

## What is a Morgan Horse?

by Ina Ish

The Morgan horse is unique in that it descends from only one stallion, named Justin Morgan, after his owner by the same name. Originally called Figure, he was born in Massachusetts and later taken to Vermont. Figure was said to be descended from Imported Thoroughbred stock on his sire's side, but little if anything is known of his dam's side. Figure as an adult breeding stallion, sired three sons- Sherman, Woodbury, and Bulrush who rose to prominence throughout New England. There were other sons of course, such as Revenge , and many daughters- often un-named. Figure or Justin Morgan - The Morgan Horse - as he became known- was an extremely pre-potent stallion. One who had a long, hard, varied life. His three best known sons became the backbone of the Morgan Horse as we know it today. For quite some time in New England the families of the three sons were not intermingled, but bred very much within each separate son's line. That changed of course over time, and the three families were bred to each other becoming what we now call Lippitts, Lamberts, Government, and Working Western Families. In the 1800's the public craze was for race trotting speed and the Morgan excelled in that area. They were the NASCAR cars of the day.

Particularly the Bulrush line and the Sherman line which possessed great speed. The Bulrush line as a sire line is extinct today, and only comes down to us through the mare lines. But the Sherman line and the Woodbury line flourish to this day. As foremost trotting horses of their day, the Morgan blood became the foundation blood for several other horse breeds. The Quarter Horse, the Saddlebred, The Tennessee Walker, The Standardbred. Morgan blood spread all over the country- to the South , the Mid-West, the Far West, the Southwest, and the North West. They went west with the covered wagons, with the US Cavalry , were the Pony Express horses, and later the cow horses of the western ranches. The United States Government bred the Morgan Horse in Vermont, and instituted a Remount Program- assigning various stallions to ranches and Indian Tribes through-out the country to improve the stock that existed on those ranches and reservations.

As the automobile emerged in the country, the need for driving horses fell away and the US Government Morgan Farm in Vermont, under the auspices of the USDA introduced to their pure Morgan herd, bloodlines of mares who had Morgan blood, but were not fully Morgan. This was done in an effort to create a new niche for the Morgan horse, to create a taller animal who would be marketable as a riding horse as well as a driving horse. An animal which might suit the needs of the public better since the heyday of the trotting races was declining. In the meanwhile, those Morgans who had migrated to the Western parts of the country became the backbone of the cattle ranching out there.

So a diversification began, what we now call Foundation and Non-Foundation Morgan.

The Foundation Morgans are those with little or no non Morgan blood, and the Non-Foundation Morgans have a much higher amount of non Morgan blood. The Non Foundation Morgans have made the Horse Show world their niche, and the Foundation Morgans have remained, for the most part the Working horse it was bred to be. Within the Foundation Morgan group, can be found the Lippitts- who have strict rules about which Morgan Horses are allowed as ancestors of current Lippitts, and indeed are founding a new Registry within their membership. The Lamberts, who primarily descend from a stallion named Daniel Lambert a Sherman Morgan descendent,

The Working Western Family - who primarily descend from that Government Remount stock with the blood of Sherman as well. There are other sub-groups- the Flyhawks, for example, who are the ones with the most mare line Bulrush blood. Today's Foundation Morgan is to be found all over the country, working cattle out west, in the Sport Horse area of competition, in the family back yard, out on the trail, and competing in Driving competitions where they are still considered the Cadillac of driving horses. From Dressage and Driving to Ranch Cattle Sorting, Reining and Cutting the Morgan can do it all. It is simply a matter of identifying which family suits your needs. Today's Morgan comes in all colors and sizes- from Pony Hunters to 16 hands, from bay, chestnut, black to gray, palomino, cremello, buckskin, dun, even the multicolored splash- like pinto colored horses. The old blood survives along with the newer blood and the mind, heart, and soundness persists.