

WORKING WESTERN

by DEAN JACKSON

THE MORGAN AS A STOCK HORSE

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When we speak of the Morgan breed most people think of a breed that is used entirely in the East. The Morgan is very much a western breed. He is the all-purpose horse of the country. The Morgan is every bit as much of a utility horse now as he was a century ago.

The first Morgan horse used on the Jackson Ranch at Harrison, Montana, was acquired in the late 1880s by Thomas W. Jackson, pioneer rancher and horseman. The Morgan was used as a light harness horse, stock horse, and Sunday mount. He sired many of the better using horses in the locality during that time.

Our first experience with registered Morgans began back in 1918 when J. C. Jackson purchased his first Morgan stal-

lion, Hal Mercury, Jr., MHR 6819, foaled in 1913. This stallion carried some of the finest blood obtainable. From that time on, the Morgan proved itself to us. Some of the other herd sires used at that time are: Chief Bugler, MHR 6992, a double grandson of Jubilee De Jarnette, who was the son of Lady De Jarnette (recognized as the top harness mare of all time); Found At Last, MHR 7240; Delbert, MHR 7707; Monte L., MHR 8423; Ken Carmen, MHR 7815; Major R M, MHR 8011; Red Racer, MHR 8919; Juzan, MHR 7895; and Fleetfield, MHR 10572.

Endurance, level-headedness, sure-footedness, cow savvy, and willingness are some of the essentials of a good stock horse. The Morgan breed generally possesses these characteristics and is noted for them.

As for endurance, the Morgan has been winning high honors consistently through the years in the country's leading

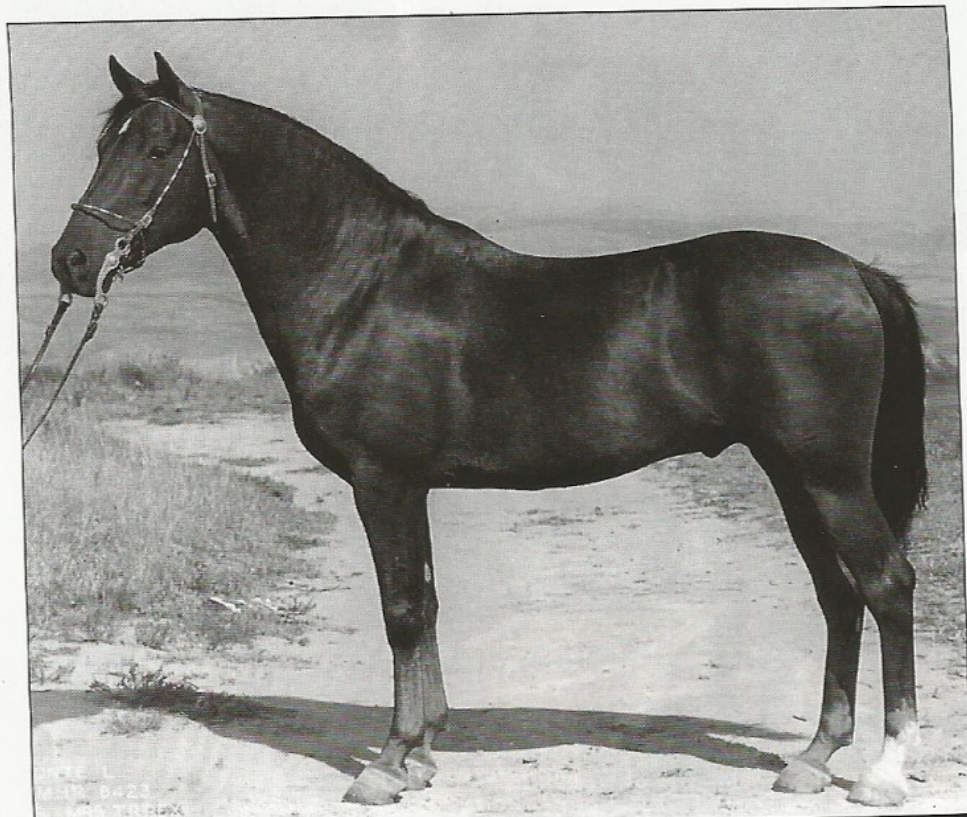
endurance contests. A good stock horse must have endurance. It is mighty embarrassing to the horseman to have to change mounts at noon when his partner doesn't have to. Take one look at a good Morgan and you can see that he has the conformation of an all-day horse. Good prominent withers, well-sprung ribs, deep and wide chest indicating tremendous lung capacity, shoulder blades and hip bone reasonably long and oblique, excellent underpinning with good solid clean bone that can endure abuse without bad effects, and an adequate amount of *average to long* type muscle, are things to look for.

The quality of level-headedness cannot be stressed too much when we talk of working stock horses. Many a cowboy's life has been saved by this good kind of level-headed stock horse who did not blow up when his rider got into some sort of storm—whether it be a 1,200-pound cow on the end of a rope, a snubbed bronc, or a tangle in a barbed-wire fence. Level-headedness is one of the essential characteristics of the Morgan breed. Morgan breeders throughout the country have been selecting and breeding toward this merit for many years.

It takes a sure-footed stock horse to stay on his feet in extremely steep and rough country. He must be agile enough on his feet that this type of going does not tire him. In open country or in close corral work, he must be quick and sure-footed in order to turn a cow or catch a calf.

In the many years of breeding and using Morgans we have found a correlation between the shortness of coupling and the degree of surefootedness in a horse. A good Morgan is always short-coupled. Justin Morgan, the only horse in history to found an entire breed, was one of the shortest-coupled horses ever foaled. The Morgan breed has retained this type since the breed was originated.

A good stock horse must do more than trail a bunch of cattle with his head down. He must be alert and watchful of the cattle. He must have the adaptability and the willingness to be trained for this work. In other words, he must possess cow savvy. Breeding, environment, and training are the principle components of cow savvy. I have seen Morgans that were bred and raised in country where they had nothing to do with cattle show extreme interest, understanding, and enjoyment when worked with cattle for the first time. There are many natural-born cow horses of Morgan breeding in the West. Seeing and training this type of



Monte L. (Photo © John H. Williamson Photography)

horse is good proof of the natural working ability and cow savvy that the Morgan breed possesses.

Probably one of the most universally-known characteristics of the Morgan is his willingness to learn and his easiness to train. Perhaps you have heard the old saying, "*There's not a horse bred that has a larger heart than the Morgan.*" There seems to be a closer understanding between the Morgan and his rider than in most breeds; a feeling of companionship, whether the horse is used for work or for pleasure. The willingness of a Morgan is one merit of the breed that is brought to realization only by the horse enthusiast who actually breeds, trains, and uses the Morgan.

The disposition of a Morgan is outstanding. He is sensible enough to be used as a specialty horse, such as an arena horse, pleasure horse, or a good trail mount. He possesses enough spirit and animation with a natural body carriage for a good show horse, whether shown under English or western saddle or in harness. This is further support that the versatile Morgan truly makes the family horse.

Through the years we have endured the popularity of other breeds of light horses and never felt that we had to change to another breed to get the type of those that was needed to do our ranch work and, at the same time, sell well.

During the past 39 years we have bred, raised, trained, and sold over 300 head of Morgan horses. Of this number, approximately 38 percent have been sold as stock or using-type ranch horses. Some 20 percent of our sales are to previous buyers. When a breeder repeats a sale it is an excellent indication he is raising the type of horse that satisfies a customer.

Some of the better cow horses of the West had Morgan blood infused in their veins. This infusion dates back to the early 1900s. The late Dick Sellman, who owned the Mountain Vale Ranch in southwest Texas, was one of the largest Morgan breeders in the country at that time. He owned over 400 head of registered Morgan horses. The Mountain Vale Morgan stallions were sold and used all over the country. Some of the stallions were purchased by purebred Morgan breeders, and others were used to sire stock horses from stock horse-type mares.

The utilitarian value of the Morgan cannot be duplicated. He is what we like to refer to as a "middle of the road" type. The genuine adaptability of the breed has resulted in ever-increasing demand, sales, and popularity of the Morgan horse. 