

# Ahead of His Time: The Sunup Neptune Story

By Laura Hornick Behning


In ancient Roman mythology, Neptune is the ruler of the sea, a symbol of the intangible and the extraordinary. He was also the patron god of horses and fertility. So it is fitting that Neptune's namesake was a stallion who has had the most widespread influence on colorful Morgans since the famous palomino Californio.

The late Sunup Neptune (Sunup Shenandoah x Goldie Zephyr) sired 57 registered Morgan foals, the last few born in 2003. His sons and daughters have been prolific as well. It is interesting to note that Neptune did not sire any registered offspring until 1990, when he was 14!

Foaled in February 1976, Neptune was bred by Liz Vanderhoef of Sunup Morgans in Michigan. Liz recalls, "He was a really cute foal.

But back then, no one wanted color. His dam [Goldie Zephyr] was the most beautiful golden buckskin." Goldie Zephyr was by the Cotton Hill Daisy son, Tweedle De, and out of Mackinac Star. Tweedle De was registered as chestnut, but actually was palomino. Until recently, it was not known that the source of color in this line was the Brunk-bred Cotton Hill Daisy, a mare registered as chestnut who was actually a palomino (confirmed via photographs). Neptune was unique; he became the main representative of the single line of creme dilute Morgans that does not trace their color to X registered stock.

As a yearling, Neptune was sold to the Edward Wogoman family. "He was a very special part of our lives," Sheri Wogoman remembers. "Our eyes tear up and we get lumps in our throats when we remember the memories we had with him—and we're talking over 20 years ago. I have pictures of him from about 1979. Some of them show me and my sister [at ages 11 and 8] standing with him, holding trophies and ribbons from a successful day at the horse show." Few



The Sunup Neptune son TFM The Midas Touch graced the Morgan show ring in the late 1990s before his untimely death in 2002.

stallions have the requisite temperament to be shown by young children, but Neptune was one of those rare few in classic Morgan style.

As a six-year-old, Neptune was sold to Kenneth and Ruth Plank of Nappanee, Indiana. Ken had been looking for a stallion to breed to his Morgan-type riding

mare. "I was on my bicycle, going for a 15-mile ride which took me past a place where this awesome buckskin horse came snorting up to the edge of the fence. He took off, then came back again to check me out. By then I was stopped, simply in awe of such a bold character. Of course, I was looking him over and saw him to be a

stallion! That took me back to knock on the door, not knowing what kind of response I might get. They said I could have my mare bred to him. They also said they were looking for a good home for him. It didn't take me long to make that decision. In a few weeks he was mine!"

Neptune became Ken's favorite riding horse; he was also a fabulous driving horse. "He had such a no-quit attitude," Ken reminisces. "He would give you all he had. I never tired of watching his perky trot while driving him. He was a lot of horse for his 14.2 size."

I was curious how Neptune, a colorful Morgan living in a time when color was not popular even in the general Morgan world, was accepted in the Planks' conservative Amish community. "Buckskins, palominos, plus roans and grays are readily accepted, especially as riding horses," Ken says. "We have seen palominos in harness, although not many. Mostly the Amish people stick to the Standardbred—blacks and bays. Occasionally someone will breed to a palomino or buckskin."

Neptune not only stood at stud in Indiana, but was leased elsewhere, giving him access to Morgan breeders across the country. Sharlene Anderson's R Two Morgans in Belgrade, Montana, had Neptune in 1995 and 1996; and Nancy Nard of Ragtime Morgans in Williams, Arizona, leased him from 1999 until 2001.

"Our one regret is that we didn't have Morgan mares before the 1990s," Ken comments. Neptune would make up for lost time, however. From his first registered foal crop came one of his most popular breeding stallion sons, the 1990 buckskin LJ Morning Reveille (x High Ridge Victoria). Reveille's original owner, Linda Jung, leased him to several breeders before he was finally sold to Tindo Morgans in Texas. "Rev" was *The Morgan Horse* magazine's cover boy in May 1998, but his port-

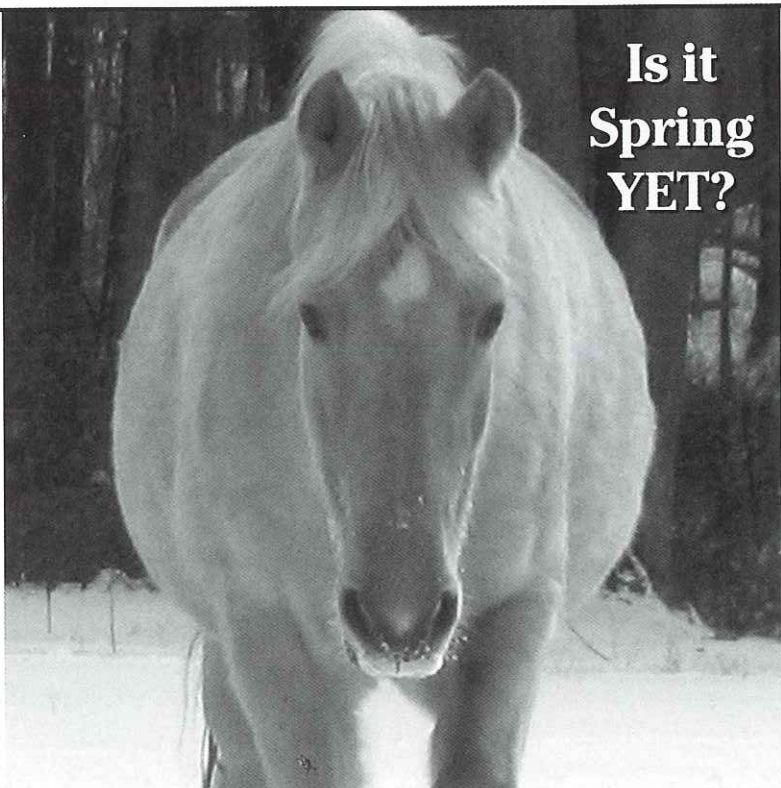


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Left: Lisa Horning says her Sunup Neptune son NVS Midas has wonderful manners, is gentle, and extremely typey; Right: Sunup Neptune.



folio doesn't stop there. He also has been on one of AMHA's promotional brochures, in the 1999 AMHA calendar for the month of December, and in AMHA's advertisements in the October 1998 and October 1999 issues of *Western Horseman*. Reveille has had more than two dozen Morgan offspring thus far, his most well known probably being Julie Heise's 1996 buckskin stallion, Chesterhill James Taylor (x Snoopytime EVM).

Another Neptune son, TFM The

Midas Touch (x Shaker's Lara), graced the Morgan show ring in the late 1990s. Midas was a buckskin stallion, foaled in 1996 and bred by Bob and Marge Thomas of TFM Morgans in Union, Ontario. "We were interested in getting into color and were looking through the ads on various studs when our daughter, Katie, spotted that beautiful head shot of Neptune in a magazine," Bob recalls. "We were going to Indiana to a carriage sale so went to the Planks to see him and were immediately

struck with how typey he was. We then decided to breed our Shaker's Lara to him. The result was TFM The Midas Touch. I know we all have the 'perfect' horse, but Midas really was. He had a great disposition, excellent color, and was so willing to do anything." Purchased as a youngster by Kristin Safanie of Seymour, Illinois, Midas would go on to earn several top tens at the Grand National in the Western Pleasure division. He also put in a memorable appearance at the 1999 American Royal Concert of Champions, a demonstration of several breeds set to live orchestra music. He passed away at the young age of six in 2002. "I think we were all devastated by his untimely death," Bob continues. "Kristin has some great offspring by him to carry on that line, however." After Midas, the Thomases bred several more Neptune offspring, including the buckskin TFM The Gold Standard (Midas's full brother) in 2000. "He is almost a clone of Midas," says Bob.

There is an old saying that advertising doesn't cost, it pays. This is particularly true when the ad includes a beautiful photograph. The same picture of Neptune's exquisite head that had captivated the Thomas family had a similar effect on many others. Jane Pietenpol of Mossrose Morgans in River Falls, Wisconsin, says "After seeing Sunup Neptune's picture in an advertisement, I had to see him in person. He was gorgeous! I had never seen such a balanced, correct Morgan. His back end matched his front end! He had good bone and a nice crested neck. And then to find out that his disposition was so good that Ruth [Plank] could drive him to town—that was the icing on the cake for me! I haven't ever bred just for color, but Neptune's quality and disposition made me decide to breed two mares to him. Both of his offspring have been a joy to have around." And both were buckskin. First came Mossrose Rising Sun, a 1999



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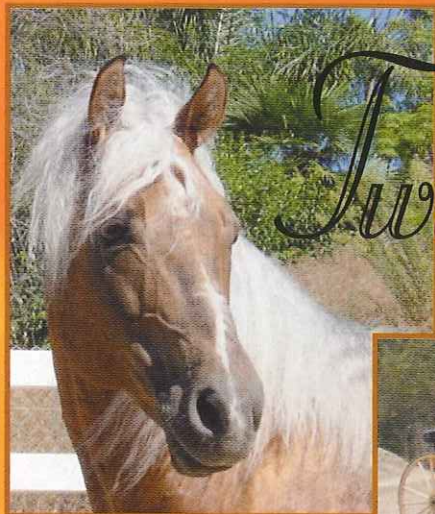


Above: *Sunup Neptune* in front of the Planks home. Left: *Sunup Neptune's* son *KRP Cocoa* has had an enormous influence on colorful Morgans in Canada.

buckskin mare out of *Carmida Mist*. "I won't ever forget starting her under saddle," Jane relates. "I would take her to the indoor roping arena to ride in the winter. One time, after just a few rides, we had an experience that to this day still makes me laugh out loud!

There is a big roll up door at one end of the arena. One of the guys opened it up about three feet and bent over and went underneath it to go outside. 'Racy' saw this from the other end of the arena and perked up her ears and started trotting toward the door. She trotted right up to it, all the while her ears perked forward, stopped, and stuck her head and neck underneath to see what was out there. Now normally a horse would shy at a door like that just being closed—not this mare! Andrew and Diane Knight of New Hope Ranch in Lincoln, California, now own Racy. They are enjoying her and think she is a very kind mare and easy to love!"

Jane's second Neptune offspring was the 2001 buckskin stallion *Mossrose Triumphant*. "I have always thought of him as a Vavra horse," says Jane. "He was born to be somebody and knows it, yet his disposition is second to none." "Turbo" is now pursuing a breeding and showing career overseas for Rosita Hamar's Lagden Farm in Shropshire, England. A



# Twilight GOLDEN DREAM

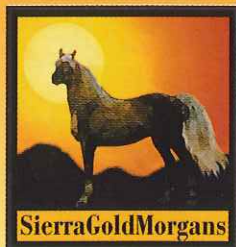


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*Mossrose Triumphant is now pursuing a breeding and show ring career in England.*

future of Dressage, eventing, jumping, and breeding is planned for this colt. What a spectacular opportunity for this talented, colorful Morgan!

Lisa Horning of NVS Morgans in Lincoln, California, became interested in Sunup Neptune after (are we noticing a theme here?) seeing his picture in an

advertisement. "The first thing that caught my eye was the picture of Neptune's gorgeous Morgan face and true Morgan ears," Lisa says. "After seeing what nice conformation and hearing how wonderful his disposition was, I finally broke down and sent a letter. Ken told me how wonderful Neptune was and I was hooked. Soon after, Ken leased Neptune to Sharlene Anderson. We arranged to have the semen transported and low and behold Midas was born 11 months later."

NVS Midas is a 1997 buckskin stallion out of Rantresa Ecstasy. "He is the light of my life," Lisa says. "He is such a wonderful stallion to own, just a joy from day one. He has the best disposition of any horse I've ever owned. He has wonderful manners and is very gentle. He is extremely typey. I took him to a stallion presentation not long ago and he had quite a following. People just love his true Morgan look—the color is just a plus. I had some

folks come out last year looking for a stallion to breed to their mare. They logged and cleared their land using their Morgan mare and wanted to breed her and eventually use her baby for a team. They measured Midas' chest, girth, hindquarters, and cannons and said he was the best stallion they had looked at."

Morgan breeder Charlene Cook of Edgewood Farm in Goshen, Indiana, was another Neptune fan. "I actually 'met' Sunup Neptune when he was two," she recalls. "He was competing in halter at a local show against his grandsire, Sunup Mike. Neptune was a scrawny guy at two, like many Morgan colts, but had a full head of hair, with his long, thick forelock covering much of his forehead. He was such a nice horse, you wouldn't know he was a stallion. I don't think he knew either."

"I had always wondered what had happened to him," Charlene continues. "About 20 years later I saw this buckskin horse near an Amish barn and thought to myself, that sure looks like a Morgan! The next time I went by, I stopped and talked to Ruth Plank; it was indeed Neptune." Charlene bred her mare, Mill Creek Chica Caliente, to Neptune in 1996 and the following year her buckskin stallion Edgefield Sun Gold was born. "Sonny" has Neptune's trademark gentle disposition.

The Neptune son KRP Cocoa (x Hot Fudge Swirl), a 1993 buckskin, has had an enormous influence on colorful Morgans in Canada. He resides at Al Kolenosky and Liz McGuinness's 2J Morgans in Alberta. Al recalls, "We purchased Cocoa from Sharlene Anderson as a long yearling after searching for just the right buckskin stallion for over two years to complement our mares' pedigrees. This coincided with the time that Sharlene leased Neptune, so we were able to see him in the flesh when we went to pick up Cocoa." Al was impressed with how fit and athletic Neptune was for a stallion his age. "He was colorful yet true to type, this being the challenge in our search for a young stallion prospect." KRP Cocoa currently has 42 registered off-

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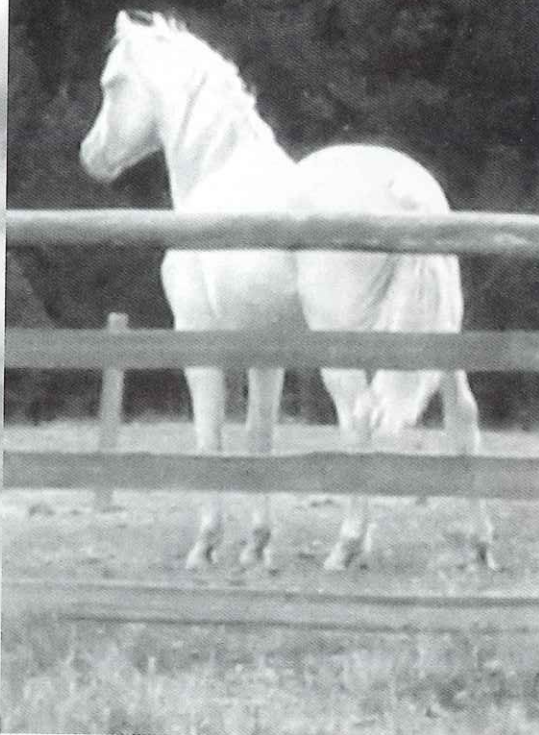
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spring. Probably his most well known son thus far is the lovely buckskin gelding Two J Sunhawk, who sired 16 offspring himself before being gelded. "Hawk" graced the cover of the May 1999 issue of *The Morgan Horse* magazine and his photo or photos of his offspring have been seen on the covers of many other equine publications as well. Other notable Cocoa sons include the buckskin Two J Morning Sun (x High & Mighty Maxine), residing at Shato Morgans in Hotchkiss, Alberta; and CLM Cocoa's Cavalier (x Willy's Classic Quattro), a palomino, owned and shown successfully in Dressage and western pleasure by Country Lane Morgans, Ft. Saskatchewan, Alberta. Flying Cocoa (x Two J Royal Firefly), a palomino stallion owned by PT Morgans of Elkford, British Columbia, will soon have foals born in France and Italy. And at 2J Morgans, Two

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J Desert Sand (x Show's Royal Diamond) is being crossed back to the farm's Brunk-bred mares. "We are looking forward to this third Neptune generation," Al remarks.

Another Neptune son residing in Canada is KRP Cocoa's full sibling KRP Amigo Dan De. This 1998 bay gelding was

imported by Gord and Mary Freeman of Upper Canada Morgans in Ontario as an untrained two-year-old. Before he was gelded, "Hudson" sired two colts foaled in 2002—UCM Governor Cornwallis (x Abi's Nancy Oak), a bay still owned by the Freemans; and UCM Vimy Ridge, a lovely buckskin (x M & M K'ehleyr Suprise).

Hudson is now owned by Kerry Galan.

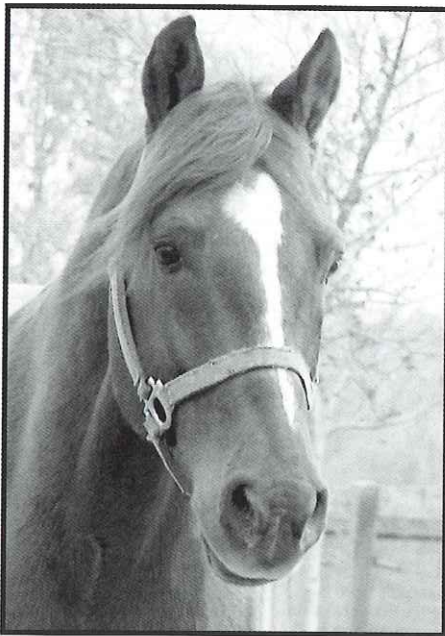
Many of Neptune's get are still under the age of ten, but a handful of his older daughters are starting to show as much promise as broodmares as their Y-chromosomal half siblings do as sires! One such Neptune daughter belongs to Chris Holm of Devine Morgans in Montana. Her 1996 buckskin mare KRP Pixie Pat (x High Ridge Victoria) has produced three colorful offspring so far, all by the buckskin Blacksaddle Starbuck: a 2001 buckskin filly named Devine Mist Of Gold, now owned by Rick Mackin and Marge Peasley of Montana; Devine Spirit Of Hope, a 2002 crème colt who will become Chris's future stallion; and Devine Haley's Comet, a 2003 buckskin filly now owned by Susan Shrack of Arlington, Texas.

Also just beginning a promising career as a broodmatron is the eight-year-old buckskin Orcas Sunup Celebration (x Camano Dutchess), owned by Mary Morgan of Orcas Morgans in Ellensburg, Washington. Mary remembers her birth well. "When Dutchess was close to being due, a knowledgeable horse friend of mine looked at her and said she was at least a week or more away. The next morning, the vet flew to the island where I lived at the time. I picked him up at the airport and guess what? When we got to the pasture at about 8:30, my mare was busy having a baby! What a day that was, out came this lovely buckskin filly! I was so thrilled.

"When 'Squirt' was four months old, I made the decision to sell her. Deborah Wicks of Windborne Morgans bought her. When Squirt was three, Deb bred her to Windflower Stardust, a buckskin stallion she owns. One day Deb called to say she was getting out of the horse business and did I want to buy Squirt? Of course! She spent a couple months with a trainer, and then came back. I saw no sign that she was pregnant, and hadn't had her ultrasound, so imagine my surprise in November,

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*LJ Morning Reveille came from Sunup Neptune's first foal crop and is one of his most popular breeding sons*

when I looked at her from the hind end!" In May 2000 Squirt produced a crème filly, Orcas Breezellen, who is now owned by Donna Perez of Sierra Gold Morgans.

One of Neptune's most successful performance horse offspring is the 1993 buckskin mare KRP Tequilla Sunrise (x High Ridge Victoria). Owned at the time by Sharlene Anderson of R Two Morgans and ridden by Scott Seeklander, this talented reining mare won the 1997 NMRHA Derby, taking home more than \$2,000 in cash and the Tedwin Topic Memorial trophy buckle.

The Sunup Neptune influence will continue. Charlene Cook will never forget the sire of her beloved stallion. "After we had Sonny, we couldn't get our mare back in heat, so we never had a chance for a second Neptune baby. We would stop by once or twice a year to see Neptune and any babies the Planks might have. Sometimes Ken's boys would be out grooming Neptune or harnessing him. Neptune was one of those stallions that really stamped his offspring, much like his grandsire. Even the bays and chestnuts you could tell were

Neptune babies—nice heads, smooth crested toplines, good shoulders, short powerful backs, good legs, sweet dispositions, and they'd trot forever."

Had Neptune been born in recent years instead of in the mid-1970s, it is likely he would have greatly benefited from the growing interest in colorful Morgans. As it was (and despite his late start in siring registered Morgans), he still did quite well for himself.

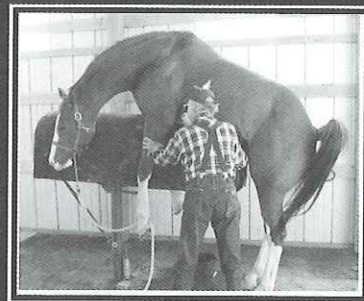
The day after Thanksgiving 2002, Neptune passed from this world. The Planks have his three final offspring born in 2003, as well as a 1997 dark buckskin son, R-Two Flying Buckaroo (x Plainsview Firefly) to carry on his tradition.

"In our memories, Sunup Neptune lives on," Ken Plank says. "Can't you just hear his whinny?" Indeed, that sweet sound is echoed every time one of Neptune's descendants greets a favorite human companion. ■

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