

# Making a Splash

## The Story of Shahaylee

By Laura Hornick Behning

Since I have an interest in color genetics of the Morgan horse, I often am questioned about Morgans who have interesting colors or patterns. In April 2005, a mare came to my attention who would rock the colorful Morgan world. When I first heard about Shahaylee (Marvelous Intrigue x Marvelous Phophecy), I thought, from her description, that she was a medium expression of the sabino pattern. Sabino is quite common in Morgans, but sabinos who actually have spotting on the body are rare in our breed (although as time goes on, we are likely to see more of them). I decided to contact the mare's owner and get her story and pictures.







1. Neither of Shahaylee's parents was "pinto" marked, but the telltale signs of heterozygous splash are there—crooked blazes that veer toward one nostril, and socks and stockings that are blunted and relatively straight edged across the top. Pictured here is Shahaylee with her dam, Marvelous Phophecy; 2. A close-up look at Shahaylee's face; 3. Shahaylee's "non Pinto" side; 4. Shahaylee at two days old; 5. Breeder Ellie Mason with Shahaylee's sire, Marvelous Intrigue; 6. Shahaylee and her owner Liz Alanne out for an afternoon ride.



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Elizabeth Alanne of Berryville, Virginia, owns Shahaylee and we ended up having a wonderful conversation about her lovely Morgan. A few days later an envelope arrived in the mail. Liz was true to her promise to send me pictures of Shahaylee to satisfy my curiosity about the mare's unusual coloring. I opened it up and broke into a grin so big my cheeks hurt the next day.

This was *no* sabino.

But what the HECK was she?

Shahaylee's photos showed a pretty bay mare with a bald face, two blue eyes, a large spot on the left side, two white front stockings, a high, over-the-hock blunted off stocking on the right hind, and a high white stocking on the left hind.

Some background is in order here. There are four pinto patterns: tobiano, sabino overo, frame overo, and splash white overo. A horse can have one of these patterns, none of them, or some combination of them (these are sometimes quite difficult to identify). My immediate thought was that Shahaylee was sabino plus frame simply because they are the two pinto patterns that were known to exist in Morgans (although the frame gene is, as far as we know, found in only two individuals, the 1982 mare, Sky Walker AB, and her 2003 daughter, Sky's Blu (RAF)). Shahaylee could have gotten her face and leg markings from sabino, and the spot on her side from frame. Her blaze has a bit of roaning on its edges, like the sabino pattern. But like many things in life, it simply wasn't that cut-and-dried. Shahaylee has no lower lip white as is almost universally seen in sabinos with this much white; blue eyes and squared off blazes also are not typically sabino. Her body markings are not irregular in shape as a frame overo's would be, nor lacey edged as a sabino's usually are. Liz quickly had Shahaylee tested for frame and found she is not carrying that gene, which ruled out frame as a source for her unusual coloring. With only two other patterns to go, things were looking pretty interesting, as neither of those possibilities were known to exist in Morgans! Tobianos don't typically have face white, and they also tend to have white at the withers or in the tail. Shahaylee's pattern, along with her blue eyes, looked very much like the fourth and final possible pinto option: splash white. News of the mare spread to the online discussion group Morgan Colors, where breeder, color genetics enthusiast, and author Julia Lord also suggested splash white. This also was the opinion of Dr. Phillip Sponenberg, author of *Equine Color Genetics* and considered by many to be the leading expert on color in horses.

Splash white occurs (rarely) in Arabian horses, Saddlebreds, and Thoroughbreds. Other breeds where splash is more common include Miniatures, Icelandics, Paints, Quarter Horses, and Foxtrotters. It is a very ancient pattern. Splash white horses tend to look as though they were dipped feet-first into a bucket of paint. On the splash white horse's body, the pattern starts underneath and works its way upward; on the head it starts from the

nose and goes up the face.

Splash is thought to be the rarest of the pinto patterns, but this may be only because breeders have had a difficult time identifying it. The reason for this is splash is one of the few color genes that is incompletely dominant. This means that a heterozygous splash (a horse with just one splash gene) looks different than a homozygous splash. A heterozygous splash will appear to be a "solid" colored horse with "normal" white markings that generally include at least a snip and some leg white and often (but not always) one or two blue eyes. A homozygous splash will have body white to some degree as well as white on the legs, a bald face, and blue eyes. Thus, splash white can "lurk" in a gene pool, occasionally showing up as horses with "bottom heavy" face markings (including a lop-sided snip which covers one or both nostrils or veers strongly toward one nostril), socks and/or stockings, and possibly one or two blue eyes. In this way, heterozygous splashes pass as "solids" until a breeder somewhere down the line unknowingly matches up two of them and comes up with a spotted surprise. Which is exactly what happened to Shahaylee's breeder, Eleanore Mason of Marvelous Morgans, in 1994.

Ellie is well known in Morgan circles, primarily as a breeder of Lippitts although other old lines have been incorporated into her program as well. Marvelous Ideal is a name many will recognize as a stellar example of her breeding. Ellie recalled how Shahaylee's dam came to be. "I purchased Lippitt Rita Roy in 1970 when she was 18 years old. She hadn't foaled for a number of years and it took a few months to settle her, but on October 19, 1971 she presented me with a lovely chestnut filly who I named Marvelous Prophecy (by Marvelous Gem). Her name on the registration paper actually is spelled incorrectly, which I didn't realize in time, so it reads 'Phophecy.' 'Proph' was buff colored at birth, but shed out that true black chestnut color. She had a star, crooked stripe and snip, and two hind stockings." Phophecy was a fabulous broodmare for Ellie, producing 12 foals; her last one at age 23 was Shahaylee, by Ellie's young stallion Marvelous Intrigue, in 1994.

Breeding Morgans during the time of the White Rule meant a single misplaced bit of white or a blue eye resulted in an unregistrable foal. I wondered if Ellie had witnessed Shahaylee's birth and what she thought at the time. She replied "a very good friend of mine was over that evening helping me with breeding and other horse chores, so we were watching Prophecy's foal. I saw this white nose appear and then two high white front stockings and I remarked to my friend, 'this one's got a lot of white.' In the meantime, my friend, Debbie, had moved to the other side, and as the filly came all the way out she said 'wait until you see this side, Ellie' and she started to laugh. And two blue eyes! Were we surprised? You bet we were."

In 1994, registration wasn't an option for the filly. Ellie adds,

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“Also, as this was Intrigue’s second foal, I knew if word got around about her, some would have a field day doing damage to Intrigue’s future as a breeding stallion. Since I didn’t have a back 40 acres to put her in and I wasn’t about to take her to an auction, she got all the tender loving care all of the foals got and was right out in the arena and field with the rest. Interestingly when the vet and her assistant came to do the well baby check on her, the vet’s assistant was amazed I would spend that amount of money on a foal I couldn’t register.”

Before her birth, Shahaylee had been promised to a customer of Ellie’s. “She wanted one by [Marvelous] Ideal, but he wasn’t breeding anymore so we bred Phophecy again to Intrigue,” Ellie remembers. “She and a friend drove up unannounced when the filly was three days old. I didn’t have any time to prepare a speech, so as we were walking down the barn aisle they asked me what did she have, and I said ‘a paint filly.’ They both laughed as they thought that was a pretty good joke. Then I opened the stall door and there stood the paint filly. This woman became irate and accused me of breeding Phophecy to a pinto. I gave her the deposit money back and she told everyone that would listen to her I had bred to a pinto stallion because I had a buyer that paid me \$3,000 for the foal. Maybe the last laugh is on her.”

Enter Liz Alanne. Liz and Ellie have known each other for more than 40 years. Both women once lived in Illinois, where Liz was visiting a local barn one day, and saw a woman ride by on an upheaded, curvy stallion. She thought “that’s a Morgan!” The stallion was Moro Hills Medallion and thus he and his owner, Ellie Mason, entered Liz’s life.

Fast forward many years and a move to Arizona. Liz always had wanted a pinto, so she purchased Shahaylee. It didn’t matter to Liz that Shahaylee couldn’t be registered at the time; Liz believes that a horse’s personality and what it can do are more important than its color. And “can do” is a phrase quite descriptive of Shahaylee. She drives as well as being a reliable riding horse! Liz moved to Virginia in 1999 and Shahaylee and three other Morgans made the trip with her. Shahaylee went to the Old Dominion Morgan Show in 2004 as a companion to another of Liz’s mares. Not surprisingly, she attracted much attention there! Liz plans to breed Shahaylee soon and hopes she will pass on her unusual coloring.

Since Shahaylee is a body spotted splash, she is almost certainly homozygous for the gene. This means she has to have gotten splash from both of her parents. Her pedigree shows linebreeding to two horses on both sides of her pedigree: the 1952 chestnut mare Lippitt Rita Roy (Lippitt Rob Roy x Alrita) and the 1963 bay mare Royal-Glo (Emerald’s Aristocrat x Caven-Glo Saguario), specifically through her 1966 chestnut son Marvelous Gem (by Moro Hills Medallion). Lippitt Rita Roy had a blaze, right front coronet, and one hind stocking. It did not make sense

to me that the splash gene could be hiding in a gene pool as heavily line and in-bred as the Lippitts; if the gene was there, we should have seen it by now. I turned my attention to Royal-Glo, who was marked with a star, snip, and a spot on her left hind coronet. Not exactly markings one would normally think of as “pinto.” In other breeds, however, splashes have been produced by parents who had only a small, telltale snip. All of the pinto patterns have specific places on the horse’s head and body where that particular pattern “likes” to put white; in other words, “points of origin” for the white to begin. In the facial markings of a splash white, this often is on the nose—in the form of a snip—which usually is offset toward one nostril in “less expressed” heterozygous splashes, which are those most likely to pass as “solids.”

Royal-Glo’s sire was Emerald’s Aristocrat, a bay with a stripe and four white socks. His sire, Our Emerald King, was a chestnut with a blaze and four white stockings. Pictures of Our Emerald King show something interesting; his blaze covers his nostrils and upper lip, but there does not appear to be any lower lip white as there likely would be if his markings were from sabino. This is a “splash-like” characteristic. There is a lot of linebreeding behind Emerald’s Aristocrat to the mare Rhythm Lovely Lady and Dude De Jarnette, who appears to have a big, squared off, “splash-like” blaze in the picture I’ve seen. Other horses from the lines behind Aristocrat, however, tend to have very conservative white markings or none at all.

Royal-Glo’s dam was Caven-Glo Saguario, by Cavendish (Jubilee’s Courage x Paragraph, by Jubilee King) and out of La Reina (Highview King x Lucienne, by Plains King). Saguario is from very prolific lines that often produce sabino. As we have learned, it often is difficult to visually separate minimally marked sabinos from heterozygous splashes. Both have blaze faces and white socks or stockings. However, the horses immediately behind Caven-Glo Saguario do not have lots of white; no snips are noted, at any rate, nor lots of leg white, until you get back to Jubilee’s Courage, and to the dam of Lucienne who is an interestingly named mare, “Sox.” She is noted as having four white socks.

Because of the similarities in phenotype between minimally-marked sabinos and heterozygous minimally-marked splashes, it probably is not going to be possible to pin down exactly where the splash gene is coming from in Royal-Glo’s pedigree. However, it is the produce record of Royal-Glo that virtually clinches the idea of her being the source of Shahaylee’s splash white genes.

In 1976, Royal-Glo produced a then-unregisterable filly with four white stockings, a blaze and blue eyes by Ivy’s Grand Mariner. “I ended up trading this lovely filly to a man whose business was building fireplaces,” Ellie says. “My farrier mentioned to him that I would consider trading for the filly, as I wanted a fireplace in our family room. The fireplace covered one whole wall, it was made from native stone and the hearth ran the

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entire length. I would have spent at least \$2,000 just for the labor, so it worked out fine.” On another occasion Royal-Glo was bred to Mantic Piperson, and the next spring she produced a lovely (but again, unregistrable) chestnut filly with a stripe, two hind stockings, and a blue eye.

The blue eyes and flashy white did not stop with Royal-Glo, however. They began to appear in her grandchildren! Marvelous Gem (Moro Hills Medallion x Royal-Glo) sired several who would carry the splash gene on to the next generation. Unfortunately, due to the High White Rule which was in effect at the time, some were lost to the Morgan breed. Ellie recalls, “In 1974 we sold a yearling filly, Marvelous Morita [Marvelous Gem x Moro Hill’s Royrita], to people in Canada. On one occasion when she was bred she produced a foal with a blue eye. I don’t know if it was one or two of the eyes and I believe that only happened one time. In 1969 I purchased a three-year-old mare from people in Pennsylvania. This mare was by O-At-Ka Don Moro and out of Lucinda’s Victoria. Her first breeding to Gem produced a lovely chestnut filly with one blue eye. Of course, in those days, there was nothing to do but sell her as an unregistered horse.” Marvelous Gem is the sire of Marvelous Phophecy (Shahaylee’s dam), as well as Marvelous Legacy (the dam of Shahaylee’s sire, Marvelous Intrigue). Legacy’s markings are listed by the Registry as “Connected Star, Wide Strip, Snip Covering Left Nostril. Left Front Fetlock Extending Higher In Rear. Left Hind Stocking.” Intrigue’s markings are given as “Connected Star, Strip, Snip Touching Both Nostrils. Both Hind Socks.” It certainly makes you look at the white markings a horse may have in an entirely new way!

Shahaylee’s sire Marvelous Intrigue, Ellie’s current stallion, is 17 this year. He has sired offspring ranging from completely solid—no white markings at all—to several other horses with one or two blue eyes, blazes, and leg white suggestive of heterozygous splash white. These include the 1995 bay mare Scarlet Tara (x Marvelous Scarlet Lady) and the 1996 bay stallion Intrigueing Ruler (x Marvelous Elegance). There also is the 1996 chestnut stallion Budley’s Painted Warrior (x JSS Arrow Miss), whose markings are given as “Connected star, strip, snip. Brown eyes, left fore sock, right fore stocking, both hind socks, white spot on stomach.” I haven’t seen pictures of this horse, so I am not sure if his markings are due to splash or sabino. Regardless of markings, one thing all of Intrigue’s offspring have in common is their beauty, true Morgan type, and lovely dispositions.

Marvelous Phophecy produced 12 registered offspring. Another foal, a splashily marked colt with a bald face, blue eyes, and four white stockings by Moro Hills Medallion, was born early in the mare’s breeding career and was unregistrable. Ellie remembers, “My only concern [when breeding Phophecy to Medallion] was that they might not produce as long a croup as I

want. The result was a dark chestnut colt with a bald face, two blue eyes and four white stockings; the one hind stocking actually went above the hock. Mane and tail were lighter. He was gorgeous, almost looked like I bred to an Arabian, and my farrier loved him and bought him. He had a very good croup, so my concern was needless.” Of Phophecy’s other registered offspring, five had the connected star, stripe, snip, and liberal leg white suggestive of heterozygous splash: Marvelous Prophet (1978 chestnut gelding by El Capitan’s Pride); Marvelous Beginning (1981 bay stallion by Marvelous Ideal); Marvelous Rascal (1983 bay gelding by Marvelous Ideal); Marvelous Promise (1989 chestnut mare by Edgewood Pioneer); and Marvelous Buck Rogers (1991 bay gelding by Marvelous Encore). Two others have enough white that they could be carrying the gene as well; however, seven out of 13 offspring showing evidence of the splash gene is about the average 50 percent production rate expected of any dominant gene.

Keep in mind that there are quite a few Morgans who have one or even two blue eyes. Since these horses usually are liberally marked with “chrome,” they have previously been thought to be sabinos. We now know they might or might not be sabino, they may instead be heterozygous splash whites. Blue eyes most often are associated with the splash or frame overo patterns, but can occur on non-spotted horses as well; they are much more rare on sabinos. If breeders cross Morgans with liberal white markings, especially those who have one or two blue eyes, to each other, we may begin to see more obvious splash white offspring appearing elsewhere in the breed.

It certainly has been an exciting few years for the colorful Morgan world. In 2001, we learned that there was a frame overo mare in the breed (and she has since produced a frame overo daughter). In 2002, silver dapple was discovered to still exist in the breed, though it is still very rare. And in 2005, splash white was confirmed in Morgans.

Fasten your seat belts, folks, there may well be more colorful surprises in store for us in the future! n

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*There may be other lines of splash white in the Morgan gene pool. If you have or know of other lines of Morgans that have consistently produced blue eyes and flashy white markings, please contact me at [morgans@mindspring.com](mailto:morgans@mindspring.com) or write to me at 75 Glass Spring Road, Covington, Georgia 30014. Pictures are most helpful, as well as pedigree info.*