

Ancient Type For To-day

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★★ Action ★★

No less an authority than D.C. Linsley has written in regard to the Justin Morgan horse, "though he raised his feet but little". This statement if added to others by the same man is surely not what it seems taken by itself. For instance, Mr. Linsley said on page 146 of *"The Morgan Horse"* "...easy but vigorous action, were strongly and strikingly impressed upon his (Justin Morgan) offspring." "Not only did his qualities descend unimpaired to the next generation, but apparently with little diminution to the second and third;..." He does qualify this miracle by saying "While they (sons of JM) differed in the particulars we have herein set forth, (which difference was rather in the degree, than the nature of their qualities,) they all possessed the great and striking features of their distinguished sire.

Linsley says this of Revenge; "He had less action than either Woodbury or Sherman;..." Fred Wier of Walpole NH said exactly the same thing. There were other references to the degree of action in his offspring and other close ancestors. The Hawkins horse was a noted parade horse like Sherman and Woodbury. Mr. Linsley says of him, "He was one of the best acting and finest looking horses under the saddle ever in the State."

The word vigorous is used in several of his descriptions. It is very hard indeed or the mind's eye to present to us any sort of grass cutting, daisy clipping action, with little or no bend or breaking at the joints and still call it vigorous. Quoting the *"Cultivator"* on the New York State fair of 1846; Of General Gifford and Gifford Morgan, "Their action attracted the marked admiration of all..." Linsley quotes a writer to the *"Kentucky Journal"* the writer giving a description of the Morgan including these words, "...trot quick, short and springy, with forelegs bending remarkable". On page 164 of "Linsley's", he gives some general

characteristics and describes their motion; "...short, easy, rapid step..." Mr. Linsley says "easy", this former uses the term "spring", nearly identical sketches. Following Mr. Linsley's account that Justin raised his feet but little, he makes this unpromising statement, "**His proud, bold and fearless style of movement, and his vigorous, untiring action, have, perhaps, never been surpassed**". Is this straight legged action?

Untold numbers of description, of the progeny given in Linsley's and Battell's, describe this attribute like fine action, action good, fine style and action, or style and action good. A letter to Battell from E.K. Whitcomb of Elgin, IL, states of the Barden Morgan; In style and action he surpasses Green Mountain and Gifford. We know of Green Mountain that he had "...great knee and hock action". If we do not rely solely on Linsley's statement that Justin raised his feet but little, we begin to see that perhaps there was a bit more than a little of it. The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle of high and low knee action.

Mr. Henry Herbert in *"Horse of America"* calls the action of the Morgan "a tempest in a teapot; he beats the air too much without corresponding headway."

Mr. James D. Ladd was a man who admired different kinds of horses and owned Black Hawk stock among others in his lifetime, writes to the *"Spirit Of The Times"* in 1893: "...Every intelligent, observing horseman knows that the Morgan horse as a family has more knee action than any other, and, in addition, has other desirable traits and qualifications of a first-class horse roadster. Knee action alone does not make a first-class light harness horse, but I never saw a first-class stylish roadster that had not more

than ordinary knee action, and the only horse that I ever saw that I thought had an excess of it was an inbred Morgan, and this in my opinion, is the pivotal point in the problem of breeding roadsters with uniformity. Breed an intense (here he obviously means inbred) Morgan stallion on such mares of other families as are easily selected and readily obtained, and a majority of the produce will have good knee action. Breed him on an intense Morgan mare and all the produce will have enough knee action. I owned and used Morgan stallions in Ohio and Iowa. I also owned and used well known stallions of the most fashionable trotting families. I had some success with both classes. My main object with the Morgans was to get superior light harness horses; with the others to get speed that would win. The former I got uniformly, the latter in a few instances. I know by experience whereof I affirm..." C.F. Ramsey writing to Battell in his *Middlebury Register* in April of 1894 says of Sherman; "here is the font of Billy Root's unceasing action"... This term is another used often to describe the Morgan and needs no further explanation but should be incorporated into one's mental image.

C.W. Bliss wrote to Battell about his father's horse called the Bliss horse; "He was called from quickness of motion and light footedness the Weasel by many, but was more generally known as the Bliss horse." More food - Trappy is another term used to describe the ancient True Type Morgans. It may be derived from the sudden action of a sprung trap. Many of them were said to possess "great activity" or were "very active" at the lead or under saddle - i.e. a very rapid or quick step. The action of the ancients was rather busy at all speeds. Another quote from one who signs himself as "Old Timer" is found in the *"New*

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England Farmer” for April 9th 1910/ In a very long article entitled “Conserve the Morgan” he states, “The most casual observer of a Morgan horse, is conscious that he sees a peculiar animal. His short, light, rapid step points to the great muscles which give him motion.

No, we do not need the long hairs on the legs, nor do we require that a Morgan to be without action, nor do we require that all Morgans shall be of Justin Morgan’s color or his precise height or weight. We do require that the restored Morgan shall be a small horse; that is an essential feature of the breed and proved so by a century of breeding and experiment. Action, we have less knowledge of. Possibly it may be developed. Experience has not proved that action cannot be found in the typical Morgan without the loss of a single good quality. Possibly by such methods of care and feeding as are now practiced, by skillful bitting and shoeing, but the other arts of the adroit, modern handler and reinsman and by being relieved of heavy draught

work, the Justin Morgan might have gone down into history as an “actor.” We have no right, therefore, to say positively that action or lack of action is an essential of the “ancient Morgan type”.

For this student of the ancient True Type, or Justin Morgan type, the words above, and many others like them, depict and define that action; an impression that is hopefully interpreted fairly closely to that of

anyone else reading those same words. It is very important to know what we should be breeding for. Simply breeding individual to individual because it is a “Lippitt” lacks foresight and is wrong.

The action of the True ancient Type was balanced, free and restricted only by that imposed by short legs and an oblique shoulder.

Bulrush for example was not high headed nor was he as active in his movements; his shoulder was more vertical than the usual, as well as being longer gaited than was normal for the early Morgan. He had less action than the others, as stated above, but it was still vigorous and rapid.

There are other sources where the “action” of the ancient Morgan is described. Those curious enough are encouraged to do their own research and add their finding to those already know.

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