



The Magic OF MAGGI

BY SARA PIZZUTO

Unlike most children who spend their young life longing for a pony of their own, Merin Maggi was given one on a whim.

“We went to one of those trail riding places and that’s where I fell in love with horses,” she said. “When I got off the horse, they told my mom that it was for sale. And she was crazy enough to say, ‘Ok, let’s buy a horse.’ We had no family members with previous riding experience at all.”

This spontaneous purchase led to a wonderful career in the Morgan horse industry for Maggi and an eventual training operation of her own. She opened the doors to her California based Maggi Stables in 2011. Now, along with newly appointed assistant trainer and instructor Lila Tatar, Maggi Stables has become a premier training facility for both Morgan and Saddlebred enthusiasts.

Merin Maggi began formal riding lessons with Susie Morgan at Triton Morgan Horses and then transitioned to Cathy Grimes Training Stables for her junior exhibitor career. During this time she was fortunate to show multiple horses, achieving great success and garnering world titles on the

Morgan breed’s biggest stages. She soon realized that despite her reluctance, a career in the horse industry was inevitable.

“I tried hard not to be a horse trainer,” she said. “I tried really hard not to do this but I was always so obsessed with horses and even as a junior exhibitor, towards the end of that career, I was working my own horses so it ended up being that there was nothing else that I wanted to do.”

Before opening her own facility, Maggi traveled across the country from California to Maine to work under legendary Morgan trainer David Rand. This allowed her additional experience learning the inner workings of a large training operation. Maggi Stables was soon opened following her stint at Rand, as the young trainer began her professional career at the helm of her own business at the mere age of 21.

“I am kind of a control freak and so I always had a vision of what I wanted to do,” Maggi said. “I just knew exactly what I wanted the barn to look like and how I wanted it ran and I didn’t second guess it.”

As Maggi Stables grew, Merin Maggi was linked to Morgan world champions among the likes of DLY Judgement Day, Master Disaster GCH, and Clayhill Affirmative GCH. Now, exactly 10 years after its inception, Maggi Stables is thriving—expanding their training to include American Saddlebreds as well. Former amateur and junior exhibitor world champion, Lila Tatar, has also been a welcomed addition to the team, joining Maggi Stables just a year ago as an assistant trainer and instructor.

1 Jennifer and Jacqueline Mahoney were Maggi’s first clients in 2011 and have remained a part of Maggi Stables since its inception. Maggi directed Jennifer Mahoney and Ledyard Oberon GCH to be named the 2020 Classic Pleasure Driving Ladies World Champions and the Classic Pleasure Driving Reserve World Champions.

2 Maggi Stables first open its doors to the public in 2011. Ten years later, it has become a successful training operation for both Morgan and Saddlebred competitors. Owner and trainer Merin Maggi celebrated a successful week at the 2020 Morgan Grand National with assistant trainer and instructor Lila Tatar and fiancé Dan Freudenblum.

Like Maggi, Tatar's first moments on horseback came at a trail riding facility. Unlike Maggi, Tatar didn't receive a horse after her first ride. However, a year after she began riding, her father entered a tack shop and was placed in contact with a prominent California horse trainer, Glynis Snowden. Soon, Tatar had established herself as one of the top junior exhibitor riders in the country, with a remarkable string of winning show horses. Her family's Lawson Creek Farm was established with Anne Judd at the helm, and even included a breeding program that produced world champions LC Amazing Spiderman and LC El Matador. Tatar was most famously linked to the multi-titled world champion Morgan legend Bada Bing and claimed her final amateur world title before joining Maggi Stables on the back of Epona's Mo'o Lio GCH. Both Tatar and Maggi developed a friendship early on that eventually developed into a working relationship when Tatar joined Maggi in business in 2020.

"I would help Merin at shows and Merin had been wanting me to come here for a while," Tatar said. "Things just worked out where it got to a point where I knew I loved horses and Merin was a good friend. I didn't want to lose my amateur status but I knew that this job would be up my alley."

Now together, both Merin Maggi and Lila Tatar are responsible for the success of the Morgans and Saddlebreds that make their home at the San Martin, California, facility. Whether the focus is junior horses, or junior exhibitor riders, a powerful three-gaited Saddlebred or a fluid moving Morgan hunter, Maggi Stables has been able to succeed in all facets of the equine world. Maggi explained that both her and Tatar work well together when devising a training program for their horses and clients.

"Lila handles the more sensitive horses and can give them confidence," Maggi said. "The ones that are more neutral, we just split up on a day to day basis whether it's her jogging one or riding it. It's really handy to have her because she can ride anything and I can throw her on anything and see what it looks like and check in. She's incredible with the clients."

Two of those clients, Jennifer and Jacqueline Mahoney, were Maggi's first ever clients when she opened the doors to her facility in 2011 and are still part of Maggi

Stables today. Jacqueline Mahoney drove under the spotlight twice in Oklahoma last year under the direction of Maggi and Tatar. She and Ledyard Oberon GCH were named both the Classic Pleasure Driving Ladies World Champions and the Classic Pleasure Driving Reserve World Champions.

Linda Sheridan is yet another client that has reached the pinnacles of success with the help of Maggi Stables. Maggi and Tatar directed Sheridan and CBMF She's Got The Beat to be named the Classic Pleasure Saddle Masters 61 and Over Grand National Champions in Oklahoma City last year. The training duo has paired Sheridan once again with park horse EKL Sophisticated Lady this year, as well as her newest teammate, Flintlock's Envy. Sheridan explained that she returned to the show ring after some time off partly due to the team at Maggi Stables.

"I came back after a hiatus because of Merin's integrity, because of her positivity and because of her encouragement," Sheridan said. "One of her multiple objectives is that the horse shows at his best. She is also encouraging about our ability to show our horses at their best and she's all about having fun. The show isn't a success unless you have fun and it doesn't matter what the ribbons look like. 'What are you going to work on?' is what she sometimes says before you go in the show ring. Each show experience is created like a practice ring. It's not as much about the ribbon as much as it is about whether you are learning and moving forward and having fun."

She continued to explain that Tatar has been a wonderful addition to the barn, as she and Maggi complement one another.

"I would say that first they are a great team," Sheridan said. "Lila brings a balance to Merin's perspective. Merin focuses on the horse, making that horse the best horse possible. Lila's focus that balances that is your riding. The balance that Lila brings is about my riding skills while Merin continues to have the focus on my horse and bringing my horse up to its potential."

Helen Roy has been both a winning exhibitor and a thrilled owner, with horses who are thriving at Maggi Stables. Roy purchased Ancient Oracle, the reigning Futurity Park Saddle Three-Year-Old World Champion, following his performances at the Morgan Grand National in 2020.



Helen Roy's Ancient Oracle is one of the standout junior horses in training at Maggi Stables. He joined the team after being crowned the Futurity Park Saddle Three-Year-Old World Champion just last year.



Maggi Stables has expanded its talents into the Saddlebred industry, including Wintersby, the reigning Ladies Fine Harness Reserve World's Champion of Champions. Lexie Saine and her family's Muy Loco Investments own this performer as well as Saddlebred Taco and Morgan, Muy Bien.



Merin Maggi and Lila Tatar have helped client Linda Sheridan return to the show ring. She guided CBMF She's Got The Beat to be named the Classic Pleasure Saddle Masters 61 and Over Grand National Champions in Oklahoma City last year.



Lila Tatar has become a welcomed addition to the Maggi Stables team as both an assistant trainer and instructor. She is shown here congratulating student Reese Tierney.



Regardless of division or breed, Maggi Stables has been able to put their stamp on all facets of the equine world. Their commitment to excellence extends beyond Morgans and focuses on Saddlebreds as well, including Doubletrees Skyfall.

"I saw a video of him as a three-year-old and there was just something about him," Roy said. "There was like a spark in him that caught my eye unlike any other horses that we had looked at. He just sort of spoke to me and it seemed like the right fit."

Maggi is quick to mention her love for this horse and her excitement as she campaigns him in the four-year-old ranks this year. Not only is Roy satisfied with her young horse's progress, but she is additionally thrilled with the efforts of both Maggi and Tatar.

"They are just so great," she said. "I love their passion for the sport and how much thought and effort and creativity they put into everything they do for every client."

The efforts of Maggi and Tatar extend into the Saddlebred industry as well. Lexie Saine and her family's Muy Loco Investments welcomed Wintersby, the reigning Ladies Fine Harness Reserve World's Champion of Champions, into their family late last year and placed him under the direction of Maggi Stables. Saine has since successfully debuted on the lines of her popular Saddlebred. Wintersby joins her three-gaited show pleasure contender Taco, as well as Morgan Muy Bien, whom Maggi drove to be crowned

the 2020 Park Harness Three-Year-Old Grand National Champion last year.

Regardless of the breed, division, or rider, Maggi Stables has established themselves as a leading training operation with the skillset to succeed in a myriad of disciplines. Tatar explained that both she and Maggi had similar upbringings within the horse industry that allowed them both to ride a variety of horses. This then easily translated into their professional lives in allowing them to successfully train a horse in all divisions.

"I feel like we both grew up just riding anything and we got acquainted with riding different seats and divisions and horses," Tatar said.

Maggi explained that she loves the challenge of her job that comes in part with working such a diverse string of competitors.

"You have to love horses and the people that come with them," she said. "We had a really successful horse show recently but we came home and were both equally focused on what we can do better and fix for the next show. It's always on to the next. I don't know if a lot of other jobs are like that."

In its now tenth year in business, Maggi Stables has risen to the forefront of the industry. Both Merin Maggi as well as Lila Tatar have

become inspirations for other young professionals looking for similar success in the show ring. Maggi is quick to encourage others to learn as much as possible from those in the industry who are willing to share their knowledge.

"There's always going to be setbacks with anything and sometimes you can feel defeated but you just have to keep trying to evolve," she said. "That might be my biggest thing. Never stop learning. People's egos either get big or they get really prideful but you can always learn something from every experience, good or bad, or from every person."

As Maggi Stables begins its second decade in operation, the California based establishment has managed to excel in all facets of the equine world with top training and instruction across all disciplines. A vision once imagined by a 21-year-old has flourished into a training facility that has produced world champion Morgan horses and has now brought its talents into the Saddlebred community as well. With Merin Maggi at the lead, and Lila Tatar now working alongside her, these two young professionals looked poised for another ten years of industry leading achievements.