

The Gaited Morgan, From the Beginning, by Jackie Farmer
Edited for publication by Vali Suddarth

There are trails that lead back through time—through the pages of Morgan Horse history and that of the other modern breeds—to the Old World, centuries ago in Europe. In those days, saddle horses were amblers, horses that did not trot, but traveled instead with an easy four beat gait, intermediate between the walk and the canter. Today's trails still echo with the four beat rhythms of the amblers, also known as single-footers, travelers, and gaited horses. The modern day travelers are many and varied; the Tennessee Walking Horse, the Missouri Fox Trotter, the Kentucky Mountain Horse, Rocky Mountain Saddle Horse, The Mountain Pleasure Horse, Walkaloosa, The Peruvian Paso, The Paso Fino, The Icelandic, the Florida Cracker Horse, and the Gaited Morgan Horse. Many Appaloosas as well as quarter horses also carry the gait gene for the single-foot. There are several lesser known gaited breeds.

These horses all share a common trait; they perform a variation of the singlefoot, the rack, the running walk, the foxtrot, or the stepping pace. The rack is a faster version of the evenly timed running walk, while the foxtrot and the stepping pace are unevenly timed. Many gaited Morgan owners use descriptive terms such as ambling and broken pace to describe what their horses are doing. Some refer to the rack or running walk as the old fashioned single-foot. Gaited Morgans do one or more of these intermediate gaits in place of, or in addition to, the trot.

In order to understand WHY there are GAITED MORGANS, we need to look back at the development of the Morgan Breed, none of which is today quite what it started out to be. We all are aware that the Morgan breed began with Justin Morgan, the horse referred to by the name of his owner, and so recorded in the registry (but known as Figure 1789-1821) a rather short, drafty-but-stylish pulling, driving and saddlehorse. Many lines of the modern Morgans have developed into stretchy, fine harness and park horses, which often more closely resemble today's American Saddlebreds than they resemble Justin Morgan. Other families are known for concentration of classic Morgan characteristics and consequently are on the lower end of the height spectrum, with more tractable personalities, heavier bone and more substance, more like the first Morgan, Justin himself. There are many TWH and Mountain Horses that look like Morgans. These similarities are understandable because all of the horses mentioned above share, to some extent, common ancestors. All of the four main families of Morgans carry the pace gene and the gene for strong gait, a modifier which allows some strong trotters and pacers to hold their gaits when other horses are galloping.

Early Morgans were used principally in harness, as draft animals and as roadsters. In heavy draft work, trotters pull more efficiently than pacers and amblers. As roads improved, there was less and less demand for the ambling saddle horse and more demand for speed at the trot. For a time, in the early days of the register, Morgan pacers were acceptable, if they were competitive in harness. Dan Patch, the great Standardbred Pacer, was introduced into the Morgan gene pool under Rule Two, with offspring breeding on at the L. U. Sheep Ranch.

The government program began in the days of Dan Patch, shortly after the turn of the century, as the Standardbred assumed control of harness racing, automobiles took command of the roadways, and suddenly it seemed there was no place for the Morgan to go, other than the Cavalry. Morgan horses had played illustrious roles in the War Between the States, with General Stonewall Jackson's Morgan pacer, Little Sorrel as a prime example. He must have been an extraordinary animal, since most of the Confederate Cavalry were mounted on American Saddlebred (Saddlebreds). The little horse, also known as Fancy, was the General's favorite battle mount until the day he fell mortally wounded from Fancy's back, a victim of "friendly fire". While the horse was described as a pacer by Henry Kyd Douglas in "I Rode With Stonewall", I assume that he was a stepping pacer (four beat) since many people today call these horses pacers. A true hard pacer would not have been a very comfortable mount, nor very handy in a battle situation. Little Sorrel died at the age of thirty three and is mounted on display at the Virginia Military Institute.

The goal of the early Government program and, later, under Earl Kranz, was to preserve and improve the breed. Mr. Kranz felt that this could best be accomplished by the introduction of Thoroughbred and Saddlebred lines. The Lippitt family actually came into being because of one man's opposition to this idea. Robert Lippitt Knight selected a limited number of what he felt were the best representatives of the Old Morgan line and with his breeding program began a separate and distinct family of Morgans. The U. S. Government operated Cavalry remount stations in the west, where Morgan horses were bred for its use. These breeding programs were in existence until the late forties, modified and operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and located on Indian Reservations such as Pine Ridge, South Dakota. All these Morgan groups harbored the pace/strong gait genes to a greater or lesser degree.

The focus of raising Morgans turned to producing show horses in the first half of the twentieth century. Since the single-foot was deemed inappropriate for the show ring, and because five gaited Morgans could not successfully compete, in most cases, with the larger faster, five gaited American Saddlebred, the emphasis was placed on three gaits, the most important of which was the Big Trot. An attempt was made to eliminate the pace or gait gene – a virtually impossible task, since **the genetic blueprint for gait is as much as part of the first generations of Morgans as many of the desired characteristics that are bred for today.** In many of the western states, the breeding goal was to produce working ranch horses, and I believe that since a single-footer is a lot easier to ride for forty or fifty miles, and since the gait does not interfere with the horse's ability to cut or rope cattle (or to be a reining horse, for that matter), there was not such an effort to cull out the smooth gaited single-footers.

The early Government program used General Gates, the foundation sire, on such mares as Ellen #0642, and the American Saddle bred, Harrison Bell ASHR#3712, "reclaiming" the Morgan blood of Harrison Chief by Indian Chief, which had been foundation blood to the American Saddlebred. Both of these mares occasionally produced offspring of mixed gait. These colts and fillies were culled, but not so their siblings, nor the dams themselves, which bred on, passing along the recessive pace gene. Eleanor Gates (General Gates x Ellen), the first filly born at the farm at Weybridge, likely carried the genes for gait. General Gates himself, goes back to Copperbottom, who won races in all gaits.

Many early Morgans were able to pace and singlefoot. Today, many, many Morgans carry the pace gene. Eldon Eadie states that “every foal that paces during its early days and then straightens out to trot, as it should is manifesting the pace gene, which is always recessive to the trot gene. This should hardly be a surprise; Justin Morgan and his sons were bred to many a pacing mare. Sherman’s dam was believed by many historians to be a Narragansett Pace (article by Mabel Owen, TMH, 1974). Woodbury had many pacing descendants (Vol.1, American Morgan Horse Register). The dam of Black Hawk was also believed to be a Narragansett Pacer (article by Wallace Smith, TMH, and July 1968). Lady de Jarnette, probably the most famous Morgan show horse of all time, and often called the most perfectly gaited, paced and single-footed, by eye witness accounts, in addition to her other show gaits, seven in all. She has had a profound effect on the Morgan breed, mingling with the blood of Daniel Lambert through Jubilee Lambert to produce her only offspring, Jubilee De Jarnette, and his great grandson, Jubilee King, with thirteen crosses to Black Hawk.

Jubilee King is to be found in the pedigrees of most of the Western bred Gaited Morgans. Some believe that he is a source of gait, while others vehemently oppose the possibility, theorizing instead, that he was bred to many gaited mares of Flyhawk descent, and of government breeding. The Flyhawk-Sentola (full sister of Jubilee King) combination is seen in the pedigrees of many Western Gaited Morgans. No one knows for sure. What we do know is that the sources of gait are widespread throughout the Morgan population. The names of Flyhawk, The Brown Falcon, Mentor, and Stellar are strongly associated with gaited offspring. There are many, many more in the government, Working Western, Brunk and even in the Lippits. Archie O, Ann Royal and Sea Gull were documented as five gaited Morgans.

Many Morgan fans do not know that the Gaited Morgan exists, but they are becoming more and more prevalent and popular. The genetic blueprint that made these horses gaited was designed to provide a musculoskeletal system that could travel many miles comfortably, without the jarring effects of the trot on the horse itself, not to mention its’ rider. These horses are smooth travelers, born and bred, and the assets of the gaited Morgan are growing in recognition and popularity. Trail riders and even those who show in open shows (gaited Morgans may not compete in an AMHA Morgan show at the gait), recognize that they are beautiful, with chiseled heads, big soft eyes, and tiny ears, tractable and smooth to ride, the perfect horse, the original American horse, with that extra ability to gait.

Addendum: Since Jackie wrote this article back in the mid 1990’s a group of gaited Morgan owners came together and, in 1997, founded the Morgan Single-footing Horse Association, accepted as a service organization of the American Morgan Horse Association. Ann Gerhardt, a known Mountain Horse advocate and Jackie hatched the idea along with Lea and Roy Heib of DIA H Morgans in Washington State, and gathered known breeders in Utah such as Bruce Olson, Noslo Morgans, Mel Frandsen of MaryMel Morgans, Gary Gray of Silvershoe Morgans, who decided to create the organization. Bruce Olson did the paperwork and the club was formed with the first working President Linnea Sidi (Regional 9 Director, AMHA) at the helm. Membership numbers have been as high as 165 at times, (pretty good considering the number of gaited Morgans is less than 10% of the entire breed population) and the club is a growing body of dedicated gaited Morgan admirers. Numerous other members and officers have

dedicated countless hours to create a friendly and cooperative Association for Gaited Morgan Admirers. An informational website has been developed, a quarterly newsletter is published, group advertising and promotions are launched with members volunteering at Horse Expos, and an annual ride or meeting has been held in different areas of the country over the years. The American Morgan Horse Association continues to strengthen its support of the Gaited Morgan, recognizing it as an extra special horse, supporting the owners and breeders through promotions. Learn more about Gaited Morgans at www.gaitedmorgans.org where you will find gait Information, advertisement for horses, videos of numerous gaited Morgans and a photo gallery, a list of articles, a partial Membership list, information on how to become a member and membership benefits, and other contact information. Or you may contact Vali Suddarth directly at 573-286-1954 or valizoe1@yahoo.com

For a more complete article, see the www.gaitedmorgans.org, Morgan Singlefooting Horse Association Website.