



America's Baroque Breed

Thriving in the High Schools of Germany

What started with Parade and Broadwall Drum Major in 1964, then led to the breeding program known as Glamorgan Farm, has now arrived as a full-blown Morgan movement among our European friends.

By Steffi Niggemeier



Above: Glamorgan Damien doing Levade in hand with his trainer and owner Susen Fischer-Henkel; Images on opening page, main image: Lipizzaner stallion performing a Capriole while performing with the Spanish Riding School; Insets, top to bottom: Spanish Riding School trainer Johann Isbinger awaits his curtain call aboard Parade during the 1964 Spanish Riding School North American Tour; Morgan stallion Rainstorm Shadow performing a Levade.

What's old is new again, thanks to the Morgan horse in Europe.

For a few years, there has been a “new” kind of horsemanship taking place in Germany—the nearly forgotten art of classical “baroque” dressage. The classical Baroque dressage is what we say “L’art pour l’art*,” developed from the 17th century Renaissance dressage that was of great utility for the knights riding their horses into war. Today, the main goal of the classical baroque dressage is a complete unity of the spirit and body of both horse and rider with a minimum of aids and a maximum of harmony. All exercises are meant to keep the horse sound and healthy up to a high age.

Some horse breeds seem to be pre-destined for this kind of riding: the Barbarien, the Andalusian, the Spanish Horse, Knabstrupper, Frederiksborger, the Lipizzan and the Friesian horse. But wait—there is still one horse missing in that list. A horse that is in a good size, well-built, with a short, strong back, a deep, round croup, a naturally high-held neck and head with balanced movements and a natural talent for collected work. This is the only horse breed that is bred that way in America—the Morgan horse.

The idea of working a Morgan horse in the classical baroque dressage was first realized in the summer of 1964, when the Spanish Riding School of Vienna, Austria, went to tour through the USA and Canada. The “Spanish” is well known all over Europe to be one of the saviours of the traditions of the classical baroque dressage, along with the Cadre Noir of Saumur, France, the Royal Andalusian Academy in Jerez, Spain and the Egon-von Neindorff Foundation located in Karlsruhe, Germany.

J. Cecil Ferguson, owner of the Morgan stallion Parade (Cornwallis x Mansphyllis) and founder of Broadwall Morgans visited the Spanish Riding School and got to talk with Oberst Alois Podhajsky, leader of the Spanish in those days. He must have told about his wonderful Morgans, must have compared them to the Lippizzans and offered Oberst Podhajsky to take a ride on his chestnut stallion Parade when in America. Obviously Podhajsky was impressed with the Morgan breed—he invited Parade and his son, the chestnut Morgan stallion Broadwall Drum Major, to take part in the North American tour and

*“Art for art’s sake.”

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Top to bottom: Claudia Weiser with JEM Bandit doing Piaffe in the long rein; Stefanie Niggemeier with Glenmorgan Final Hylight doing a Spanish Walk; Glamorgan Damien doing a school-halt.

become, as is tradition with the Spanish, the colorful mascots during the riding shows.

Ferguson, however, was not the only Morgan horse breeder who accompanied the tour. Dr. Alden B. Starr, a student of Podhajsky's, joined the tour as well to learn and deepen his knowledge about the classical baroque way of educating horses. He was so very fascinated with breeding an American baroque horse that he founded the Glamorgan Farm in Syracuse, New York and started breeding Morgans with the influence of Parade and his offspring with a Broadwell prefix, combined with the blood of Upwey Ben Don (Upwey King Benn x Quietude). He had an ideal on his mind: a sensitive, intelligent horse with the ability of learning difficult exercises, plus an easy-to-handle temperament and a willing-to-please attitude. The horse he was thinking about was a deep-bodied horse with a wide chest, with good movement and natural self-carriage.

When Susen Fischer-Henkel was eighteen, she came over to the U.S.A. for a student exchange. Something with horses, a little farm or a family with an own pony, that had been the only wish of this young girl who was passionate about riding. How glad she was when she was invited to come to the Starr family, who were breeding Morgans for more than 20 years.

She took lessons in riding with Dr. Starr, who passed on his knowledge in baroque dressage to Susen. Susen hacked out with the elder horses, helped the young horses to become broken to ride or stayed with the broodmares while giving birth to the new foals through the nights. And yes, she also upgraded her knowledge of the English language, the original reason why she made that trip.

Susen Fischer-Henkel —what else could have happened?— ultimately fell in love with the Morgan horse. And this has not only been up to her: a little seal brown colt named Glamorgan Damien (Glamorgan Noah x Glamorgan Augusta) decided to be her horse, followed her wherever she went, only wanted to visit the farrier when she held his rope and wanted to be taken out in the meadows or back inside his stall only by her. All Morgan horse owners can see crystal clear: The horse that chooses you! Glamorgan Damien proves this slogan is so very true.

The Starr family could see that a love like this should never be divorced, so they offered Susen to take Damien home and off they went to Germany after Susen's year was over. Although the Starrs have been offered to sell Damien for a lot of money, Dr. Starr decided to commission Susen to keep his dream of an American baroque horse going to Germany and found a new bloodline with her stallion in his new home country.

When Damien had the right age, she wanted him to be proven by a German commission and that meant Damien became the first proven and registered Morgan horse breeding stallion in Germany.

For sure, Damien is as versatile as every Morgan and it is no surprise that Susen and Damien tried several disciplines like Western, hunter or endurance, but they always came back to the Baroque dressage. They were part of a show group named "Classico Iberico," that took part in shows and horse fairs all over Germany and introduced the Morgan horse to the audience.

"Promoting the Morgan breed has always been my first aim. We established the Glenmorgan Farm more than 20 years ago

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Top to bottom: Lissa Jonetat, student of S. Fischer-Henkel with her six-year-old Morgan horse gelding "Sox"; Glenmorgan Final Hylight performs a Piaffe in the snow; Glenmorgan Final Hylight shows off the typical high carriage of the neck in a Morgan.

and I have always carefully chosen my breeding stock to continue breeding and preserve those old bloodlines. Looking back all these years, I never felt any regrets. For me, it feels like a life without a Morgan may be possible, but is completely wasted," Susen says.

Susen Fischer-Henkel is a longtime pupil of Bent Branderup, the famous riding teacher from Denmark and founder of the "Academic Art of Riding." Susen was taking lessons with her awesome Morgan stallion and after a while, she could do her test to become a "Knight of the Academic Art of Riding"—an official training licence.

Susen educated Damien up to piaffe and levade and visitors often get caught by watching Damien doing these spectacular movements only wearing a halter or a neck-rein in between his mares and their foals out in the meadow. Her Morgan horse farm, called Glenmorgan Farm in honor to Damien's home Glamorgan Farm, is well known as the eldest Morgan horse farm in Germany. It is located near Dithmarschen in the north of Germany. Glamorgan Damien is 24 years old now and in best health condition. His progeny are living all over Europe.

The wonderful loose walk, the high stepping trot and balanced canter make the Morgan match perfectly as a Baroque horse. With inspiration from Susen, there are more and more Morgan owners—including those who own a Morgan with the Glenmorgan prefix—choosing the ancient way of educating their horses. To a person they find in the Morgan the characteristics preferred by Podhajsky in a perfect baroque horse.

Glenmorgan Leroy Brown (Glamorgan Damien x Glamorgan Faline), a brown, proven breeding stallion, standing at stud at Grinmorgan Farm in Fockbek, Germany, competes regularly in hunter dressage competitions up to Level M. His full brother, Glenmorgan Nyx Surprise, a very traditional type chestnut stallion, has been champion and best in show during his proving test and was winner of the honor prize of the city of Aachen in 1997 as a two-year-old. He was standing at stud at Glenmorgan Farm for some years after that, and has been educated in the "Academic Art of Riding" like his sire. After standing at stud in Belgium and France for some time, he was purchased in 2010 by Manuela Lehmann, a passionate baroque riding teacher and teacher for horse therapy. "Glenmorgan Nyx Surprise and his sire Glamorgan Damien are the most beautiful horses I have ever seen," Manuela says. "The happiest day in my life was the day when I got to know Nyx and I was the luckiest person ever when I had the chance to buy him. He is the best-tempered horse I have ever worked with—soft, gentle, smart and charming. I will take him to be my riding horse in my improvement as a classical baroque trainer next year and I am sure he will, like always, do his very best." But Manuela, once infected with the Morgan virus, also imported a palomino Morgan weanling colt named Justin Triumphant, bred by Rosita Hamar of Hamar's Horses of the UK, four years ago. He will follow in Nyx's footsteps and is getting used to the saddle these days.

JEM Bandit (Vonavet Troller x KLN Ginger Snap) sired offspring in Germany and Sweden before he was gelded some years ago. His owner, Claudia Weiser, also Knight of the "Academic Art of Riding," educated him up to piaffe and uses him as a schoolhorse for her students.

The six-year-old gelding Glenmorgan Final Hylight

(Glamorgan Damien x Glamorgan Faline) is also doing baroque dressage, mainly trained in hand. He has been carefully selected as a baroque Morgan and the dream of his owner, the baroque trainer Steffi Niggemeier came true—Final Hylight turned out to be the perfect in hand dressage horse. He can already do shoulder-in, haunches-in, pirouettes, piaffe and pesade, as well as Spanish walk, school-walk and does canter in hand with flying changes. This is really special, because the ancient masters tell us to start working a horse usually when it is about four to six years old and its milk teeth have mainly changed. Final Hylight, whose baroque training started at the age of four, seems to be extraordinarily talented and shows the intelligence that is needed to learn the Haute Ecole movements. A perfect educated baroque horse is able to divine about 55 different commands and the Morgan horse, with its extraordinary intelligence, is able to learn easily to follow the rider's voice and spoken commands in every situation.

Whenever Final Hylight shows his ability on front of an audience, everyone is kept by his beauty and stamina, his long and curled mane and tail, his pretty face with the typically Morgan big, intelligent eyes and tiny ears.

Tanja Friedburg of Kingsmoor Manor, is going to join this community as well. She purchased a little chestnut colt, Glenmorgan Ben Ruby (Glamorgan Damien x Alexandrite by Upyre Te-N-Te) at Glenmorgan Farm this year and will educate him with the help of his breeder and her longtime trainer, Susen Fischer-Henkel. With his well-built body, Ruby's destination seems to be the high school, too.

"I was so glad when Susen Fischer-Henkel moved to Dithmarschen last year, so I was able to take lessons with her regularly," Lissa Jonetat, Marne, says. She started her six-year-old Morgan gelding, Socks, riding Western first, but changed to work him baroque about one year ago. "He looks much better now, his back is strong and well muscled, his mind is calm and he is always concentrated and tries to do his very best. I will never work Socks in another way anymore!"

The idea of doing Morgans in classical baroque dressage is growing more and more these days. Five years ago, some German Morgan breeders and owners founded the Germanmorganhorse.com project to promote the idea of an American baroque dressage horse all over Europe. The enthusiasm about that project has grown more and more and it meanwhile got to be the biggest privately managed project about the Morgan breed in Europe with participants all over the world. The wish of learning special exercises that keep and preserve the health of the horse causes more and more people in Germany to look for the ancient education. It is thought to take six to eight years for a professional trainer to teach a horse the perfect bending of the haunches and the carriage from behind, so the longevity of the Morgan seems to match perfectly. You will be able to enjoy the result of your work long enough!

The perfect American baroque horse Oberst Alois Podhajsky and Dr. Brad Starr dreamt about fifty years ago has become a reality in Germany! ■

Steffi Niggemeier writes for us from her native Germany where she is a frequent commentator on Morgans in Europe.



Top to bottom: Glamorgan Damien practicing the "school halt," a movement which is the precursor to teach levade; Shoulder-in with the long reins attached to Glenmorgan Final Hylight.