

RyanDay Farm: **A FAMILY LEGACY**

Written by: Bridget Ryan

On top of the hill, looking eastward down the valley between Hillsburgh and Erin sits RyanDay Farm. Owned by Robert and Jennifer Black, RyanDay breeds and shows Percheron horses, a versatile draft breed known for its strength and even temperament.

Photo: Jennifer Black

Early morning at RyanDay Farm

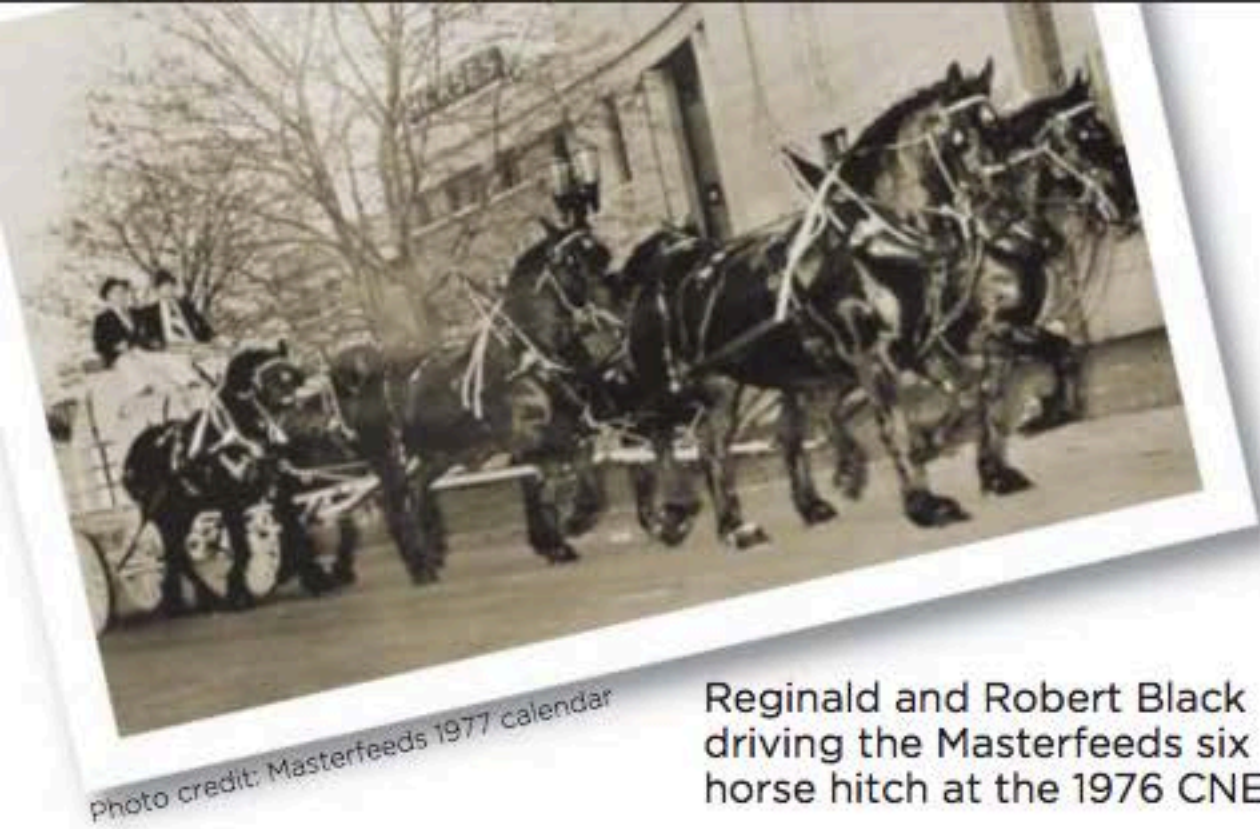


Photo credit: Masterfeeds 1977 calendar

Reginald and Robert Black driving the Masterfeeds six horse hitch at the 1976 CNE

Black family: four generations



Photo Credit: Lynn Cassels-Caldwell

In 2019, RyanDay Farm foaled eight registered Percherons and is expecting five foals in 2020. Their yearlings, stallions and mares are sold throughout Canada, the U.S., Cuba, England and France. They also produce and distribute a premium horse vitamin-mineral supplement.

Their children, Ryan and Dayna—for whom the business is named, grew up learning about heavy horses. Robert and Ryan have driven up to eight horses at once, and over the years have shown six and four horse teams, singles and breeding classes. Shows are a big undertaking and the entire family pitches in to help. Their grandchildren visit often and will be the fourth generation of Blacks to take up the reins.

The Blacks' horse heritage goes back to Herbert Black, Robert's grandfather. In the late 1800s and into the early 1900s, heavy horses were needed for working the land on their family farm, which is where Pearson International Airport is now located.

In 1969, Robert's parents, Reginald and Helen Black moved from Brampton to a Wellington County dairy farm, where they continued their interest in registered Percherons. Reg and Helen became known for breed development, specifically their Blackhome line. The horses provided them with continued learning, a break from the milking and farm work, and a place to connect with other horse people.

Reginald, Ryan, Jacob and Robert Black



Photo Credit: Lynn Cassels-Caldwell

"My grandfather spent his life perfecting the (Percheron) bloodlines. He found a good cross and from them came world champions in both mares and stallions. He taught us all the little things, he taught us about the show ring and horses and how to be around them. My boys are now learning from their grandfather and it's a family tradition that we hope to continue." –Ryan Black

Robert and Jennifer embraced the Black family tradition, and continued breeding and showing while each had full time careers off the farm. In 1973, the Black's six-horse team was hired by Masterfeeds to promote their brand at fairs and special events. This work lasted through the 1970s and '80s.

Robert is an accredited judge, overseeing shows in Canada, the U.S., and England. He serves as a director on the provincial breed organization and on the Royal Draft Horse committee. Ryan is also a judge for draft breed shows in Canada and the U.S.

The Royal Winter Fair (the Royal) in Toronto remains one of their favourite show venues and in 2013, Robert was recognized for sixty-five consecutive years of showing there (1948 to 2013). Last year, RyanDay's MRD Valentino's Lance, won the prestigious Royal Winter Fair, 2019 Senior Stallion championship. Over the years, they have earned many ribbons, prizes and championships, however, they say it is the people and the love of the breed that motivates them to continue.

RyanDay six-horse hitch driven by Ryan Black




Photo Credit: Lynn Cassels-Caldwell

Showing is a huge commitment of time, energy and expense. The heavy horses require a tractor-trailer and driver, space for nine heavy horses, the wagon, harness and show gear. Many pre-show hours are spent training the teams. Preparing for the Royal (and all shows) includes:

- Checking, cleaning, oiling and polishing all the show tack;
- Transporting the horses into Toronto on the preceding Wednesday;
- Washing and wrapping all the horses on Thursday. It takes a 'pit crew' of at least four to five people another two hours to roll and prep their manes, groom the horses to be show-ready and tack them up after the washing has taken place;
- Showing in various classes all day Friday, Saturday and Sunday;
- Ship back home to Erin/Hillsburgh, Sunday night.


RyanDay takes part in four to 10 shows every year, wrapping up their show season after the Royal in November. Then, the horses' shoes are pulled off for the winter, and they are on vacation until spring. The owners are not. The stable work, feeding and horse-care of these gentle giants continues every day, seven days a week. Big horses, big hearts, it is a labour of love. The RyanDay family legacy continues.




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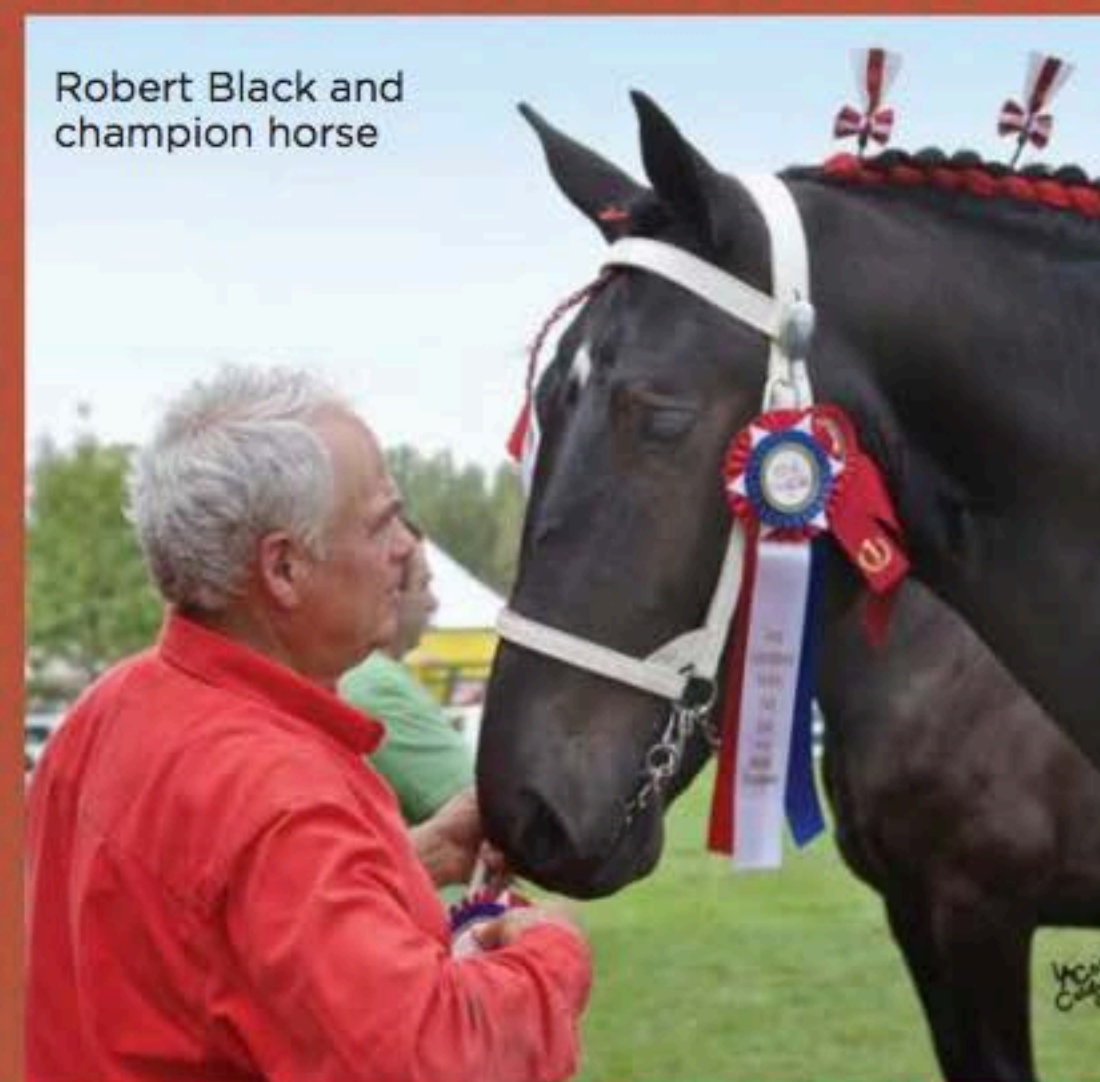
PERCHERON HORSE

The Percheron horse breed originated in the former province of Perche, in western France. The horses are often black or grey in colouring, but can also be chestnut or sorrel. A healthy foal weighs about 150 pounds and a mature animal weighs 1,800 to 2,000 pounds. An average height for an adult is 18.2 hh (hands high). That's 73 inches or about six feet! The Percheron is also called a draft horse and includes other heavy horse breeds such as Belgians, Clydesdales, Canadians, Gypsy Vanners and others. Heavy horses are used for showing, logging, farming, sleigh and carriage rides, parades, and mounted patrol. Occasionally, these gentle giants are involved in dressage and eventing competitions.



SIX-HORSE HITCH

A six-horse hitch is made up of three horse teams: the wheel team in the back, the swing in the middle and the lead team at the front. Owners and drivers strive to put together teams that are similar in breed and colour, size, stride and head carriage (how the horse holds their head). These attributes help a team work together in unison.



Robert Black and champion horse

Photo Credit: Lynn Cassels-Caldwell