

THE MORGAN

A Horse for All Seasons

by Michelle Scott

If you've ever longed to ride on a beach at sunrise, gallop through miles of cornfields, or test your endurance on a 100-mile trek in the mountains, the Morgan horse is your passport. If dashing through the snow in a one-horse open sleigh rings your bell, or if you'd prefer to be on the box-seat of a coach commanding an elegant four-in-hand at Newport, the Morgan is your answer to these aspirations as well. Would you like to cultivate a small plot of land without using a modern tractor, or have you dreamed of competing at the Olympic levels in dressage, combined training, or combined driving? The Morgan can be part of that quest, too! Bred for over two centuries to be the ultimate in versatility, this first and truly indigenous American breed has shaped our country; fostered our other American horse breeds; given countless owners joy, pride, and companionship; and contributed to our nation's sense of Olympic pride.

A Noble History

In 1789, a bay colt named Figure was born in Springfield, Massachusetts. Later known by his owner's name, Justin Morgan, he was the product of a breeding between a draft-type mare, possibly Canadian, and a purely-bred thoroughbred named Traveler. Thoroughbreds at that time were primarily of Arabian blood, so Figure was indeed a "warmblood"! The most significant thing about Figure was his uncanny ability to reproduce his wonderful temperament and beautiful conformation in all of his offspring. It soon became apparent



"Lippitt" Morgan Stallion Harwich Tyrant
Photo by Bob Tarr. (www.BobTarr.com)

Lisa Singer driving a pair of Morgans at the 1997 World Championship in Reisenbeck, Germany. Seen on the left is Avalon Avant Guard, and on the right is Battersea Chancellor. Photo courtesy of Lisa Singer



that Figure lived again in each of them. This unusual prepotency paved the way for the foundation of a breed based not on the usual method of selective breeding, but based on only one animal! This is a unique genetic anomaly unprecedented in "bred" animals.

During the early nineteenth century, the offspring of the Morgan horse developed into types within the breed. Starting out as farm horses in New England, they learned to plow fields and pull carriages, and they were valued for their ability to be an all-purpose animal for their sometimes isolated owners. They brought settlers to our western frontier and helped to lay part of the foundation for the Quarter Horse breed as herding and cutting horses. Mid-century, the Civil War found Morgans dominating Union efforts, and General Sherman's horse, Rienzi, was one of them. Confederate General "Stonewall" Jackson's Little Sorrel was a Morgan, too.

Also around this time, trotting racing was taking the country by storm and gave Morgan owners yet another use for their horses, with Morgan blood contributing to many of the Standardbreds of the time. In the East, these elegant horses



Harwich Mink on the cross country course at Huntington Farm in Strafford, Vermont, with Beth Drake up. Photo by Michelle Scott

were prized as carriage horses and “park” horses for the growing bourgeoisie, and soon the Saddlebred took on its own shape from its Morgan roots. The Tennessee Walking Horse is another American breed with a base in Morgan blood.

At the end of the nineteenth century, some of the men most involved in Morgan breeding began to recognize the importance of recording these horses. At the forefront was a native of Middlebury, Vermont, named Joseph Battell. He began to compile pedigrees in 1884, and after years of painstaking work, the first volume of *The American Morgan Horse and Registry* was published in 1894. In the twentieth century, the financier Chauncey C. Stillman purchased this registry from the Battell estate, devoting much of his lifetime to recording the births and matings of the original “Morgans,” and it is to him that we owe our gratitude for the current registry. The Morgan Horse Club officially became a membership corporation on October 31, 1927, and it is now The American Morgan Horse Association (AMHA). The stud book closed permanently in 1948, reflect-

ing the wish of the membership to maintain the purity of the breed.

From the 1930s through the 1950s, the American film industry used Morgan horses in every way imaginable. Not only the equine stars of Westerns, they can be seen in genre films about Roman, Greek,

and Civil War topics, as well as carriage horses in English, French, and Russian historicals. Their dependability and classic looks put them in great demand. Many film stars had Morgans in those years, too. For example, the well-known Vermont breeder Dana Wingate Kelley sold horses to James Cagney and Bing Crosby.

The Bloodlines

As the Morgan breed developed, certain strains of bloodlines became more delineated, and four basic family lines emerged. Of these, the Lippitt is the most pure. Developed by Robert Lippitt Knight of Rhode Island, these Morgans trace back to the original Figure on a maximum number of lines with a minimum of known outcrosses to other breeds. Knight established the Green Mountain Stock Farm in Randolph, Vermont, operating it from 1927 to 1962. His foundation stock came from the estate of A. Fullerton Phillips and re-established a strain already well-known in Vermont. They all trace back to Figure through the Peter’s stallion, Ethan Allen II. Because of their heritage they often have the look of great sturdiness and breed type

Shannon Loomis aboard Quail Meadow Star at the Greater Dayton Horse Trials. Photo by Bob Tarr. www.BobTarr.com



in a compact package.

Another distinct strain is the Government Morgan. In 1905, the US Department of Agriculture established a breeding program in Burlington, Vermont, with the purpose of producing horses with Morgan type and versatile athletic ability while increasing their size. Two years later, this farm was moved to Joseph Battell's farm near Middlebury, Vermont, which he donated to the government. Similar to European standards, a testing process was used to identify the best breeding stock, including 300-mile endurance rides, jumping, and timed races. The Department of Agriculture discontinued the funding of the US Morgan Horse Farm in 1950, when the University of Vermont took part of the stock to continue the breeding program.

Of modern Morgans, a prominent family was established by Joseph C. Brunk of Springfield, Illinois. His original stock were bred similarly to the Lippitt foundation mares, and later the stronger trotting lines of Daniel Lambert were added to increase size as well as height of action and elegance in their gaits. Many of today's top show horses carry Brunk blood, and their influence is strong in the Western Working family as well.

The Western Working family was developed between the 1880s and 1950s by several ranchers and breeders in several states. With the expansion of the cattle ranching industry, the need for a tough and sensible "cow" horse grew. Using a combination of old Vermont/Lippitt lines, Government, and Brunk breeding, with some Thoroughbred influence, too, the result was a family of Morgans known for their strength, adaptability, and "heart."

So many of our modern Morgans have blood that combines more than one of these families, with fine examples such as Lippitt Mandate, who was an outstanding example of a cross of Lippitt and Government lines. He was owned and shown by Marilyn Childs of Chelsea,



Kimber Sobek showing Harwich Tyrant at "Dressage at Lexington" in 2006.
Photo by Bob Tarr (www.BobTarr.com)

Vermont. All of this history and background can explain why the Morgan is a perfect fit for almost any equine sport of today.

Today's Morgans

Since the mid-1980s, Morgans have achieved great success in international combined driving competitions. Competing with many different breeds, their qualities of intelligence, bravery, strength, and speed make them strong contenders. In 2007, Shelly Temple and her Morgan gelding LR Ami B-Line were chosen to be part of the United States Equestrian Team in Denmark this year. Later this year, two more Morgans won High Point Awards at the Elk Creek Combined Driving Event in Fair Hill, Maryland. Taking Reserve in the Preliminary Single Pony Division was Stacie Hoffman driving LBF Spider Man, who was awarded High Point Morgan in the Preliminary Division. David Forney driving Mimi Thorington's Battersea Chancellor was the winner of the Training

Single Horse Division and High Point Morgan Training Division. Chancellor was bred by Carlton Huhn and Frank Calhoun of the Battersea Stud in Churchville, Virginia.

While the "Western" Morgan once played an integral role in the development of the West, these horses are still making impressive Western show horses. They can also be seen sharing in the daily work with many of their owners, participating in reining, team penning and cutting, rodeos, gaming, and working cows on the ranch. Many riders, too, use these tough animals to compete in both competitive trail and endurance riding.

On the other side of the spectrum, Morgans are making an increasing impact on the national dressage scene because of their impulsion, lightness, grace, and their love for the work and their rider. Today, more than 60 registered Morgans have competed successfully in recognized United States Dressage Federation (USDF) Open Dressage Competitions at Third Level and higher. The 1980s was a






Harwich Tyrant
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driving Morgans. These “classic” Morgans, although energetic and athletic, must demonstrate a quiet, calm, and extremely tractable attitude at all times.

The Morgan horse is unparalleled in its combination of beauty, ability, and disposition. Whether your interest is showing, sport competitions, or pleasure, there is a perfect Morgan for you. The American Morgan Horse Association has an information-filled and exciting website for those who might want to do further research: <http://www.morganhorse.com>.

Michelle Scott has been breeding Morgans with Lippitt lines for 31 years. Starting out in Harwich, Massachusetts, her Missalette Farm then moved to North Tunbridge, Vermont, and is now located near Lexington, Virginia.

successful decade for Morgans in dressage and flowed into even more success in the 1990s. In 1994, Deb Dougherty was awarded a USDF gold medal for her ride on a Morgan. In 2000, EFM Desperado was the sixth Morgan to earn the AMHA gold medallion in dressage. In 2006, Harwich Tyrant was ridden to a first in First Level, Test 2, by Kimber Sobek. There were over 400 entries of all breeds at this highly competitive show. He was bred by Michelle Scott of Lexington, Virginia.

Morgans are perfect for combined training, too. Their wonderful athleticism and ability to focus can bring top ribbons for their riders. In 1993, Pat Fay rode Minty's Stardust to win the preliminary championship at the Green Mountain Horse Association in Woodstock, Vermont. Stayner Haller and the Lippitt-bred LGM Challenger did very well at training level, and in 2004 they qualified to compete in the open training division at the 2004 American

Eventing Championships. In 2005, this 22-year-old horse competed and was in the ribbons in seven events with his rider!

Morgan Horse Breed Shows offer something for everyone. From the easy-going way of the western pleasure horse, to the animated, energetic park horse, Morgan horse shows offer their owners a competitive setting among the company of other exhibitors with a common love of their breed. A variety of in-hand, or halter, classes judge the horses on conformation, type, and motion. Park saddle and harness classes present the Morgan as a “picture of great beauty, brilliance, animation, and elegance,” combining athletic ability with a willing attitude. The English pleasure and pleasure driving Morgans are just as much show horses as the park horses but are not required to have the same brilliance or high action. There are also “hunter pleasure” Morgans, competing under forward-seat saddles, and classic pleasure saddle and