

Legacy Mares A HORSE OF A DIFFERENT COLOR THE STORY OF FOXTON FELICIA

Nancy Harris had no doubt she had a horse of a different color. But when the oddly colored filly toddled to her feet that day in April of 1983, little did Nancy know that she would become a cornerstone mare in the salvation of a color which was hanging by a thread in the Morgan breed. Nancy was not sure what color her new filly was, though she had very strong suspicions. But time has an interesting way of revealing the facts, and nowhere is that more apparent than in our ever-evolving knowledge of equine color genetics.

By **Laura Behning**

SO, WHAT COLOR IS IT?

One of my favorite pastimes is researching and writing about color in Morgans. Ferreting out the sources for each color present

in the Morgan and searching for individuals of colors previously unknown in our breed is a big part of that endeavor. For many years I suspected that the rare silver gene existed in Morgans. One of the horses I most wondered about was a mare named Orland Youlenda. She looked exactly like a classic black silver in her black and white photos in old issues of *The Morgan Horse*. At the 2000 AMHA Convention held in Atlanta, Nancy Caisse of Townshend Farm presented a slide show of historical Morgans from the New England area. In her presentation was a color slide of Youlenda's dam, Paleface (Squire Burger, chestnut x Zona Skinner, registered as chestnut but now known to have actually been a silver dapple). The mare was clearly a bay silver! I was very excited to see this picture as it confirmed my belief that silver had indeed been present at one time in the breed. The question was, did it *still* exist—or had the gene died out?

Above: Foxton Felicia and Chip Cooper competing in the 1992 Top of the World Competitive Trail Ride in Foxton, CO; Insets: Foxton Felicia with her first foal, the dark bay or brown based silver filly Foxton Fawn (by Society Statusmaster). Fawn is registered as black, "with silver mane and tail, silver dapple" in the markings section, as her registration was changed in 2002, which was before silver was offered as a registration option; Foxton Felicia in the spring of her yearling year. Yearling black silvers are often very dappled, with a pale mane and tail. The mane and tail may darken over time, as Felicia's eventually did.

FOXTON FAWN & FOXTON SMOKEY DAWN

Left to right: The dark bay or brown based silver mare *Foxton Fawn* (Society Statusmaster x *Foxton Felicia*) in retirement in Georgia; *Foxton Smokey Dawn* (Topside Midnight x *Foxton Felicia*), 1990 black silver mare (registered as a chestnut). As they age, many silvers lose the bright white mane and tail they had as youngsters. It is easy to see how they can be confused with the chestnut color.



(Photo by Laura Behning)

The answer came in February 2002 when John and Bobbie Zeulner's stallion, Zeulners'Sunka Wakan (S Bar B Blksaddle Chester x Zeulners'Marvelous Melody), became the first confirmed silver Morgan via DNA color testing. The world finally knew that for sure, silver existed in Morgans! Silver Morgans are still very rare—there are only about fifty alive at present—but their numbers are growing due to the attraction of this undeniably beautiful color and the dedicated breeders who wish to preserve it.

Silver, sometimes called silver dapple, is a dilution gene (like cream and dun) that only affects black pigment. It turns a black horse's body to a chocolate color, and the mane and tail to a silvery gray. On a bay horse only the leg points are diluted to chocolate, again with a silver mane and tail. Silver has no effect on chestnut, as there is no black hair to dilute, but chestnuts can carry—and pass on—the gene if they inherited it from at least one parent. Often silvers are mistaken for flaxen chestnut (and vice versa), but genetically, they are two entirely different colors. In North American light horse breeds, silver is the signature color of the Rocky Mountain Horse, where it is called 'chocolate.' It is also a common color in the Shetland and Miniature Horse.

I had seen pictures of Sunka's paternal grand-dam, Foxton Fawn (Society Statusmaster x *Foxton Felicia*), and knew she must be a silver and the source of Sunka's unusual coloring. And so my search for more information—and ultimately, a silver Morgan of my own—led me to Foxton Morgans, owned by Tom and Barbara Butterfield, their daughter Nancy Harris and Nancy's husband Thom.

Foxton Morgans, located in Foxton, Colorado, is comprised of some 4,000 acres in the Rocky Mountains, much of it now preserved in conservation easements. The terrain is rugged, an

environment that gifts the Foxton horses with strong feet and legs and a hardy constitution. Originally the ranch had been a livery stable for many different breeds of horses. The family became involved with breeding Morgans in 1976 with the purchase of SH Crescent (H-Ken x Flashy Bess), a chestnut mare who was, in Nancy's words, "a sensitive, high-stepping mare, so we sought out steady temperaments and dispositions to cross with her." That search for stallions ultimately led the family to Pegasus Persuader (Topside Jolly Roger x Dainty Dot), owned by Jack and Ginny Muse of Pegasus Morgans in nearby Parker, CO.

Persuader was registered as a chestnut, but is now known to have actually been a bay or brown based silver. His sire, Topside Jolly Roger (Kings-Haven Senator x Yampa Sue), was a chestnut who carried the silver gene inherited from his dam. Yampa Sue traces in an unbroken line of chestnuts carrying silver—or actual silvers mistakenly registered as chestnut—to *the* source of silver in the Morgan breed, Dan (Headlight Morgan x Kate B). Dan, foaled in 1916, was a chestnut that carried the silver gene.

The Butterfields knew Persuader was an unusual color; he reminded them of the silver dapple Shetland they had. But silver was not known to exist in Morgans at that time.

In the spring of 1983, SH Crescent foaled an odd colored filly by Persuader that the family named *Foxton Felicia*. "She was a pale silvery-grey, like an old fence rail. I was excited to have a 'charcoal palomino' as I thought of the color," Nancy remembers. "The Morgan people told us to just register her as chestnut, even though that didn't seem right," adds Barbara. Indeed, because *Felicia* was a black silver. We now know that at the time of her birth, there were just a handful of them in the breed.

A bit more quiet than her dam, *Felicia* was still a sensitive,

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(Kenfield x Muchacha)

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high energy animal, both on the ground and under saddle. "We always rode her with just a halter, though she was also fine with a snaffle bit," Nancy recalls. "I never had any troubles with her, so didn't hesitate to ride her down to be bred in 1989. I was pregnant with my second boy. We were just a quarter mile from the corrals. Beavers had been making ponds along the stream below the road. As a consequence, ducks had located those ponds that spring. As Felicia and I came along, the ducks flew noisily quacking into the air. All of a sudden, we were six foot above the road, facing the other direction! My heart pounding, I was very glad to still be on her back. But, I was quick to hop off to lead her back onto the road. Nearly home, I was happy to proceed on foot, due to my own interesting condition."

Besides being used as a broodmare, Felicia also dabbled in competitive trail riding. In 1992 the mare was leased to Chip Cooper, and the team competed in the NATRC Top of the World competitive trail ride. "They did pretty well together, as he was a novice," Nancy says. "Felicia drew the line at his looking at his map while on his back; she never did like crinkly sounds!"

As she got older, Felicia's mane and tail darkened, which is not uncommon in silvers as they age. It is easy to see how they are mistaken for chestnut. At age 15, Felicia foaled her third and final offspring. This was a silver tobiano part Morgan mare, RV Serena, by the ranch's part Morgan tobiano, RV Eagle Feather.

In 2001, 18-year-old Felicia went to a friend of the Harrises as a companion horse. Sadly she colicked the following winter and did not survive. Felicia would produce only two full Morgan offspring in her short lifetime, but both were silvers and would found silver dynasties of their own.

FOXTON FAWN: THE BEGINNING OF A LEGACY

Felicia's first foal, Foxtan Fawn (by Society Statusmaster), was born in 1987. Registered as chestnut like her dam, she was actually a brown-based silver—proven not only by her offspring's colors, but by the fact that—many years later—she would test homozygous for black base color! Sold as a yearling, the high tempered little mare went through six owners before landing

in her current retirement home with Lisa Bock-Holec of Senoia, Georgia. Fawn had six foals, at least four of which are known to be silvers like their dam. They include S Bar B Blksaddle Chester (by H-Saracen), 1994 brown silver stallion (later gelded) owned by Spruce Hill Farms in Westkill, NY; Whittings Bright Star (by Foxtan Black Jack), 1998 black silver mare owned by Karleen Gose of St Onge, SD; Whittings Fancy Star (by Foxtan Debonair), 1999 black silver mare owned by Joyce Urroz of Custer, SD; and Whittings Smoky Debonair (by Foxtan Debonair), 2000 black silver gelding owned by Carroll Whiting of Blue Rapids, KS.

When Bobbie Zeulner first saw S Bar B Blksaddle Chester, she thought he was a dark palomino—"that's what I get for doing my own thinking," Bobbie quips. Chester only sired two offspring before being gelded, but one of them was the previously mentioned brown silver stallion Zeulners'Sunka Wakan—the horse who ultimately proved to all of Morgandom that yes, silver did exist in Morgans when he DNA tested as being black based, not red based, in 2002. Sunka sustained an injury to his front legs as a youngster, so he never had a formal career under saddle, but he could be trusted to carry the Zeulners' grandchildren safely. Everyone who knew the stallion remarked upon his sweet and kind nature. Sadly, Sunka's last owner Carrie Duff of Hazel Run Morgans in Georgetown Lake, MT, found him entangled in a gate one morning in April of 2010. He did not survive. Fortunately, the Zeulners had frozen semen from Sunka, so he may yet contribute more silvers to the breed.

Sunka sired just 10 offspring in his too-short lifetime, four of which were silver. The first was Zeulners'Marvelous Robert (x Zeulners'Marvelous Melody), a 2001 chestnut (carrying silver) stallion owned by Angie Nadon of Anfarra Morgans in Bailieboro, ON. Robert is a multi-champion in hand and Western pleasure horse. Angie had previously purchased Robert's chestnut (also a silver carrier) daughter, Zeulners Linda Lee. "I was looking for a smaller Morgan mare with an outstanding temperament for our six-year-old daughter to eventually ride

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DESCENDANTS OF FOXTON SMOKEY DAWN

Right: Foxton Frosty Dawn (Foxton Society Beau x Foxton Smokey Dawn), 2002 brown silver mare, with her 2006 bay silver colt

Unconventional (by Gone Gold). **Below, left to right: Lisa Holec** with the author's 2007 smoky black silver filly, **Positively Charmed** (Gone Gold x Foxton Frosty Dawn). Lisa owns "Charli's" aunt, **Foxtan Fawn**; The yearling buckskin silver filly, **Edgefield Vermeil** (Edgefield Sun Gold x Foxtan Frosty Dawn) and Rachel Longacre compete in a halter class at an open 4H show; **Coulee Bend Pure Silver** (Unconventional x Dody Little Bell SRDA), a chestnut (carrying silver) 2010 colt, is now living in Alaska with Pat Kearney; **Coulee Bend Orion** (Unconventional x Coulee Bend Contessa), a 2009 chestnut (carrying silver) colt pictured here as a weanling, will stand his first season in 2011 for owner Linda Sterling.



(Photos by Laura Behning, David Holec, Char Cook & Cindy Dietz)

and show," Angie says. Linda Lee fit the bill. Then Robert became available, and Angie purchased him as well. Robert's first foals for Angie will arrive this year, and Linda Lee's first foal was born in 2010, a chestnut (carrying silver) filly, Anfarra Carrera (CN), by Anfarra Que Barbaro.

Schaenzer's Silver Eagle (x Granaway Bonne Amie), a 2004 brown silver stallion, was Sunka's second silver offspring. He is owned by Ken Thomas in Richfield Utah, where he is adding the silver dilution to Ken's band of gaited mares, the goal being to produce gaited silver Morgans. Eagle's 2009 black silver son, KTM Shadowflax (x KTM Shadow Dancer), is now owned by Silver Eagle's breeder, Susanna Schaezner of Eugene OR. He will be bred this year for a few 2012 foals.

Sunka's next silver son was Zeulners Silver Legacy (x Oregon N Blacksaddle XTC), a 2005 black silver who was owned by Linda Sterling of Sterling Morgan Horses in Chino Valley, AZ. Linda recalls how she came to find him: "Looking around for my very own stallion in 2005, I came across an ad for a weanling stallion, Zeulners Silver Legacy, who had the silver dapple gene. All this 'silver' and 'Sterling' seemed like the hand of providence, and this little guy sure was cute! Several potential buyers were considering him, but they wanted him tested to see if he was homozygous black first. I jumped in and bought him. He later tested homozygous black with one silver gene (EEZz). He was the only silver Morgan stallion who was also homozygous black. I had hit the jackpot!"

"Legacy had a quiet calm disposition and always passed this on to his get," Linda continues. Of his 18 foals, the handsome stallion sired eight silvers, all fillies except for his last foal, LM Sterling Shining Knight, a 2010 black silver colt Linda is keeping as his sire's

replacement. Sadly, on December 19, 2009, Linda found Legacy dead in the pasture. "It appeared he had died suddenly and quietly: there were no thrash marks around him. A necropsy later revealed he had an intestinal hernia into his diaphragm," she says. Zeulners Silver Legacy left the breed a grand "legacy" of eight additional silvers for the breed. However, in the space of a few short months the Morgan world had lost two of its rare silver stallions—quite a blow to such a tiny genetic pool.

The last foal sired by Sunka is the appropriately named Zeulners Last Hurrah (x Renwood Lila B), a 2008 chestnut (carrying silver) stallion bred by the Zeulners and recently sold. Shortly afterwards the Zeulners disbanded their Morgan herd. Their small breeding program had made a huge contribution to the Morgan world, and without their efforts we might never have discovered that silver still existed in the Morgan breed.

The only other silver offspring of Foxtan Fawn that has bred on is Whiting's Bright Star. She has had two buckskin silver colts for her owner Karleen Gose: Inyan Silver Sage (by HMSTD Rum Runner) in 2006 and Inyan Silver Buckshot (by HMSTD Electric Cowboy) in 2008.

THE FOXTON SMOKEY DAWN FAMILY

Foxtan Felicia's other registered Morgan daughter is the 1990 black silver mare, Foxtan Smokey Dawn (Topside Midnight x Foxtan Felicia). Dawn's sire, Topside Midnight, was the 1982 AMHA Open Competition winner at first and second level dressage, ridden by 14-year-old Laura Paling-Claborn. "I regret that we didn't have Topside Midnight long enough to produce more silver dapples from Felicia. There wasn't the interest in the color at that time,"

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Nancy muses now. The black stallion's quiet disposition was a good cross for Felicia. Foxton Smokey Dawn has the laidback personality of her sire. She is used as a pony horse for youngsters, and for moving horses around the ranch.

This is the smaller of the two branches of the Felicia family, but it is a growing one! Dawn has had 5 registered Morgan offspring for Foxton Morgans. Her first foal was a silver filly that unfortunately did not survive. Her second foal is Dawn's only other

silver offspring to date, the 2002 brown silver mare Foxton Frosty Dawn (by Foxton Society Beau). Purchased by the author at three days of age from Foxton, Frosty has a friendly, people loving personality and an amusing love of water. On hot days she will "volunteer" for showers by standing by the pasture gate and begging to be hosed off. Frosty has gone on to carry the torch for her dam in a big way—she has had four foals so far, and all four have been silvers!

Frosty's first foal was born in 2006 and was by the palomino stallion Gone Gold. Bred by the author, the colt was named "Unconventional," both because of his unusual color—he is a bay silver—and because of the circumstances surrounding his birth. I was scheduled to speak on Morgan color genetics at the AMHA Convention in February 2006. Frosty went overdue and I could not leave her to go to Convention. Hence the colt was my UN Convention!

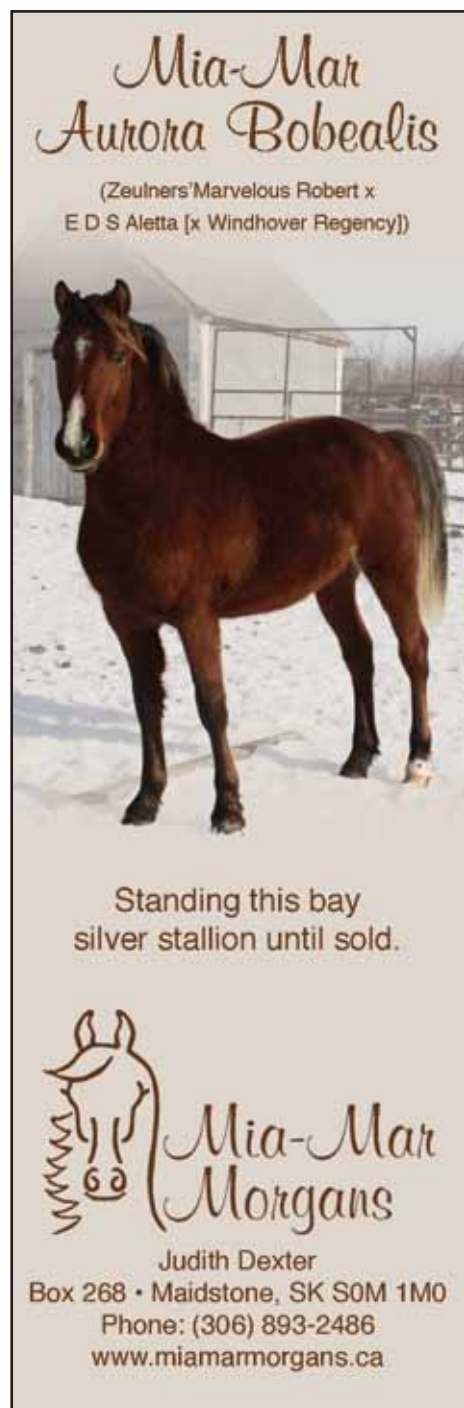
"Connor" as he is known to his friends, is now owned by Lyle and Cindy Dietz of Coulee Bend Morgans in Galahad, Alberta. "When we started our search for a new colt to add to our breeding program, we looked for all the usual things," Cindy says. "The colt had to be outstanding Morgan type, be an easy, natural mover showing great athleticism—length of stride and impulsion. He had to have great conformation and that little extra 'something' that drew your eye back for a second, then a third look. He had to have a soft eye, chiseled features, and of course, the Morgan attitude—that is curious, willing, personable and very trainable. We found those attributes in Unconventional. These were all first and foremost—and as an added bonus—'Connor' is a rare silver dapple bay."

Connor has sired three registered Morgan foals so far and two have inherited his silver gene. The eldest, a chestnut (silver carrier) Coulee Bend Orion (x Coulee Bend Contessa), is now owned by Linda Sterling of Sterling Morgan Horses. A two-year-old in 2011, Orion will breed a few select mares for Linda this year. Connor's other silver offspring is the 2010 colt Coulee Bend Pure Silver (x Dody Little Bell SRDA), also a chestnut silver carrier, now living in Alaska with Pat Kearney.


Foxton Frosty Dawn was bred back to Gone Gold and in 2007, Positively Charmed was foaled. 'Charli' color tested to have both her sire's cream gene and her dam's silver gene, on a black base coat, making her the first (and so far only) smoky black silver in the breed. Charli's friendly personality endears her to everyone she meets, and she inherited her dam's love of water—no water trough is safe from her attempts at swimming! Charli is owned by the author, and plans are to eventually breed her.

In late 2007 Char Cook of Edgefield Morgans in Goshen, IN leased Frosty, and the following year the plucky little mare added a third silver to her incredible production record. Edgefield Vermeil is a beautiful buckskin silver filly by the Cook's Sunup Neptune son, Edgefield Sun Gold. "Maddie is a real diva," Charlene says. "Whenever anyone comes to visit, she knows they are here to see her, and runs to the barn for attention. She has a heart of gold, and loves people." Maddie has been successfully shown in open halter classes by Rachel Longacre, one of Char's young riding students. Her color has attracted much attention at those shows!


Frosty was leased again, this time to Candi Rousseau of Tocara Farm Morgans in North Bennington, VT. "The spunky, sweet brown silver dapple mare Foxton Frosty Dawn came to us simply by good timing," Candi says. "I decided in 2009 that I would like to add a little silver into our small herd of mostly duns here. I just happened to mention to Frosty's then-owner Laura Behning what I was looking for. Bloodlines are always an important part of my decisions of what mares to permanently add into our program and I love what Laura has done with her silver dapples. I love a good blend of Jubilee King, Flyhawk and Lippitt. When she offered Frosty to me for a lease, I jumped at the chance." It did not take long before Frosty was part of the family. "We run a youth program here and one of the girls took a liking right away to Frosty," Candi says. The mare endeared herself to the youngsters, not only because of her friendly nature but because her smaller size was less threatening to the more timid children. Candi purchased Frosty shortly before she gave birth to her fourth foal, who was—



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DESCENDANTS OF FOXTON FAWN

Top to bottom, left to right: *Zeulners'Sunka Wakan* (S Bar B Blksaddle Chester x Zeulners'Marvelous Melody), a 1995 dark bay or brown based silver stallion, was originally registered as chestnut. Sunka was the horse who ultimately proved that silver indeed existed in the Morgan breed when he sired a bay foal from a chestnut mare, which would be genetically impossible if he was indeed a chestnut as registered. This led to him being tested for Red Factor—the silver test was not yet available in 2002—and the results proved he was a black based horse.

Sunka had an injury to his front legs as a youngster which prevented him from having a career under saddle; *Zeulners'Marvelous Robert* (Zeulners'Sunka Wakan x Zeulners'Marvelous Melody) is a chestnut stallion who carries the silver gene. Silver only modifies black hair, and chestnuts do not have any, so the gene does not “show” on them. They can pass the silver gene on to their offspring. Owned by Angie Nadon, Anfarra Morgans, Bailieboro Ontario; The chestnut (carrying silver) mare *Zeulners Linda Lee* (Zeulners'Marvelous Robert x Zeulners'Marvelous Ruth) and her 2010 chestnut (carrying silver) filly, *Anfarra Carerra* (by Anfarra Que Barbaro). Like her dam, Carerra tested to have the silver gene; The late *Zeulners Silver Legacy* (Zeulners'Sunka Wakan x Oregon N Blacksaddle XTC), 2005 black silver stallion, was the sire of 9 silver offspring before his untimely passing at age 5. Pictured with him is one of his black silver daughters, *Filigree In Sterling* (out of MLF Emotion), foaled in 2009; *LMSterling Shining Knight* (raf)(Zeulners Silver Legacy x Glick's LST Becky), a black silver colt foaled in 2010, will be his sire's replacement at Sterling Morgans; *Schaenzer's Silver Eagle* (Zeulners'Sunka Wakan x Granaway Bonne Amie), a 2004 brown silver stallion, is now contributing his color to Ken Thomas' gaited herd at KTM Morgans.



Photos by Bobbie Zeulner, Linda Sterling & Susanna Schaenzer

incredibly!—yet another silver. Tocara's Silver Twilight (by River Jordan), a bay silver filly foaled in 2010, was sold in utero to Sara Criner. In November of 2010, “Belle” and her dam traveled to the Massachusetts Equine Affaire, where they represented silver Morgans in fine style. Foxtton Frosty Dawn is back in foal to River Jordan for 2011. Will it be another silver? Stay tuned!

Foxtton Smokey Dawn is still living at Foxtton, hale and hearty at age 21. Nancy plans to breed her again this year, hopefully producing another silver for their breeding program.

THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT

We often think of great broodmares as individuals who have had many successful show or breeding offspring. When we look back at

the past however, it seems that often enough only one or two of a mare's offspring actually carry on for her over time. Foxtton Felicia was lost to the breed much too young and sadly, the same fate has met several of her descendants. But Felicia is still responsible for an incredible 34 of the 50 known silvers in the breed today. Through Felicia's descendants, and other branches of the silver Morgan family tree, this beautiful color will be preserved for future generations of Morgan lovers to enjoy. ■

To learn more about the silver gene in the Morgan breed, visit **The Silver Dapple Morgans Project** at www.silverdapplemorgansproject.com. The website www.morgancolors.com, maintained by the author, is devoted entirely to the subject of colorful Morgans.