

# THE STATE OF MORGAN HORSE BREEDING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

BY STEPHEN KINNEY, EDITOR, THE MORGAN HORSE



Sheridan Sturm visits with the filly Stolen Halo at her family's Stolen Aces Farm in Nevada. (photo by Savannah Sturm)



The stallion service for 2021 Park Saddle World Champion Ledgefields Jagged Edge topped the Superior Morgan Sweepstakes Stallion Service Auction. (photo by Howard Schatzberg)

*Editor's Note: Saddle Horse Report is delighted to present this guest editorial from the Editor of The Morgan Horse, Stephen Kinney. The AMHA bases the Sire Rating in its annual "Breeding Guide" on the statistics which are maintained by Saddle Horse Report's comprehensive Breeders' Report program. We are delighted to work together with the AMHA to promote the Morgan Horse and we appreciate the collaborative efforts we enjoy with The Morgan Horse.*

The American Morgan Horse Association chose the words "Exceeding Expectations" as its theme for the recent convention held in Orlando, Florida, in conjunction with the United Professional Horsemen's Association. It is an apt description of the year the Morgan breed enjoyed in 2021 when registration, sales, breeding, and economic activity surged.

"AMHA couldn't be happier with the state of the Morgan horse industry at this time," AMHA Executive Director Carrie Mortensen commented. "The increase in Registry activities in the past couple of years hopefully foreshadows continued growth of our beloved breed."

## REGISTRY ACTIVITY

AMHA's three-member Registry staff "handled 10,425 transactions, compared to 8,442 in 2020," AMHA Registrar Erica Eulau stated in her annual report to the membership. "Registrations continued to remain strong in 2021 with 2,110 Morgan horses registered, up approximately 13 percent from 2020 and up approximately 21 percent from 2019."

New registrations in any given year are not necessarily a precise reflection of mares bred the previous year. Tracking statistics over a five year period, Eulau's report notes new registrations account for

about 74 percent of breeding activity from the previous year. Other newborns will be registered in their yearling or two-year-old years and even beyond. Based on records filed at the time of the report in early January 2022, 629 stallions had bred 2,601 mares in 2021, up from a total of 2,377 mares bred in 2020. Registrations filed in 2021 totaled 2,110, an increase of more than 13 percent over new registrations in 2020.

Transactions included 3,626 transfers of ownership, an indication of sales activity in the breed. The "Registrar's Report" continues, "At the close of business on December 21, 2021, there were 609 registration applications pending completion. Of these, 399 are for 2021 foals."

Clearly the breed's inventory is in full recovery mode from the economic downturn of the late 2000s with breeders feeling confidence driven by demand in the marketplace for Morgan breeding stock, show horses, and for candidates in the many disciplines in which Morgans participate.

## AMISH BREEDING ACTIVITY

As any close observer knows, Morgan breeding and sales activity is coming to center in the Amish heartland where horsemen are enthusiastically answering the demand to supply young prospects to the show horse market. At the November 2021 Superior Morgan Horse Sale, held at the Michiana Event Center in Shipshewana, Indiana, roughly \$4.4 million changed hands in the two-day auction of Morgan horses and stallion services. CBMF Over The Moon (Astronomicallee x Halle Berry), the 11-year-old established breeding stallion, sold for a record-breaking \$250,000. The nine-year-old broodmare Dragonsmeade Quintessence, by

leading sire Mizrahi and out of Broodmare Hall of Fame inductee HVK Obsidian, sold for \$128,500. The full sister to the late Dragonsmeade Icon, a multiple world champion, is in foal to Park Harness World Champion Dressed Up GCH.

For two years the sale has featured a live auction of stallion services which will fund future purses in the soon-to-be inaugurated Superior Morgan Weanling Sweepstakes, the first of which will be held in November of 2022 at the Shipshewana site. On Friday evening during the recent auction, services to 120 stallions were sold with a single breeding to Park Saddle World Champion Ledgefields Jagged Edge (Get Busy x Queen's No Mercy, BHOF) bringing in \$22,500; the breeding to Dragonsmeade Axios (And The Beat Goes On x HVK Obsidian, BHOF) sold for \$19,000; and No Contest GCH (HVK Bell Flaire x Saralin Vogue) came in third with \$13,000. All monies raised at the Superior Morgan Sweepstakes Stallion Service Auction contribute to the prize money purse. For instance, 2023 weanlings resulting from the services auctioned in 2021 will be eligible to compete for a purse of \$336,000, distributed over the top 20 placings with an anticipated first place premium of \$92,000.

Erica Eulau's "Registrar's Report" contained more informative data about Amish Morgan breeding activity. Of the stallions siring the highest number of foals in 2020, nine of the top ten are owned by and/or standing at Amish breeders. The stallion breeding the highest number of mares in 2020 is also Amish owned. The horse topping both of these lists is Ledgefields Intrigue (Merriehill Home Stretch GCH x Queen's No Mercy, BHOF) who bred 54 mares in 2020. It is estimated that more than half of new foal registrations are coming from Amish breeders of Morgan horses.



Mizrahi maintains top billing in Saddle Horse Report's Breeders' Report for the eighth consecutive year. (photo by Ken Martin)

## SIRE RATING

In its annual "Breeding Guide" The Morgan Horse magazine relies on show results tracked by Saddle Horse Report's "Breeders REPORT" to rank top Morgan sires. It is considered definitive for its computerized compilation of results from virtually all world, Grand National, regional, USEF Class A, and AMHA Star Rated shows where Morgans compete. Once again the stallion Mizrahi (HVK Bell Flaire x Schiaparelli, BHOF) topped the list, owned by Playmor Farm LLC. It was the influential sire's eighth consecutive year at number one. Minion Millennium (Minion Valentino x Pompp And Pazazz, BHOF), owned by Roxanne Sardelli Greenway, was ranked second, his fourth year in that spot. Respectively, the two sires represent the Waseeka's In Command and Serenity Masterpiece sire lines, the bloodlines so evidently driving results in the Morgan show ring. Others in the top five include Graycliff Tony GCH (a son of Mizrahi), Ultras Special Agent, and Astronomicallee.



Cache' headlines the AMHA Broodmare Hall Of Fame as she is the all-time leading dam of world champions with nine to her credit. (photo by Howard Schatzberg)

## BROODMARE HALL OF FAME

A Broodmare Hall of Fame is relatively new to the Morgan breed. It was originally a research project of The Morgan Horse magazine, based on recorded results of world championships awarded since Morgan Grand National began in 1973. To be eligible for the designation a mare must have produced a minimum of three world champion offspring. Despite setting a high bar, the inaugural results reported in the magazine in 2019 inducted 63 mares into the record books. In April of that same year the Board of Directors accepted the Broodmare Hall of Fame as an official AMHA program and the initials BHOF are now included as a permanent part of a qualifying mare's registration record. The all-time leading dam of world champions is Cache' (DBA Street Talk x Fleeting Heart), the double Serenity Masterpiece bred mare owned by Indian Creek Farm, who is the dam of nine world champions. Kim's Bellegante (HVK Bell Flaire x Napaley's Obsession, BHOF), with eight world champions is second. AFF Beulah (Cedar CreekHarlequin x MKS Destiny's Echo) and Treble's Unchained Melody (Tug Hill Commando x MO Just A Wild Melody) have each produced seven world champions. HVK Ancient Cry (HVK Make 'Em Cry x Nobelle, BHOF) and Lost River Sanfield (John Wayne Brady x Jason's Winett) each have six. At this time, 83 mares have been named to the Broodmare Hall of Fame and the program has come to be considered a matter of prestige for owners and breeders.

## MORGAN COLORS

It wasn't that long ago that the Morgan Registry recognized eight colors (bay, brown, black, buckskin, dun, gray, chestnut, and palomino). In the early days of the Registry a number of colors were termed "unaccepted," including spotted horses under the old High White Rule (rescinded in 1996). To this day, the colors black, bay, brown, and chestnut continue to statistically dominate. The aforementioned "Registrar's Report," published in the January/February 2022 issue of The Morgan Horse, details that in the living population of Morgan horses more than 38 percent, or 27,253 horses, are bay; 30 percent, or 21,348, are chestnut; 16.7 percent, or 11,883, are black.



When the buckskin MLB Capo Di' Capo GCH was crowned Western Pleasure World Champion in 2013, he was believed to be the first "colorful" Morgan to win a big blanket of roses at Oklahoma. (photo by Howard Schatzberg)

But things have gotten a lot more colorful given the science of identifying color and coat characteristics, genetic testing to confirm these traits, and the relaxation of registry rules to allow all pure-bred Morgans to have their distinctive coloration recorded. In September 2021, Registrar Erica Eulau, with assistance from color genetics researcher Laura Behning, authored a comprehensive analysis of color in the Morgan breed in response to requests from color enthusiasts. The Registry now recognizes ten "base coat colors" and eight "color characteristics." A "characteristic" is a modifier to the base coat color or a dilution gene that change a horse's color appearance. The latter includes such modifiers as flaxen, roan, frame overo, and splash white. Genetic testing now scientifically confirms what was previously often inaccurate guesswork based solely on visible evidence (as Laura Behning points out, many Morgans who carry the high white splash gene are themselves solid colored).

Morgans in a rainbow of colors are being embraced by breeders and exhibitors and Morgan shows are seeing many more exotic-colored entries competing—and winning.

## FURTHER ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The Morgan breed is enjoying increased activity as reflected by record numbers of exhibitors competing at the Grand National & World Championship Morgan Horse Show and advertising support for the official breed journal. The 2021 Morgan Grand National, with more than 1,000 horses competing, celebrated its largest attendance in more than a decade. When The Morgan Horse published its 432 page November/December 2021 edition, it was the largest single issue of the official breed journal since 1985.

At the beginning of COVID related uncertainties, AMHA coined the phrase "Morgan Strong" to encourage ongoing resolve among breeders, owners, and exhibitors. The results of the 2021 breeding and show season suggest foresight was evident in that catchphrase.

"It's an exciting time to be involved with Morgan horses," Carrie Mortensen enthuses.



As the Morgan stallion ECS Made You Tense romps in the snow, it is easy to see that it's an exciting time to be involved with Morgan horses. (photo by Leah Borders)