

A Personal Quest The Morgan-Quarter Horse Connection

By Gail Perlee
SideKick #4

Growing up horse crazy in Vermont, I couldn't help knowing about the Morgan horse and its history. I had always heard that the Morgan was the oldest American breed, and that it was a factor in the formation of other breeds, including the Standardbred, American Saddlebred, Tennessee Walker and Quarter Horse. As an adult, I began to explore the fascinating history of the Morgan and its connection to the other breeds in more detail. Its role was well documented and acknowledged by the other breed associations, with one exception—the Quarter Horse. After moving to Arizona in 1968, I decided to look into the Morgan/QH connection and either prove it a myth or document its history. Little did I know that my search would continue for 28 years, and would still be in progress today. The following is a brief summary of my findings so far.

For starters, I read books about the QH breed, particularly those by breed historian Bob Denhardt. Imagine my disappointment when I found not one word about Morgans. The books seemed to say that not only did the Morgan have no part in the formation of QH, but that the QH was an earlier breed, dating from the importation of the English race horse, Janus, in 1752. This would mean that the QH rather than the Morgan was the first American breed. How could this be?

I began to research American horse books published before the QH Registry was started (1941) looking for breed information. Many of the 30+ books I examined included descriptions of the various breeds, including after the 1840s, the Morgan. Nowhere did I find mention of Quarter Horses or any similar breed. In contrast, an entire book on Morgans had been published in 1857, *Morgan Horses: A Premium Essay of the Origin, History and Characteristics of the Remarkable American Breed of Horses* by D. C. Linsley, and the first volume of the *Morgan Horse Register* was published in 1894.

Everything I read, except for books published a 1941, led to the conclusion that the QH is a 20th century breed. Of course, there have been horse races ever since man first tamed the horse, and during early Colonial times, when there were no proper roads or race tracks, short races of 80 rods or so were popular wherever men, horses and a cleared path came together. Justin Morgan, himself, was famous for winning such races, but that doesn't make him a QH or a member of any breed. Undoubtedly, a certain amount of sprint horse breeding took place by crossing Thoroughbred sires with local mares, but the advent of roads and tracks soon shifted racing interest to harness horses, which remained the rage in America until almost the turn of the 20th Century. Today's QHs can trace their ancestry back to Colonial time only through 200 years of Thoroughbred blood.

Having established to my own satisfaction that the Morgan breed predates the QH by almost 100 years, I started to look for evidence of Morgan blood in the American cow pony and the modern QH. One of the first pieces of the puzzle came from the book *The California Stock Horse* (1949) by Luis B Ortega. He says many people throughout the country have conceived the idea that from the time during the 1870s to the early 1900s the horses used in the cow business were all California mustangs. This is a long way from the truth.

As a matter of fact, the saddle stocks of many of the big ranchos were of good breeds with Morgan and Thoroughbred predominant. The remudas had fine, big, strong, well-reined horses that could really run. Cattle of that time were spooky and it required strong, tough horses that were well broke to handle them.

As I looked through books and articles by ranchers and old cowboys, I found more and more references to Morgans as cow horses. For instance, in the December 1976 issue of *Western Horseman* magazine, C. O. Peterson, who lived and worked in California's San Bernardino mountain ranching country for over 40 years,

recalled the magnificent feral horses that roamed the area in the 1920s as "mostly big, rangy animals of Morgan and Hambletonian ancestry and of solid colors-bay sorrel and a few blacks. There were some real beauties among them". A 1927 photo of one of these bands shows horses of distinctly Morgan character. He went on to explain that they were either strays from local ranches or their descendants. He named the Charlie Weiss WWI remount operation and the Hitchcock, Shay', Heart Bar and Talmadge Bros. Ranches as possible sources of the wild ones, which thrived in small bands until 1934 when the Taylor Grazing Act took effect and the wholesale removal of feral livestock from the public lands was begun.

In his book, *Back Trail of an Old Cowboy* (1982), Paul Young, a 90 year old Montana cow puncher tells of going into the Ute Mountain area as a young man and capturing a band of feral Morgans that had been left there by a rancher who went bust. A son of the rancher told Young that a two year old Morgan stud and three mares had been turned loose with the other horses when his family cleared out five years before. Young didn't find the stud, but he did get a band of "pretty, well-bred Morgan mares" that he took back to Utah and sold to ranchers for breeding stock.

Writing in the November 1961 issue of *Western Horseman*, T. W. Daniels states most of the miles "I have ridden (as a cowboy and with the US Forest Service) in the past 45 years have been put behind me on Morgan or Morgan-bred horses. The old Circle Ranch (in Wyoming's Wind River country) back in the early 1900s still had a few of these standard-bred Morgans for handling stock on their ranch". Daniels goes on to tell some stories showing the endurance and cow sense of these horses which he used when he rode for the Circle Ranch from 1918 until the early 20s.

SELLMAN RANCH

Texas, the cradle of the Quarter Horse, was no stranger to Morgan blood. In 1881, the 40,000 acre Sellman Ranch in McCulloch and San Saba counties in West Texas was begun. By 1886, Richard Sellman was importing Morgan stallions to cross on his range mares. First was MAJOR GORDON. His daughters were crossed with the 3/4 brothers MAJOR ANTOINE and GOLD MEDAL. Their daughters were mated with THE ADMIRAL, who arrived in 1908, and his daughters with HEADLIGHT MORGAN, which the ranch purchased in 1914 at the age of 21. The old horse sired 112 foals for Sellman before his death. The last major Morgan stud acquired by Sellman was the Remount horse RED OAK, which he got from the US Government Farm in Vermont in 1918.

From 1905, when he started registering his horses, through 1925 when he died and the ranch was broken up, Richard Sellman registered 689 Morgans from 273 mares. Peak production year was 1921, when 54 foals were born.

For 45 years the Sellman ranch produced Angus cattle, ran thousands of sheep and bred Morgan cow horses for their own use and to sell as cow horses and breeding stock. Some were sold to other ranches which preserved their heritage, such as Roland Hill's Horseshoe Cattle Company in California, and a few went to the US Range Experiment Station in Miles City, Montana. Most simply vanished into the immense ranch lands of West Texas, or were sold to other Western ranches to improve their remudas. For instance, Jack C Kinney of Tucson, Arizona, an honorary Vice-President of AQHA in 1941, purchased 12 Morgans, 10 colts and 3 fillies, from the Sellman estate in 1925.

RANCH

OWNER: SWEN MAGNUS SWENSON

MANAGER: FRANK S HASTINGS

One of the big outfits that acquired Sellman stock x, a-the legendary SMS Ranch, which was founded by the sons of Swedish immigrant Swen magnus Swenson in the late 1870s. Eventually their holdings encompassed four 100,000-acre operations in West Texas, the Throckmorton, Flat Top, Tongue River and Spur

ranches. They ran Hereford and Angus cattle and raised their own cow horses, starting with 50 Spanish mares and a white stallion, said to be an Arab.

According to long time SMS manager Frank S Hastings in his book, *A Ranchman's Recollections* (1921), "mainly, cow horse breeding has been a pure case of scrambled eggs". The SMS was a good example of that, says Hastings, having over the years added Missouri saddle horse, Thoroughbred, grade Percheron, Clydesdale, Standardbred, German Coach horse and Morgan blood. Of the Morgans, he says: "During the past five years, nine registered horses from the Richard Sellman Farm, Rochelle, Texas, have been added. They weight 1,000 to 1150 pounds naked".

More information on the SMS Morgans came to light in an article by A. M. Hartung in the March, 1950 *Western Horseman*. The SMS had purchased the stallions GOTCH and RED BIRD and seven mares from Sellman in 1914. According to Hartung, the Ranch used this Morgan blood in their program for the next several years and then added Arab blood using three Remount stallions, which "crossed well with the Morgans, proving to be intelligent and easy to break". Probably the SMS remuda, which numbered 1,100 head, including 500 cow horse geldings, 100 draft horses and 275 brood mares, was fairly typical to that used by other large Western ranches, and over time, given rigorous culling and selection for cow horse characteristics a fairly uniform cow horse type emerged which, I believe, became the foundation for the modern Quarter Horse.

THE TRIANGLE & 6666 RANCHES TOM BURNETT: OWNER

The Sellman and SMS ranches were not the only big Texas spreads to use Morgans. Born in 1887, the son of a Texas pioneer, Tom Burnett owned both the famous Triangle and 6666 ranches, which comprised half a million acres of prime Texas ranch land. Burnett purchased the five-year-old stud, REDOLENT, from the Sellman Ranch in 1925, and kept him for a cow horse until his death at an advanced age.

In 1934, Burnett traveled to the well-known Brunk t Morgan Farm in Illinois and bought a stud, JUBILEE KING, and a mare, DEURA, to use in his breeding program along with Redolent, Beeches Yellow Jacket and Joe Hancock.

JUBILEE KING must have found favor with other Texas ranchers as well, because two of his sons were acquired from the Brunks by Sawyer Cattle Co. in San Angelo and the Quitaque Cattle Co. in Quitaque. [Editors note: These sons were JUZAN and JUBAN.]

Although Burnett did not live to see the establishment of the QH, many of the horses he bred were to become foundation stock for the new breed, and Burnett lines are still prominent in QH reining and cutting horses, JUBILEE KING stood at the Triangle for seven years, and was willed back to the Brunks by Burnett. He went on to found a major family of Morgans and his blood is much sought after today.

THE MATADOR FOUNDER: HENRY H CAMBELL

Another legendary cattle ranch, the Matador at Channing, Texas, also ran Morgan stallions. In Jeanne Thomas' widely published article, "Morgan Bloodlines in Texas Quarter Horses", Beale Queen, one of the original members of AQHA and for many years a breeder of Quarter race horses, states that the Matador had either six or seven stallions, three of them registered Morgans:

RONDEAU by Headlight Morgan, and a bay stallion whose name has been forgotten, both purchased from the Sellman Estate, and PLUTO by Troubadour of Willowmoor. Pluto was foaled at the US Government Farm in 1922 and sold to the Sellman Ranch as a yearling. The Matador got him in 1927 from Sellman's son-in-law,

and kept him until 1932 when he was sold to the JA Ranch.

The Matador was the second largest American ranch, eclipsed only by the King Ranch, and was running 47,000 head of cattle on 800,000 acres. According to George Wallis in his book, *Cattle Kings of the Staked Plains* (1957), the Matador was founded in 1878 by Henry H Cambell, a pioneering Texas cattleman, on land that had once been home to millions of buffalo. It was prime country for beef production, and by 1881 Cambell controlled 100,000 acres and ran upwards of 40,000 head of cattle. The Ranch raised its own cow horses using Morgan and Steeldust stallions. By the turn of the century, the Matador ran cattle on huge leased tracts in South Dakota (500,000 acres and 700 head of horses), Montana, Canada and Brazil. They acquired yet more land in Texas including a 400,000-acre division of the X1T ranch. In 1951 the Matador sold for \$19,000,000.

Around 1900 a wiry youth named Claude Jeffers went to work breaking horses for the Matador. He stayed for 36 years, starting horses for the 60-70 cowboys who branded about 10,000 calves a year. Jeffers would break Anywhere from 50 to 500 head per year, and in his peak year he broke 580 horses, putting them through nine saddles each, with the help of only one assistant.

Jeffers believed in using gentle methods, and was one of the few old time "bronc peelers" who did not use spurs. According to Wallis, Jeffers thought that "the Morgans make the best cow horses. They are just about the right weight for the average man, and have lots of ginger and endurance too. The Steeldusts are also fine. They are active and learn quickly. They can't stand as much riding as the Morgans though. They are a little too nervous and work themselves down too soon." Asked about Mustangs, he said, "most of them are too small and they never get gentle. It takes a gentle horse to work cattle efficiently". In 1935, a year before he died, Claude Jeffers rode his horse High Power to first in the big cutting at the Texas Cowboys Reunion Stamford, Texas. HIGH POWER, half Morgan and half Steeldust, was then declared the best cutting horse in the state of Texas.

GOODNIGHT RANCH OWNER: CHARLES GOOD-NIGHT

Yet another historic West Texas ranch ran Morgan studs. This was the Goodnight Ranch at Palo Duro, later known as the JA Ranch. In 1876, Charles Good-night founded the first ranch in the Texas Panhandle. Trying to find markets for his cattle in the 1860s, he and Oliver Loving had pioneered the Goodnight-Loving Trail, which ran from Texas to New Mexico and supplied beef to the US Army. Later on Goodnight and John Chisum opened the Chisum Trail to supply the Colorado gold miners.

JA RANCH OWNER: JOHN A ADAIR

In 1879, Goodnight sold a partnership in his ranch to an Englishman, John A Adair. By the late 1880s, 100,000 cattle were ranging over 1,335,000 acres, and Goodnight had sold out to Adair. The brand was changed to JA to reflect the initials of the new owners.

MRS. CORNELIA ADAIR

In the early 20th Century, the ranch passed into hands of Mrs. Cornelia Adair, and it was she who brought in the first recorded Morgans. In 1920 she purchased the Morgan stallions DAN and DIXIE DAN from the Sellman Ranch. Both were sons of Headlight Morgan and foaled in 1916. They ran with the mares until sold in 1927, probably because they had too many daughters in the brood mare band.

The JA must have liked the Morgans, because in 1932 they bought PLUTO from the Matador. This trading around of breeding stallions was common practice among ranchers as it prevented inbreeding. Pluto,

however, remained on the JA until his death from old age.

OTHER RANCHES

The use of Morgan stallions as herd sires on Western ranches was by no means limited to Texas, and several big outfits besides the Sellman Ranch used purebred Morgan stock. Some of these are Roland Hill's Horseshoe Cattle Co and Tehachapi ranches, William Randolph Hearst's Sunical And Piedmont Land & Cattle Company in California, the Hunewill's Circle H Ranch in Nevada, the Theis Ranch in Kansas, the Jackson Ranch in Montana and the LU Sheep Company in Wyoming as well as many smaller ranches throughout the West. All of them raised cow horses for their own use and sold both using horses and breeding stock to other ranches.

For instance, registered Morgan studs from the LU Sheep Co. were used on the nearby Padlock and Pitchfork ranches. Not only that, but transfer records in the Morgan Horse Register show a steady stream of young Morgan stallions going to ranches all over the West from the turn of the Century until the late 1950s. In the period from 1920 to 1938 alone, there were transfers of 164 stallions to the Western states. Most of them went to California (35), Kansas (36), Montana (28), and Texas (28). These figures do not, of course, include the Remount stallions and horses that were sold but not officially transferred.

THE AQHA

It is possible to estimate the influence of the Morgan on the QH by looking at the registrations of stock from some of the big ranches that were know to run Morgans. For instance, in Volume I of the QH Register 270 JA Ranch horses, mostly mares, were registered. An additional 24 were out of JA mares and at least 3 by JA stallions. Thirty-nine Matador horses were registered, and another 34 were out of Matador mares. Tom Burnett (Triangle Ranch) stock accounts for another 118 registrations, with 34 more out of Burnett mares. If you add up all the Vol, I foundation QHs of known Morgan blood (188) and all those bred by the Matador, JA and Triangle ranches (427), plus those by or out of stock bred by these ranches (95), you come up with a total of 710 early QHs with probable Morgan blood. When you factor in the thousands of Morgan and part Morgan cow horses bred on Western ranches from the 1880s on, you begin to get some idea of the contribution of the Morgan to the development of the American cow pony, and ultimately, to the foundation of the Quarter Horse.

You may ask, if the QH has so much Morgan blood, why are the two breeds so different in appearance and way of going?

One reason is that the QH breed was quickly closed to all outside blood except Thoroughbred, and it is still open to Thoroughbred blood today. The other reason is the different directions taken by the two associations after WWII. While the Morgan folks concentrated on producing English style horses suitable to be shown in the Saddlebred manner, the Quarter Horse people tried to produce a Western type horse suitable for the trail, arena and quarter mile racing. This trend toward specialization went on until the sport horse movement of the 1980s caused both breeds to consider returning to their more versatile roots. Forty years of specialization has changed both breeds, and not all the changes were positive.

As the American horse buying population changes from pleasure/show to sport uses, both breed associations are encouraging their members to produce good all around athletes that can be successful in several types of competition. Already, we are seeing more QHs as hunters and in eventing. Morgans are beginning to excel in combined driving, dressage and even reining and cutting. Perhaps in the future, the shared past of the Morgan and the Quarter Horse will again be obvious in the descendants of both breeds.

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FURTHERMORE

In November, 1993 The Western Horseman reprinted an article that was originally printed in a February, 1949 issue about W. T. Waggoner entitled "The Horses of the Three D's". It sheds additional light on the "historical lineage" of the original QH. "Tom Waggoner knew all about his horses, how they were bred, and what became of them. Unfortunately, he did not keep records for unregistered horses. As a result, since his death nothing exists on paper to present a reliable history of his Quarter Horse breeding program." The article mentions that one of the stallions that he owned was named Texas. Richard Sellman registered a Morgan stallion named Texas in 1909. He was a black with a star and snip. (The Admiral x Sallie Antoine). W. T. Waggoner favored a dun horse and purchased buckskin from Bud Parker in Weatherford, TX in 1910.

Waggoner also had a stallion named Texas Chief. It was noted that "Texas Chief was the outstanding representative of the great Traveler strain of Quarter t Horses". (181) Sellman also foaled a Morgan named Texas Chief in 1917 [Morgan Chief x Emma B]. The AMHA CD ROM lists no progeny for Texas Chief. Sellman thought highly enough of the colt to register him, and then there is no record of him. Apparently, he was one of the many Morgans who disappeared.

An article, "Dick Sellman and His Morgans" by A. M. Hartung, was presented in the Nov. 1950, Western Horseman. Mr. Hartung evidently knew Richard Sellman as noted in the following statement: "Dick Sellman was alive to the fact that Morgan breeders were rapidly losing the original type of Morgan horse. He informed the writer that the Morgan horse breeders had for years been infusing too much of the larger, coarser blood of the Standardbred. They were thereby losing the original type of Morgan horse, according to Mr. Sellman, who was always looking for stallions of the original true type and blood". Mr. Hartung also states that in Richard Sellman's 1912 catalog he stated that "he could show more genuine equine beauty and quality in his herd of registered Morgan horses than any breeder in the United States".

Mr. Hartung notes that Dick Sellman raised many excellent Morgans from The Admiral including TEXAS 5889, THE CORPORAL 5991, DEXTER 6004 and RED BIRD, *who was the top stallion at the Swenson SMS ranch near Stamford, Texas.* [Emphasis mine] Other noted sons of The Admiral were SUNNY SOUTH, ADMIRAL GORDON, THE RAVEN, MAZEPPA, BLACK PRINCE, RED BOY, MOUNTAIN VALE, etc.

The stallions noted from Gold Medal were GOLDEN 5691, MEDAL 6675, GOLDEN RULE and others. GOLDEN RULE is listed in The Morgan Registry as being a "golden" chestnut.