

AN ANSWER to "PROFESSIONAL HORSEMEN"

by Kenneth A. Telford

Professional horse trainers are rightfully held in high regard. They have an expertise, most of them, in matters concerning the horse, that many of us would love to possess, had we the time, the means, and especially the will to acquire it. But there is in almost all matters of expertise what psychologists call a "halo effect" when a person of one competence is called upon as an authority in another. Interviewers are seldom aware when in their interviews they cross the borders of one expertise and enter another. For to be a really good interviewer one should know the matter discussed almost as much as does the one he interviews.

In a recent article devoted to questions about the Morgan horse *The Morgan Horse* magazine has brought the issue to the front. Enough so that some correction is needed. For just because of this halo effect an injustice has been done to some rather important Morgans.

Very little of the space in *The Morgan Horse* is devoted to the cause of the true Morgan type. No doubt most of the people whose interest in the Morgan started only in the last decade or so are oblivious to the problem. The last articles by Marshall Winkler on the subject are now 20 years behind us. There is great doubt that very many even understand the inroads that the Saddlebred has made on Morgan type, and this invasion of Saddlebred is what has generated the problem about true Morgan type. But without an understanding of this problem about Morgan type, there is no possibility of understanding what a Morgan is.

When one hears claims made by Morgan breeders about the conformation or type of their Morgans, it is clear that a good deal of clarification is necessary. Nowhere is this more evident than in the statements of the young professional horse trainers whose words appear in *The Morgan Horse* of March, 1988, in the article "Professional Horsemen." The issue involves mainly the first two questions asked.

The first question asked was quite good, except that the premiss that was given as the foundation of the question is totally false. For it says that "The Morgan community [whatever that means] has, as its public relations policy, promoted the Morgan as the loving, family animal that can be enjoyed by all and et cetera." The only "Morgan community" that could possibly have "a" public relations policy is the board of directors of the association which controls the voice of Morgan promotion, TMH itself. If there is any "public relations policy" it is illustrated and exemplified by the actions of that magazine. But, except for an article here and there, which seems grudgingly allowed in the midst of the great pressure to promote sales, there is very little emphasis on the family Morgan in the pages of *TMH*. In this very issue it is said on page 81 that about one-half of the 68000 living registered Morgans are show horses. And, it is said, it is these that account for the acceleration of interest and value of the breed. Clearly the authors of the two articles, Bloomquist and Parkhurst, are going in opposite directions.

But sadly, Parkhurst is right and Bloomquist is giving forth the same sort of easy pap that makes Morgan rhetoric celebrate a Morgan past that is the opposite of its frenetic present. If Morgan public relations policy was in favor of the celebration of the family Morgan, wouldn't at least half of the space in the

magazine talk about family uses and celebrate horses so used? But it clearly does not. 98% of the magazine, month after month, year after year, is about show horses, especially those expensive ads without which there would be no magazine. That is why Parkhurst can say that the breed turns on the show horse, and why Bloomquist is resorting to image making that has no bearing on reality.

Yet, as I said, the question is good. Can a family Morgan pull a National Velvet and make the grade at the national? Ekstrom's answer is forthright enough, saying in effect that it is an art, and one does not learn it overnight. Alderman repeats his point. Schwartz brings in an unsettling point, that you have to be a professional to win because the judges have debts to each other and must reciprocate pinnings. (Did you really think that judging was objective?) Rickford tries to belie this, but to no avail.

But what was lacking from any of the answers is the most fundamental point. It was asked whether a person, owning a Morgan for *family purposes*, can win at the national. What you were not told by these professionals is that training a horse for the nationals has about as much to do with the appropriate skills of family horsemanship, as driving the Indy 500 has to do with father driving the folks to the country. The difference is not merely a matter of a skill that is little developed against the same skill honed over many years with expert help. It is a matter of two totally different skills (one of them I grant you of far greater refinement) aiming at two quite incompatible and antagonistic goals. For the horses that result, by and large, from family use on one hand and show use on the other, are two different horses, each almost totally useless in the performance of the

other's function.

The idea that the show professional is after the same thing as the average capable amateur is a piece of sophistic. The great emphasis with professional trainers is on the park gaits. But it is common knowledge among horsemen that saddle seat equitation and the development of the park gaits are not only incompatible with true pleasure uses of the horse, but incompatible with true dressage. For they promote a hollow back and a want of true collection. What is more there have been books and articles in great number written by veterinarians and horsemen emphasizing the injurious effects of these gaits on the horse.

It is in fact quite arguable that the great emphasis on the professionally shown horse is the greatest of obstacles to the viability of the Morgan as a using horse. There are few things more threatening to the breed than the practice of using rejected park horses for pleasure classes and thereby subverting the very purpose of those classes. A practice equally injurious to the breed is the practice of selling horses, specifically bred for the park gaits, but rejected as failures for that limited purpose, to individuals as true family horses.

The second question, perhaps, was couched on the basis of the distinction forged in the asking of the first. For it would seem that the two types intended in the question were the family Morgan and the show Morgan. Notice, however, that Ekstrom immediately interprets the distinction as "the old type" verses "the new type," a distinction anyone familiar with the history of the breed knows refers to the difference between the Morgan as it was in Linsley's time (or later, as long as it was kept pure as Linsley asked us) and the Morgan after it was turned into a small imitation of the Saddlebred. What Mr. Ekstrom is familiar with

is the tactic of winning an argument by imputing to the imagined adversary such a ridiculous position that of course, no one would hold it. He says there have been periods when the breed lacked type, but which of the two types, he doesn't say. Then he says if you study what was perceived to be the Morgan horse in Vol. I. and in Linsley's description, there are a lot of horses that "exemplify what the horse was."

This statement is interesting because it shows that Mr. Ekstrom thinks Battell and Linsley are describing the same horse. He is totally unaware that Battell was a vigorous opponent of Morgan type, could not stand the kind of horse represented, for example, by Ethan Allen 2d, and for that reason had a terrible feud with Joseph H. Peters over the very formation of the registry. Daniel Linsley, on the other hand, carefully cautioned against mixing the Morgan with trotting blood for it would destroy type. But that mixture was exactly what Battell sought, and the reason why he celebrated Daniel Lambert as a Morgan, whereas everyone else of that day, both Morgan lovers and trotter lovers, knew quite well he was not.

Then Mr. Ekstrom goes on to create a cardboard opponent by saying that the Morgan never was "the drafty little animal a lot of people think he was." He goes on "had he been a draft horse with a punch-fat neck that couldn't raise up and set his head, nobody would have wanted him." Since I know of no one who ever made these claims about the Morgan horse that Mr. Ekstrom is railing against, his victory is hollow, mere sophistic. He then claims that "the better Morgans gravitated toward the other American breeds" and the [Morgan?] breed "got left with what was left over." Besides the obvious fact that Mr. Ekstrom knows very little about the formation of the breed, we realize

that he thinks there is neither old or new type, but just one type. Everything else is just variation from this. He thinks the Saddlebred Morgan was confined to the 40's and 50's, and today we have the same horse that Linsley talks about.

There is a very important reason why he thinks this. He gives only one characteristic of the Morgan, the ability to hold its head up. Clearly the notion of Morgan type he gives is confined to the characteristics a child would notice. How about the length of the back, the width at the poll, the width of the breast, the set of the tail, the length of the pastern, the length of the cannon, the set and arch of the neck, the length of the hip, the length of the coupling, the spring of the ribs, the size of the girth, the meat on the forearm, the proportion between the distance from the ear to the eye and the eye to the nostrils? How about the length of the step and the fact that the original Morgan was known to have lifted his foot but little as he went? How about trappy motion versus extension? We could go on for quite a while.

Does Mr. Ekstrom know how the true Morgan type differs in each of these particulars from the show animals he says have true Morgan type? And does he really think that The Buckeye, for example, has the same type as Orcland Leader? Does he think that Tug Hill Commando has the same type as Ulendon? If our professionals who make their living from these animals are ignorant of Morgan type, think how desperate is the situation of the average owner. Ekstrom sounds very much as though he has never seen a Morgan.

Miss Alderman, however, has seen some of the old type and will not make the absurd generalizations that Ekstrom from his Missouri perspective has made. She lays the difference to a difference in training. For she has seen Lippitts with all the

class that Ekstrom dreams of. But she does not say whether she notes any difference in conformation or temperament.

Schwartz allows that there has to be two types, and for the first time in this article a professional admits he or she is not concerned with the pleasure horse that the family wants. But even she supposes that the old type pulls plows and is of a draft type. Her experience seems to be midway between Alderman's and Ekstrom's. She does decry too much Saddlebred. A little bit but not too much. But there are some who feel that this is very like being a little bit pregnant.

Rickford has the humility to say she is new to the breed, but does not think we should depart too far from breed type. She generalizes this on her experience with other breeds. She says that a breed can be versatile in the sense that different members of it might be specialists in different kinds of performance, implying that it would be only the breed as a whole that is versatile, not individuals. She forgets that the logic of this is that you don't have one breed, but many. A great truth, for a breed that suits everyone is a breed that has forgotten what it is. To be everything is to be nothing. There is hardly a breed that has not lost type because people tried to turn it into something it never was, rather than change to the breed they were trying to imitate.

Mrs. Rickford has pointed to a very important problem in Morgan hype. For when we praise our breed for its versatility, we do not in the least mean what Linsley meant by the term. Original Morgan versatility had nothing to do with imitating the Saddlebreds, and the Morgan park horse, a true contradiction in terms, became possible only when the Morgan was turned into a little Saddlebred by the decisions after Elmer Darling's death. Many of the other functions that are thought of as constituting

Morgan versatility are quite compossible, that is, one horse can do most of them. The gaits that are the least compossible with other equine functions are precisely the park gaits that destroy a horse's collection and natural way of going.

There is some difference between these four professional trainers, for they differ in their understanding about the problems of Morgan type, and especially they differ in their regard for Morgans that are not bred or used for show purposes. But what all four of them illustrate is the futility of asking anyone whose living comes from Morgan show animals to express their views about true Morgan type. There is not, nor should there have been assumed, any burning concern for anything other than the animal on which their career depends. If the using Morgan is to depend for its continued existence on the support of the professional, it is doomed.

There was no greater proof of this than the proposal in the December 1986 issue of *TMH*, where one of these equine professionals publicly declared the advisability of running the small breeder out of the business. The scheme, you may remember, was to load the small owners of stallions with a tax that would add such a financial burden to his already over-taxed and non-profitable situation, that small breeders would be forced to geld their colts and depend upon large breeders for stallion service.

The tremendous uproar out in the boonies was not reflected in the Letters to the Editor. Isn't it perfectly obvious that large breeding farms exist only to serve the market from which they can gain profits? Big profits come only from breeding and training horses for the show world. Does anyone think that anyone in the large equine markets is concerned with the preser-

vation of the true Morgan? Did Waseeka Farm, UVM or the Government Farm ever stand a true original type Morgan for the benefit of those who wish to retain the type? Ted Davis kept Lippitt Rob Roy only until he found there was more interest in him than in Upwey Ben Don, and quickly found another home for him. What Dayton Sumner's proposal would do would be to insure that true Morgans are eliminated from the registry and all that would remain would be the flashy imitation of the Saddlebred.

For those who have never seen the original type and may not understand the issue involved, we would suggest visiting some of the small farms that have succeeded in preserving the type in its purity, without a drop of Saddlebred blood. One will quickly find out, as one well known breeder did when she finally went to a Lippitt show, whether the Morgan, without the "benefit" of Saddlebred infusion, is nothing but a small Percheron. If it is to be really the truth that the Morgan establishment is as concerned with the preservation of the using Morgan as it is with celebrating the fashionable but impractical show star, and does not consider the rejected show prospect to fill the need for a using horse, it should start putting some emphasis in its campaigns on the true Morgan, and stop thinking that it has an unprejudiced view of the true Morgan when it consults those who are focused on the show world.

The mere fact that this article appears in the magazine is a sign that there may indeed be hope.

[Ed Note: This last statement was to appear as the final line if the article was to be printed in *TMH*. Oh, foolish I.]