

≈ ENDURANCE ≈

MORGANS STANDING THE TEST OF ENDURANCE

Endurance riding was once used to grade the Morgan horse. And the breed's can-do attitude makes it a candidate today.

By Col. John Hutcheson



Morgans did well in the 300-mile endurance trials of 1919–1926. Is there a niche for their blood in endurance today?

There is Morgan blood in most of the American light horse breeds. It is, after all, the oldest American breed, with seven volumes of “the Registry” dating to 1783. The desire for speed in the 1840s led to outcrossing and the Standardbred; Southern plantation owners wanted to add endurance, good looks, and style to their gaited horses by introducing Morgans. (I can quote from

Volume I, Famous Saddle Horses: “Few pedigrees are lacking the great name of Morgan.”) Tennessee Walking Horses trace heavily to Allan F-1, out of Maggie Marshall, by Bradford’s Telegraph, by Black Hawk 20 (famous grandson of Justin, or Figure). The great Jubilee King was the herd sire for the Matador, the 6666, and many more of the great Western ranches that gave us the Quarter Horse. Indeed, more than a few Morgan stallions are in the foundation stud book of the AQHA, to include Whimpy and Joe Bailey.

Either as the whole package or for his specific parts, the

ABOVE: Chub Lake Jack Daniel & Linda Jacobson.

ENDURANCE ≈ MORGANS STANDING THE TEST OF ENDURANCE



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): General Sheridan's Morgan, Rienzi (from the Barbara Cole Collection, National Museum of the Morgan Horse); Rienzi (National Museum of the Morgan Horse); Castor, after 900 competitive miles (December 1970 *The Morgan Horse*); Gladstone, placed 2nd in 1922 300-mile Endurance Test (December 1970 *The Morgan Horse*); Dolly (photo by L. W. Beeson, USDA Government Album); GNR Kid Pecos & Connie Berto (photo by BJ Lewis, January 1996 *The Morgan Horse*).

Morgan has been a contributor. Docility, bone, size, substance, way of going, bottom, heart, try, that laid-back shoulder, a suspended, floating trot, and exceptional in the mountains are all terms of description that have been used about the Morgan. Fortunately, the old Morgan blood is certainly prepotent.

Theories abound about the origin of the Morgan: Arabian blood, True Briton a thoroughbred (also known as Beautiful Bay and Traveler), a Fresian, or perhaps an Andalusian. Truly, no one knows; but certainly, many registered Morgans were bred to Arabians and the offspring registered as Morgans. One early example is Golddust, a golden palomino with an outstanding trotting record, who was sired by Vermont Morgan out of a daughter of the Arab stallion Zilcaddie.

Morgans were well-known in their New England home, but the American Civil War introduced them to the whole nation. General Philip Sheridan's mount, Rienzi or "Winchester," was immortalized by his 25-mile sprint to the battle of Winchester. After the war, the US Army wanted Morgan substance and prized their temperament. Morgan stallions entered the Army Remount Program and became popular in the Midwest and the West.

In 1905, through the efforts of Senator Redfield Proctor, the US Morgan Horse Farm was established by Congressional appropriation, first in Burlington and then in Weybridge, Vermont. The goal was to bring together and preserve the best available blood of the Morgan breed. It was a cooperative project with the US Bureau of Animal Industry. Bloodlines with size and temperament were secured. Quality,

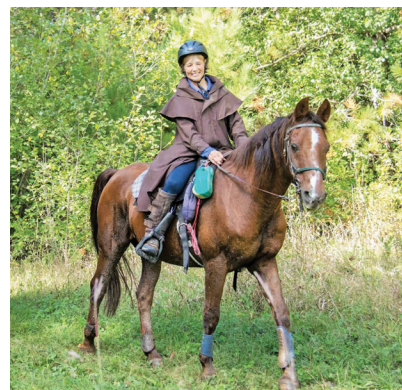
and the ability to uniformly perform all three gaits were sought, and a real effort to preserve adequate muscling and depth of body was made.

The preeminent stud was General Gates. Foaled in 1894, he was black with no markings, was 14.2-1/2 hands high, and weighed about 1,000 pounds. Among his important progeny were Bennington, Red Oak, Scotland, Linsley, and the geldings Castor and Gladstone, who performed well in the 300-mile endurance rides. Bennington was 15.0-1/2 hands high. His offspring include Mansfield, Querido, Ulysses, and Canfield (all out of the historically important broodmare Artemisia). Mansfield was 15.2 hands high. His full brother Ulysses was also 15.2 and weighed 1,175 pounds when in good, serviceable condition. Ulysses was loaned to the US Remount Service in Colorado for several years. Canfield was 15.1-1/2 hands high and weighed 1,075 pounds. Goldfield by Mansfield was 15.2 and weighed about 1,000 pounds. These descriptions allow one to appreciate the consistency of type and size the Government program achieved.

Performance was the chief criterion of the government breeding. The 300-mile endurance rides were sponsored from 1919 to 1926 by the War Department and by a group of saddle horse organizations to test the stamina and hardiness of the horses entered. Each horse was required to carry 245 pounds. Castor and Gladstone won fourth and second places respectively in 1921 and again in 1922. Castor finished in 1919 in 51 hours and 18 minutes. Dolly was sixth in 1920, and Jessie was sixth in 1925.

The 1919 and 1920 rides were from Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont,

ENDURANCE ∞ MORGANS STANDING THE TEST OF ENDURANCE



(LEFT TO RIGHT): Eco Stardust & Connie Berto on the edge of the Grand Canyon during the October 2004 Grand Canyon Pony Express rides (August 2005 *The Morgan Horse*); Hawk's Neopolitan and Mary Coleman at a competitive 25-mile ride in May 2005; Chub Lake Jack Daniel and Linda Jacobson.

to Camp Devens, Ayer, Massachusetts. The 1921 ride was from Camp Vail, New Jersey, to Washington, D.C. The 1922 ride was at Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont, and vicinity, while the 1923 ride was at Avon, New York. In the 1923 ride there were ten Morgans, six Thoroughbreds, three Irish Hunters, two Anglo-Arabs, one Arabian, and one Kentucky Saddle Horse. Three Morgans, three Thoroughbreds, two Irish Hunters, and two Anglo-Arabs completed the ride. The Browns of Berlin, New York, won first place in 1923 with an Arabian. Major S (General Gates x Babe) finished fifth. This was the last year the Morgan Horse Farm competed their horses. (It can be argued that the Morgans could have done better had their training and riding been given over to the Army rather than the Government Farm employees.)

Major C. L. Scott, an officer of the Remount Service, successfully finished four of the 300-mile rides. He wrote in 1924 of the gameness of the Morgans in the rides, "I think the Morgan horse is the gamest horse in America today."

In 1949, the Cavalry service of the Army was made into Infantry, so in 1950 the Remount Service was closed. In 1951, the Bureau of the Budget left the Morgan Horse Farm with insufficient funding to operate. The resulting dispersal sent Morgan Horse Farm blood to ten states as far west as Montana, Utah, Kansas, Minnesota, and Washington, besides the eastern states.

In this first half of the 20th century there were Morgans of similar substance and type being bred elsewhere. To mention but a few, there were those of J. C. Brunk in the Midwest, the Browns breeding in Kansas, Richard Sellman in Texas, and Roland Hill in California. In 1947 Roland Hill, owner of the Tehachapi Horseshoe Cattle Ranches in California and Nevada, with 600 registered Morgans in his remuda, went East and observed that the horses in the East were being raised for pleasure riding and had "Kentucky Saddle Blood" crosses and were different from his own horses that were 14.2 to 15.1 hands and weighed 1,000+ pounds with "plenty of depth of body and ruggedness along with refinement."

William Randolph Hearst purchased his first Morgan mare from Roland Hill in 1928. Mr. Hearst coined the word "Morab." He crossed his Morgan mares with the Arabian stallions Tsar and Ghezi. Today there is an organized Morab registry.

I believe it is all about the blood(lines). The blood carries with it inherent Morgan type, conformation, and the ability to perform. It is just a matter of a Morgan with a high percentage of Old Government

blood, and its proven genetic potential, falling into the hands of someone who is a skilled endurance rider/trainer and wants to "do it on a Morgan." I'll cite just one I know, Connie Berto, because she and her Morgan, GNR Kid Pecos, have their Tevis Cup buckle. "Billy" (The Kid Pecos) did endurance from age 2 until age 19. He retired with 980 NATRC miles and 6,135 sanctioned endurance miles.

Connie and Billy also did the 15-day, 750-mile Salt Lake to Carson City, Nevada, ride. Billy excelled on those multi-day rides and got stronger as the days went by. They did the Outlaw Trail Endurance Ride in the Grand Staircase-Escalante area of Southwest Utah, 265 miles in five days. Billy was 17 years old then. Billy is a poster boy for that well-known Morgan disposition. Connie says, "Through [17 years of] campaigning he was never nervous, always settled when we camped, trailered well, loved to eat anytime, anywhere. He always did what I asked of him. He has never had a saddle sore and never lost a shoe."

Connie is closing in on the 10,000 mile mark now with all but 250 miles done on Morgans. She says an often-heard comment on the course is "I didn't know Morgans could trot like that!" Connie's rising 12-year-old Morgan, Eco Stardust (Dusty), who is 14.3 hands high, was the American Morgan Horse Association (AMHA) endurance champion for 2004. Connie says that Morgans are not numerous in endurance but have scored very well over the years. She cites Mary Coleman (northeast region) who currently rides the gelding Hawk's Neopolitan, an AMHA endurance champion a few times. Connie says, Chub Lake Jack Daniel, owned by Linda Jacobson (Wisconsin), is another Morgan doing very well in endurance. Jeanne Slominski, in California has ridden her Son Beam Sirprize in many endurance rides. Yet another friend of Connie's, Ted Goppert, rides the mare Alamar's Chantel. In 1993, the Morgan gelding C Lain Winula, owned by Jerrilyn Huffman, was inducted into the AERC Horse Hall of Fame. And Connie says, "there are others."

If you are going to invest in conditioning, with the end in sight of being competitive in Morgan endurance, research the bloodlines and acquire or selectively breed to lines that have been successful in the past. Old Morgan blood is unmistakable. It is not uncommon to hear someone remark after watching a Morgan cover ground, "That's the biggest 14-hand horse I have ever seen." Those Old Government, Brunk, Sellman Morgans are still out there. They are scattered from New York to California. In the age of the computer, though, they can be found, and the prize is well worth the search. ■