the agouti locus.

IVORY CHAMPAGNE was the name originally used for the combination of chestnut, and cream (gold champagne with a cream gene, or you could say a palomino with a champagne gene). Such horses have an ivory-colored body with a white mane & tail, resembling cremello but with amber eyes.