

= Morgan horse =

The Morgan horse is one of the earliest horse breeds developed in the United States . Tracing back to the foundation sire Figure , later named Justin Morgan after his best @-@ known owner , Morgans served many roles in 19th @-@ century American history , being used as coach horses and for harness racing , as general riding animals , and as cavalry horses during the American Civil War on both sides of the conflict . Morgans have influenced other major American breeds , including the American Quarter Horse , Tennessee Walking Horse and the Standardbred . During the 19th and 20th centuries , they were exported to other countries , including England , where a Morgan stallion influenced the breeding of the Hackney horse . In 1907 , the US Department of Agriculture established the US Morgan Horse Farm in Middlebury , Vermont for the purpose of perpetuating and improving the Morgan breed ; the farm was later transferred to the University of Vermont . The first breed registry was established in 1909 , and since then many organizations in the US , Europe and Oceania have developed . There were estimated to be over 175 @, @ 000 Morgan horses worldwide in 2005 .

The Morgan is a compact , refined breed , generally bay , black or chestnut in color , although they come in many colors , including several variations of pinto . Used in both English and Western disciplines , the breed is known for its versatility . The Morgan is the state animal of Vermont and the state horse of Massachusetts . Popular children 's authors , including Marguerite Henry and Ellen Feld , have portrayed the breed in their books ; Henry 's Justin Morgan Had a Horse was later made into a Disney movie .

= = Breed characteristics = =

There is officially one breed standard for Morgan type , regardless of the discipline or bloodline of the individual horse . Compact and refined in build , the Morgan has strong legs , an expressive head with a straight or slightly convex profile and broad forehead ; large , prominent eyes ; well @-@ defined withers , laid back shoulders , and an upright , well arched neck . The back is short , and hindquarters are strongly muscled , with a long and well @-@ muscled croup . The tail is attached high and carried gracefully and straight . Morgans appear to be a strong powerful horse , and the breed is well known as an easy keeper . The breed standard for height ranges from 14 @.@ 1 to 15 @.@ 2 hands (57 to 62 inches , 145 to 157 cm) , with some individuals over and under .

Gaits , particularly the trot are " animated , elastic , square , and collected , " with the front and rear legs balanced . A few Morgans are gaited , meaning they can perform an intermediate speed gait other than the trot such as the rack , fox trot , or pace . The United States Equestrian Federation states , " a Morgan is distinctive for its stamina and vigor , personality and eagerness and strong natural way of moving . " The breed has a reputation for intelligence , courage and a good disposition . Registered Morgans come in a variety of colors although they are most commonly bay , black , and chestnut . Less common colors include gray , roan , dun , silver dapple , and cream dilutions such as palomino , buckskin , cremello and perlino . In addition , three pinto color patterns are also recognized : sabino , frame overo , and splashed white . The tobiano pattern has not been noted in Morgans .

One genetic disease has been identified within the Morgan breed . This is Type 1 polysaccharide storage myopathy , an autosomal dominant muscle disease found mainly in stock horse and draft horse breeds caused by a missense mutation in the GYS1 gene . Morgans are one of over a dozen breeds found to have the allele for the condition , though its prevalence in Morgans appears to be quite low compared to stock and draft breeds . In one study , less than one percent of randomly tested Morgans carried the allele for this condition , one of the lowest percentages amongst breeds in that study .

Two coat color genes found in Morgans have also been linked to genetic disorders . One is the genetic ocular syndrome multiple congenital ocular anomalies (MCOA) , originally called equine anterior segment dysgenesis (ASD) . MCOA is characterized by the abnormal development of some ocular tissues , which causes compromised vision , although generally of a mild form ; the

disease is non @-@ progressive . Genetic studies have shown that it is closely tied to the silver dapple gene . A small number of Morgans carry the silver dapple allele , which causes cysts but no apparent vision problems if heterozygous , but when homozygous can cause vision problems . There is also the possibility of lethal white syndrome , a fatal disease seen in foals who are homozygous for the frame overo gene . At present , there is one mare line in the Morgan breed that has produced healthy heterozygous frame overo individuals . The American Morgan Horse Association advocates genetic testing to identify carriers of these genetics , and advises owners to avoid breeding horses that are heterozygous for frame overo to each other .

= = Breed history = =

= = = Justin Morgan = = =

All Morgans trace back to a single foundation sire , a stallion named Figure , who was born in West Springfield , Massachusetts in 1789 . In 1792 , he was given to a man named Justin Morgan as a debt payment . The horse later came to be identified by the name of this particular owner , and " the Justin Morgan horse " evolved into the name of the breed . Figure is thought to have stood about 14 hands (56 inches , 142 cm) , and to have weighed about 1 @,@ 000 pounds (450 kg) . He was known for his prepotency , passing on his distinctive looks , conformation , temperament , and athleticism . His exact pedigree is unknown , although extensive efforts have been made to discover his parentage . One historian notes that the writings on the possibility of his sire being a Thoroughbred named Beautiful Bay would " fill 41 detective novels and a membership application for the Liars ' Club . " In 1821 , Figure was kicked by another horse and later died of his injuries . He was buried in Tunbridge , Vermont .

Although Figure was used extensively as a breeding stallion , records are known to exist for only six of his sons , three of whom became notable as foundation bloodstock for the Morgan breed . Woodbury , a chestnut , stood 14 @.@ 3 hands (59 inches , 150 cm) high and stood for many years at stud in New England . Bulrush , a dark bay the same size as Figure , was known for his endurance and speed in harness . Best known was Sherman , another chestnut stallion , slightly shorter than Figure , who in turn was the sire and grandsire of Black Hawk and Ethan Allen . Black Hawk , born in 1833 , went on to become a foundation stallion for the Standardbred , American Saddlebred and Tennessee Walking Horse breeds , and was known for his unbeaten harness racing record . Ethan Allen , sired by Black Hawk in 1849 , is another important sire in the history of the Morgan breed , and was known for his speed in trotting races .

= = = Breed development = = =

In the 19th century , Morgans were used extensively for harness racing , as well as for pulling coaches , due to the breed 's speed and endurance in harness . They were also used as stock horses and for general riding , as well as light driving work . Miners in the California Gold Rush (1848 ? 1855) used the breed , as did the Army during and after the American Civil War for both riding and harness horses . The Morgan trotting stallion Shepherd F. Knapp was exported to England in the 1860s , where his trotting ability influenced the breeding of Hackney horses . During this period , numerous Morgan mares may have been brought west and integrated into Texan horse herds , which influenced the development of the American Quarter Horse breed . The Morgan horse also was an ancestor of the Missouri Fox Trotter . By the 1870s , however , longer @-@ legged horses came into fashion , and Morgan horses were crossed with those of other breeds . This resulted in the virtual disappearance of the original style Morgan , although a few remained in isolated areas .

Daniel C. Lindley , a native of Middlebury , Vermont , compiled a book of Morgan breeding stallions , published in 1857 . Colonel Joseph Battell , also a Middlebury , Vermont native , published the first volume of the Morgan Horse Register in 1894 , marking the beginning of a formal breed registry . In

1907 , the US Department of Agriculture established the US Morgan Horse Farm in Middlebury , Vermont on land donated by Battell for the purpose of perpetuating and improving the Morgan breed . The breeding program aimed to produce horses that were sound , sturdy , well @-@ mannered , and capable of performing well either under saddle or in harness . In 1951 , the Morgan Horse Farm was transferred from the USDA to the Vermont Agricultural College (now the University of Vermont) .

= = = Military use = = =

Morgans were used as cavalry mounts by both sides in the American Civil War . Horses with Morgan roots included Sheridan 's Winchester , also known as Rienzi , (a descendent of Black Hawk) . Stonewall Jackson 's " Little Sorrel " has alternately been described as a Morgan or an American Saddlebred , a breed heavily influenced by the Morgan . While Morgan enthusiasts have stated that the horse Comanche , the only survivor of the Custer regiment after the Battle of the Little Big Horn , was either a Morgan or a Mustang / Morgan mix , records of the U.S. Army and other early sources do not support this . Most accounts state that Comanche was either of " Mustang lineage " or a mix of " American " and " Spanish " blood . The University of Kansas Natural History Museum , which has the stuffed body of Comanche on display , makes no statement as to his breed . All sources agree that Comanche originated in the Oklahoma or Texas area , making his Mustang background more likely .

= = = Families = = =

There are four main bloodlines groups within the Morgan breed today , known as the Brunk , Government , Lippitt , and Western Working " families . " There are also smaller subfamilies . The Brunk Family , particularly noted for soundness and athleticism , traces to the Illinois breeding program of Joseph Brunk . The Lippitt Family or " Lippitts " trace to the breeding program of Robert Lippitt Knight , grandson of industrialist Robert Knight and maternal great @-@ great grandson of Revolutionary War officer Christopher Lippitt , founder of the Lippitt Mill . Robert Lippitt Knight focused on preservation breeding of horses descended from Ethan Allen II and this line is considered the " purest " of the four lines , with the most lines tracing back to Figure and no outcrosses to other breeds in the 20th or 21st centuries . The Government Family is the largest , tracing to Morgans bred by the US Morgan Horse Farm between 1905 and 1951 . The foundation sire of this line was General Gates . When USDA involvement ended , the University of Vermont purchased not only the farm , but much of its breeding stock and carries on the program today . The Working Western Family , abbreviated 2WF , have no common breeder or ancestor , but are the horses bred to be stock horses and work cattle , some descended from Government farm stallions shipped west .

= = Organizations = =

In 1909 , the Morgan Horse Club was founded , later changing its name to the American Morgan Horse Association . During the 1930s and 1940s , there was controversy within the registry membership as to whether the stud book should be open or closed ; this mirrored similar controversies in other US breed registries . The result of these discussions was that the stud book was declared closed to outside blood as of January 1 , 1948 . In 1985 , the US and Canadian registries signed a reciprocity agreement regarding the registration of horses , and a similar agreement was made between the US and Great Britain registries in 1990 . As of 2012 , approximately 179 @, @ 000 horses had been registered over the life of the association , with over 3 @, @ 000 new foals registered annually . It is estimated that between 175 @, @ 000 and 180 @, @ 000 Morgans exist worldwide , and although they are most popular in the United States , there are populations in Great Britain , Sweden and other countries .

The American Morgan Horse Association (AMHA) is the largest association for the breed . In

addition to the AMHA , since 1996 , there has also been a National Morgan Pony Registry , which specializes in horses under 14 @. @ 2 hands (58 inches , 147 cm) . There are several other organizations that focus on specific bloodlines within the Morgan breed . These include the Rainbow Morgan Horse Association , begun in 1990 , which works with the AMHA to develop and promote unusually @-@ colored Morgans , such as those with the silver dapple and cream genes . The Foundation Morgan Horse Association registers those horses bred to resemble the stockier type seen in the late 1800s and early 1900s , before crossbreeding with the American Saddlebred became common . Two other membership based organizations , both devoted to preserving the old @-@ time Vermont or " Lippitt " strain of Morgans , also exist . The first , the Lippitt Club , was started in 1973 , and the second , the Lippitt Morgan Breeders Association , was founded in 1995 . The Lippitt Morgan Horse Registry , Inc . , was formed in 2011 . It registers and maintains a dna data base with pedigrees of Lippitt Morgans . There are also associations for Morgans in several countries besides the US , including Canada , Australia , New Zealand , Great Britain , Sweden , Austria and Germany . In Middlebury , Vermont there is a museum dedicated to the history of the breed .

= = Uses = =

The Morgan breed is known for its versatility , and is used for a number of English and Western events . They have been successfully shown in many disciplines , including dressage , show jumping , Western pleasure , cutting and endurance riding . They are also used as stock horses and for pleasure riding and driving . They are frequently seen in driving competitions , including combined driving and carriage driving . Morgans were the first American breed to compete in the World Pairs Driving competition , representing the US . They can be seen as mounts for 4 @-@ H and Pony Club participants and therapeutic riding programs , due to their gentle disposition and steady movement .

There are Morgan @-@ only shows held throughout the US , as well as an " open competition " program run by the AMHA that gives points based on competition success at all @-@ breed shows . The first annual Grand National and World Championship Morgan Horse Show was held in 1973 in Detroit , Michigan and in 1975 moved to its current home in Oklahoma City , Oklahoma . Over 1 @, @ 000 horses compete in the show each year . In 1961 , the Morgan horse was named the official state animal of Vermont , and in 1970 , the official state horse of Massachusetts .

= = = In literature and film = = =

The children 's book , Justin Morgan Had a Horse by Marguerite Henry , published in 1945 , was a fictional account of Figure and Justin Morgan . It was a Newbery Honor Book in 1946 . A movie based on the book was made by Walt Disney Studios in 1972 . Both the book and the movie have been criticized for containing a number of historical inaccuracies and for creating or perpetuating some myths about both Justin Morgan and Figure . One equine historian stated , " these should be looked upon not as true happenings but as entertainment vehicles . "

Ellen Feld , a children 's author , is also known for her " Morgan Horse " series . Blackjack : Dreaming of a Morgan Horse , won a Children 's Choice Award in 2005 , following the 2004 award for its sequel , Frosty : The Adventures of a Morgan Horse . These awards were given by the International Reading Association and the Children 's Book Council .

A Morgan horse is the subject of the poem , The Runaway by Robert Frost . In the poem , the speaker observes " A little Morgan " colt who has been left out in a mountain pasture during winter and seems to be afraid of the falling snow .