



~ EQUINE ANATOMY ~

AMERICA'S BAROQUE BREED

Morgan type is often described as baroque. Why the term offers a useful lens upon the breed.

By Stephen Kinney

The internet offers a description of baroque horse breeds in language, parts of which read like an excerpt from the Morgan breed standard.

“The term ‘baroque horse’ describes a group of horse breeds, usually descended from and retaining the distinctive char-

acteristics of a particular type of horse that rose to prominence in Europe during the Baroque era, after significant development throughout the Middle Ages.... They are characterized by powerful hindquarters, a muscular, arched neck, a straight or slightly convex profile, and usually a full, thick mane and tail.”

ABOVE: In *The Artist's Horse*, John Bulmer remarks that when Leonardo da Vinci depicted a horse from his imagination, rather than to fulfill a commission, it was always this type of upfrighted horse. The following Wikipedia notation is interesting: “*Leonardo's Horse*, or the *Gran Cavallo* (“Great Horse”), was commissioned from Leonardo da Vinci in 1482 but never completed. Leonardo did extensive preparatory work for it but produced only a large clay model, which was later destroyed. About five centuries later, Leonardo's surviving designs were used as the basis to bring the sculpture to fruition” (photo via Shutterstock);

RIGHT: The distinctive Morgan type of Mossrose Triumphant carried the baroque look to Europe for British breeder Rosita Hamar.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Andalusian, the Lipizzan, and the Friesian are among the European breeds originating in Spain, each frequently described as “baroque” (Friesian photo via Shutterstock).

Small ears, and a neck that rises from a swelling curve and a well laid-back shoulder unlike other breeds. A forelock and mane of quite extraordinary length... This elegant and romantic horse appealed to leaders and artists in the past. These same qualities have led people of all walks of life to the Morgan horse today.”

In a 2016 interview with *The Morgan Horse*, Angela echoed the sentiment, saying, “I kept saying to John, this horse I saw in America looked so much like the statues in London... In those days, before mass media, television, or the internet, kings and leaders, the way they gathered popularity was by parade in the street. You didn’t want to be top guy riding a low-going horse. On the other hand, you could ill afford to be tossed off into the gutter. So, a type of horse evolved in Europe... some of these European horses, never a breed with a registry as such—remember the Thoroughbred did not have a registry until 1836—went to America and that, to me, is very interesting. You, over here in America, were preserving this horse that had disappeared in Europe.”

The documentary shares a detailed history of the horse in ancient and European art. The narrator explains, “It has been the love of artists since before Christ to depict this up-headed, sensuous animal as you can see in the horses from the Parthenon Frieze. These small, compact, well-muscled animals...

Almost every reference to baroque horses remarks upon their origins as war horses used centuries ago for the purposes of riding and conveying armaments into the field, with physical characteristics that made them ideal later for the “haute école,” the dressage movements preserved by the Spanish riding School. Andalusians, Lusitanos, Lipizzans, and Friesians are among the baroque breeds of Europe.

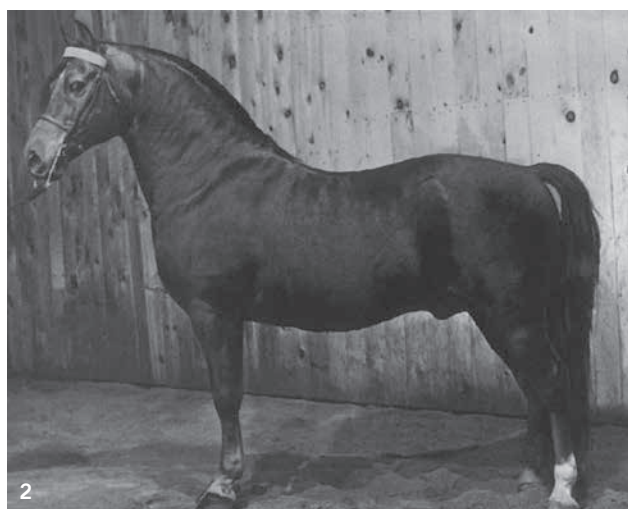
THE ARTIST'S HORSE

This was already on the minds of John Bulmer and Angela Conner Bulmer when they fell in love with

the Morgan and founded Britain’s foundation farm at their Monnington Court. They had discovered in the American breed an equivalent to the majestic horses that once enthralled old world aristocrats and adorned statuary across their continent.

John’s DVD, *The Artist’s Horse*—the English documentarian’s gift to the American Morgan Horse Association—seamlessly melds a discussion of horses historically featured in European art with a comparison to the Morgan breed’s type today.

About horses in European art, the film’s narrator intones, “What is actually special about this animal? A fine, short head and big, broadly set eyes.



Morgans associated with Jeanne and Fred Herrick were among those first attracting John Bulmer and Angela Conner Bulmer because they typified “The Artist’s Horse.” Elm Hill Charter Oak (1) was a signature horse for the Herricks and is shown here with his sire Pecos (2) and his maternal grandsire Orcland Leader (3) (photos via

The Morgan Horse archives).

appear again and again in the sculptures and paintings of the past. Greek and Etruscan artists loved the alert quality that could be given to their work by featuring upheaded horses....

“Leonard da Vinci, with his love of machines, was obsessed with the physical structure of this powerful but refined animal. [Flemish painter Peter Paul] Rubens’s famous love of curves made these horses irresistible to him.”

Early in the narration of the video we hear, “This horse differs substantially from the kind of horse we see in Europe today. It was required and bred to carry its head very high so that the neck continues the vertical line of the chest. The present-day European Thoroughbred’s neck extends the line from the backbone. The level forearm of the high-stepping, old-fashioned horse at the trot is no longer the fashion of the riders of Europe. The Thoroughbred’s lower style suits its need for pure speed.... Parades and public show decreased in value as ruling classes turned to hunting and racing, thus material needs caused the conformation of horses to change.”

With visuals of Jeanne Mellin Herrick riding Elm Hill Charter Oak and Fred Herrick driving a synchronized pair of Morgans, the narrator says, “But what has happened to the ancient style of animal? It’s alive and well in America. And it’s called the Morgan horse.”

In their observations about the artist’s horse—and, by extension, the Morgan—John and Angela are describing the baroque breeds.

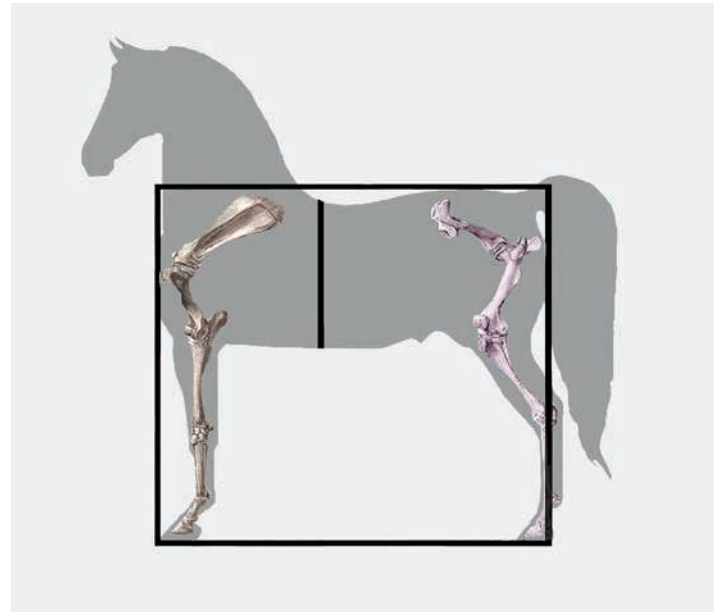
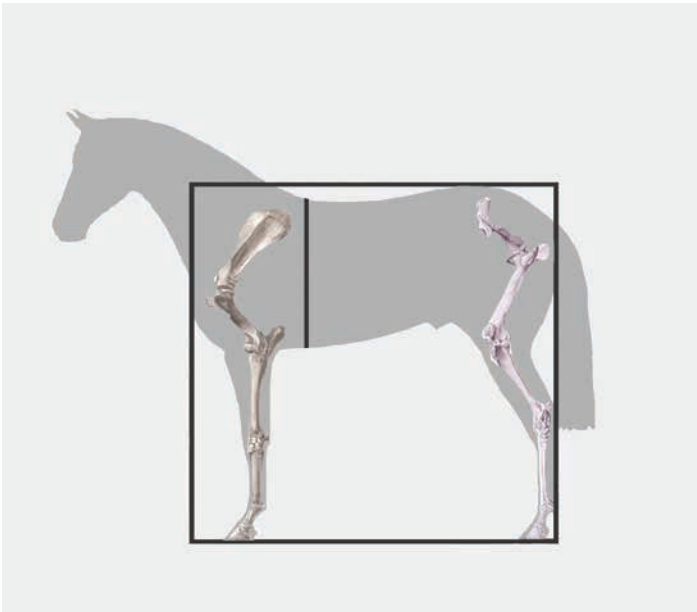
PHYSIOLOGY

In 2015, *The Morgan Horse* conducted an interview with artist Denise Peterson entitled “The Physiology of Trotting Breeds-Versus-Running Breeds.” Like the word “baroque,” the terms “trotting breeds” and “running breeds” describe types of horses that have structure and function in common. Modern day Thoroughbreds and Quarter Horses are running breeds. The trotting breeds would include European horses like the Friesian and Andalusian. And in America, the Morgan and Saddlebred.

Having studied equine anatomy through the lens of an artist, Denise’s interview contrasted the physiology distinguishing the athletic functions primary to each type. Her illustrations described both the geometry and skeletons distinct to each. Her drawings of the trotting breeds could just as easily be depicting the Morgan horse.

In the interview, Denise says, “To be efficient, runners are built to move with a long, low stride and all four legs do their part in moving the horse forward in the gait, though the hind legs do more work than the front legs do...with their bottom line being about the same length as the topline, the point of the buttock is lower than the point of the hip which allows the runner to use his spine to store and release energy from the hind quarters. A plumb line dropped from the point of his buttock will fall behind the hock and his hindquarter is very muscular. They have long cannon bones and a long, low-set neck. If you look at their silhouette, the runner’s body fits into a square.

“Again, trotting-bred horses move in such a way to maximize efficiency. The humerus bone is very close to being perpendicular to the ground. This puts the front legs at the front of the body and gives them a high, round stride. A plumb line dropped from the last hairs of the withers will fall far behind the elbow, almost halfway between the elbow and the stifle, giving the impression that the horse is longer on the bottom than he is on the top. His back is shorter, and he is close coupled. A line drawn from the point of the hip to the point of the buttock is closer to



These geometrical illustrations by artist Denise Peterson demonstrate the difference in type and function of the running breeds (left) versus the trotting breeds (right). Of particular importance is the contrasting plumb lines dissecting the rib cages and the angles of front and hind leg skeletons.

being level, giving the trotting horse a rounded croup and a high-set tail, rather than the steeply sloping croup and low set tail seen on Thoroughbreds and Quarter Horses. A plumb line dropped from the point of the buttock will bisect the hock. The set of their pelvis also gives them a deep hindquarter. Add to that a shorter cannon bone and the resulting silhouette is rectangular rather than square.”

The entire article from January/February 2015 can be read at The Morgan Horse magazine's public archive at www.morganhorse.com/upload/photos/904TMH_Jan2015_PhysiologyofTrottingBreeds.pdf

Baroque form, however, is as much about function as it is a source of artistic inspiration. The structure has made baroque horses useful for many of the pursuits of its human companions beyond wartime and coaching purposes of old. They have been favored in classical dressage. On Spanish ranches (and later in America), vaquero horsemen developed their training techniques around these shapely and agile horses. Their style and carriage define the Morgan breed's show ring specifications today.

Let's explore these diverse utilizations of our breed.

IN CLASSICAL DRESSAGE

The late Henry Fleming was a unique horseman who perpetuated the dressage philosophy taught by the French equestrian Francois Baucher, as opposed to contemporary German-influenced Olympic dressage. He found his classical dressage counterpart in the Morgan breed.

On his HarmonyCross.com website (no longer online), under the heading “Why Baroque,” he wrote, “Horse racing may be called the ‘Sport of Kings’ due to the costs of participation. But prior to the British Civil War, the most treasured riding horses of European aristocracy—and, of course, the riding masters who instructed them and created the canon of classical manège and dressage, from [author] Newcastle forward—have been of baroque type, a.k.a. Spanish, Iberian, etc. Putting subjective beauty aside, functionally, the baroque body type is best prepared to safely, comfortably accommodate the rigorous demands put upon the high school manège horse, as well as the finished vaquero-type bridle horse. In actual practice, both extreme applications (to which most enthusiasts will

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Courtesy of The Morgan Horse magazine

EQUINE ANATOMY AMERICA'S BAROQUE BREED



The upright neck, short back, and curvaceous shape of the Morgan have suited it to many of its human companions' purposes, including carriage driving (Heyday Blackhawk and Jeff Morse) (1); park saddle (Tug Hill Whammunion and Joan Lurie) (2); working Western (Holiday Campadre and Eitan Beth-Halachmy) (3); and classical dressage (Pisgah's Melody Rose with the late Henry Fleming) (4) (photos © Denlore, Howard Schatzberg, Debbie Beth-Halachmy).

only aspire) demand the balance, power, and mobility resulting from the baroque build found in the remaining Iberian-based registries by whatever name, e.g., the Lusitano, PRE, Andalusian, and Lipizzaner... *and*, I would argue, America's original Morgan."

Over the years, Morgan breeder Karin Weight has tracked Morgans who have risen to the Grand Prix level of dressage, with their written profiles appearing in "The Ascendants" series of articles for *The Morgan Horse*. She recently commented, "When most horse enthusiasts think of baroque breeds, the dancing Lipizzans of the Spanish Riding School immediately come to mind. Several years

ago, I spent two days at the stud farm in Lipica, Slovenia, where that famous breed was first developed starting in AD 1580. As I entered the extensive grounds, I noted that the logo displayed on the gate could easily be a stylized drawing of an early Morgan stallion. In fact, if one ignored copyright issues, that logo could be appropriated by a farm raising Lippitt or other foundation Morgan stock.

"The Lipizzans at the stud farm lacked the pretty faces that most Morgans sport, and they were slightly taller and a little heavier overall. Compared to today's show Morgans, their necks were not as long nor were they quite as upheaded. However, as they

wandered in their pastures, the overall resemblance to my favorite breed was quite striking. And when the stallions were shown in harness and under saddle, the resemblance became even more evident; the high knee action and movement of the Lipizzans was precisely what I see in Morgan dressage tests. Just like so many Morgans, the extensions did not include the reach common with warmbloods; the trot definitely showed better quality than the canter; the walk was sometimes a bit hurried. But in common with Morgans, the white (actually genetically gray) stallions were naturals when it came to collection and the lateral movements.

“At the end of my visit there was no doubt in my mind: the Morgan horse is most definitely America’s baroque breed.”

IN WESTERN HORSEMANSHIP

The body type of the Morgan made it useful to those who rode in the American West, especially those who, as Henry Fleming alluded above, favor the vaquero techniques originally developed around Spanish breeds. Brenda L. Tippin, *The Morgan Horse* magazine’s prolific historian, recently authored the article, “Arnold Rojas and the Morgan’s Role in Vaquero Horsemanship” (*The Morgan Horse*, March 2025). In California, Rojas rode at Roland Hill’s Tehachapi Cattle Company. At that time Hill was the largest breeder of Morgans in the world. Rojas went on to write several

anecdote-filled books on vaquero horsemanship.

In the article, Brenda states, “In the words of Colonel John Hutcheson, an ardent admirer and follower of Rojas’s teachings, Rojas idealized the Morgan horse. He saw in the breed a likeness to the original Spanish horse used by the great masters of that country to develop the vaquero style of horsemanship. He admired the Morgan horse because of its conformation and movement; its fearless spirit and unparalleled endurance; its proud bearing; soundness, willingness, and responsiveness. The Morgan was the ideal vaquero horse.

“Rojas arrived at this theory after traveling to Spain and spending extensive time studying old Spanish literature on the subject. He says, ‘...when I traveled in Europe and studied the Andalusian in Spain, the Lusitan in Portugal, and attended the bullfights-on-horseback, I was struck by the similarity of the Andalusian and the Lusitan to the American Morgan. All three, the Andalusian, the Lusitan, and the Morgan, have the same high crest, the same proud carriage, and all three have the courage to face cannon in war as the Lusitan and Andalusian did in the Crimean and Napoleonic Wars, and the Morgan in the Civil War.”

The Spanish or vaquero style of horsemanship is commonly associated with the sometimes-misunderstood curb bit known as a spade bit. A finished spade bit horse is light to the touch, with a

FITTING A VAQUERO SADDLE TO A MORGAN HORSE

By Colonel John Hutcheson



John Hutcheson’s fascination with the geometry of the foundation Morgan is illustrated in this diagram showing the short back, longer underline, and angles of shoulder and hip on his beloved stallion PKR Primavera Brio (photo

© Laura Behning).

The old-blood Morgans have a short back. In 2015, I began corresponding with Ron Butler, a master saddle maker in California, who grew up with Ernie Morris, Ray Ordway, Richard Caldwell, and many other great horsemen of the vaquero tradition. Ron had torn down and rebuilt scores of old Visalia saddles over his 40-year career. We corresponded for almost four years, and I treasure all his letters. Here in Georgia, a local saddle maker brought over a dozen trees to try on the eight Morgans (linebred to the Primavera family) living here with me. Hands down, the best fit was a tree made by Warren Wright of Tauranga, New Zealand (the North Island). Warren handcrafts 200 trees annually and about three-quarters of those go to the United States. So, I engaged Warren to build a tree that was shorter by an inch than his Quarter Horse trees. It is a Visalia 3B tree with 22 1/2-inch bar length. It was shipped to me a year later and I tried it on all the Morgans I have. (There is a short video on my Gab Creek Farm Facebook page that shows me putting that tree on a Morgan). It was a perfect fit with no bridging anywhere. I shipped it to Ron when he was ready to build the ground seat, and the rest is history. I would privately share all the measurements of my Wright tree with any serious horseman. ■



The Morgan's ancient baroque type accounts for the distinctive show ring specifications that instruct judges today. "Regardless of the tack they are wearing they must always look like and move like a Morgan," says Morgan Judging School co-chair Cindy Mugnier. Hunter Pleasure World Champion Derawnda Lincoln GCH, with trainer Amanda DuPont, and Western Pleasure World Champion Grand Cru Beaujolais GCH, with trainer Daryl Hopson, illustrate the point central to Morgan presentations (photo © Howard Schatzberg).

collected frame and buoyant, agile gaits. In America, it is sometimes called California style, distinguishing it from the Texas style of stock horse riding.

Morgan breeder Colonel John Hutcheson is a practitioner, as well as student, of the vaquero ways and has authored the essay "The Bridle Horse." He writes, "A 'Bridle Horse' is both a 'process' and a 'result.' The finished horse has a unique carriage/neck set. Not any horse can be 'bridled.' Horses that flex in the third vertebrae are candidates.... A finished 'bridle horse' works on 'signal' not 'leverage,' and is therefore sometimes referred to as a 'signal bit horse.' It takes five years or more to train a true bridle horse.

"The old way was hackamore, to the two rein, to the bridle," he elaborates. "The purpose of the hackamore is to 'make' the horse before the bit is ever introduced into the picture. The whole system is to take the horse to lighter and lighter signals...When the bit is finally introduced...the reins are never pulled."

It is often commented that the baroque horses, including the Morgan, are so well suited to the collection and movements required by the vaquero tradition. It is just as reasonable to assume that the vaquero techniques and traditions developed as a response to the structure of this horse—the flexible, curved neck; short, coupled back which gives it such a quick turning radius; its inherent ability to lower and move weight to its hind end; and the acute intelligence which make it so accommodating to these advanced techniques. The same chicken and egg question can be asked about the baroque horse's aptitude for high school dressage movements.

IN THE SHOW RING

Today, American show ring practices have been specifically developed around the baroque characteristics of the Morgan breed. Rule book descriptions are consistent with the baroque silhouette and

buoyant gaits unique to the Morgan. Bits, bridles, and other tack used in show ring disciplines are similar to the equipment used to put the finish on traditional vaquero and classic dressage horses.

Cindy Mugnier, co-chair of AMHA's Morgan Judging School, says, "To me the baroque horse has a silhouette that combines elegance with substance. The Morgan certainly fits that description. Morgans share the curvy appearance of other breeds such as Friesians and Andalusians. There is something regal about the characteristics of baroque horses that you recognize in the Morgan breed. There is a substance to them, a true sense of form to function."

Morgan type and character adds a unique form to some show ring disciplines. Cindy says, "The most important thing to remember when looking at or judging a Morgan hunter or Western horse is that you are looking at a Morgan horse first and the tack they're wearing second. There is a breed standard based on the unique characteristics of the Morgan type and conformation that must take precedence over anything else. Regardless of the tack they are wearing they must always look like and move like a Morgan."

Washington state trainer Daryl Hopson has ridden multiple horses to the Morgan Western Pleasure World Championship. He is also a frequent teacher at Morgan Judging School. He says, "Like Friesians or Andalusians, I think the baroque nature of our Morgan horses makes it easy for them to have the proud presence that is trademark to our breed. Our judging standards call for light contact, which helps to maintain this baroque style and gives them a forward uphill feeling versus some of the other stock breeds. While I do believe all horses should learn to respond and work in a snaffle, a curb bit will assist in maintaining this baroque look by way of pushing the horse with our legs to the curb and teaching the horse self-carriage, that proud silhouette which makes our Morgans special."

Today the horizontal silhouette and lower motion of the mod-

ern Thoroughbred is commonly perceived as standard issue for the hunter frame. This perception derives, as John Bulmer explains in "The Artist's Horse," from the creation of a different horse for speed on tracks and cross country that took place among Europe's gentry centuries ago.

Morgan trainer Amanda DuPont, whose string of world champion Morgans has put her at the forefront of the discipline, articulates the difference between this common perception and hunter pleasure as it is defined in the Morgan show ring. "I think the way the breed is built gives the Morgan a unique and easy ability to raise up and shift their weight to the hind end. Then lengthening and stretching their stride to extend is easier than if they are carrying their weight on their front end like some other breeds. I rode Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, and Warmbloods, and getting them to shift their weight back—when they are approaching a jump, for instance—is not as easy as it is for a Morgan that is already built that way. I couldn't wait to get back on a horse that could carry itself."

Amanda addresses the occasional commentary that Morgan show ring hunters are too fancy in comparison to other breeds exhibiting in that division. Her comments echo Cindy Mugnier's explanation that Morgan type and characteristics are primary. She uses reigning Hunter Pleasure World Champion Derawnda Lincoln GCH as her example, saying, "The true hunter pleasure horse has elliptical motion. While Lincoln trots high, he clearly covers

more ground than the park horse which may be getting a few more inches of height at their top of motion. Instead, Lincoln moves on, he goes forward with that animation and uses his stride to cover ground, which is consistent with our class specs."

For our breed's most competitive division, Amanda says Morgan temperament comes in handy. "The willing attitude of the breed and its stamina contribute a lot in our Hunter Pleasure Division," she says. "Hunter pleasure horses have to go hard for a long time—extended trot and hand gallop, often there is a work-out or a call back. Their attitude is something that makes them great show horses, in all of our disciplines, not just with hunter pleasure horses. But the hunter goes longer. If they were apt to get heavy on their forehead, if they weren't as willing and forward, we wouldn't have the animation and expression that is so apparent in all our divisions, including the horses that, in my opinion, are our best hunters."

Amanda argues athletic efficiency and show ring stylishness is "natural for a Morgan due to the way their neck comes out of their shoulder, the fact they are shorter coupled. All the Morgan standards requiring a horse to raise up and bridle up is easier than for a horse built with their necks set lower."

Her comments about Morgan hunter pleasure horses echo the sentiments of artists, vaquero horseman, and classical dressage enthusiasts. To a person, the horse they describe is clearly America's baroque breed. ■

Available at AMHA's Online Retail Store

The Artist's Horse

To create this instructive and entertaining DVD offering, AMHA reached out to British Morgan breeder John Bulmer, the award-winning director of this popular 1978 documentary. It is the original footage, 20 minutes in length, of equestrian art shown comparatively with footage of the Morgan horse in motion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Bulmer, for allowing AMHA to purchase the rights to print a limited number of copies for resale of this beautiful and historical video.

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