



Channeling Gladys Brown Edwards

Why we breed for trot. Why we judge the trot. Why we train the trot: Part One

By Stephen Kinney

There are two types of light breed horses.

The Morgan breed is a trotting breed. In being such it joins other trotting breeds including: the American Standardbred, the American Saddlebred, the Hackney horse and pony and, in Europe, the so-called Baroque breeds like the Friesian and the Andalusian.

This is as opposed to a galloping breed. Breeds born to gallop would include the Arabian, its descendent the Thoroughbred and the Thoroughbred-influenced modern day Quarter Horse. For nomads in the desert of old it was important that their horses could flee in the sand at speed. They didn't spend much time trotting anyplace! Nor do cowboys mounted on Quarter horses.

Disclaimer: This is not to say that Morgans can't canter or gallop. We know from their success in working Western events that they can. And Arabians can trot. We know from that breed's high stepping classes that there are many who can. There are variations in every breed, but the trotting breed-vs-galloping breed dichotomy is a well-worn rule of thumb. It's a useful generalization.

It is interesting to note that the trotting breeds, to a one, all bend their knees when they trot. This is in evidence despite all the controversial talk about how high horses should trot, what is natural versus what is unnatural, wasted motion, the superiority of one breed over another for various light horse, modern era disciplines. Let's put this another way: all horses who trot as their primary mode of employment do their work

most efficiently while flexing all joints of their legs equally. Hence, they bend their knees.

For purposes of illustration here, let's make a distinction. The galloping breeds, which must exercise the most efficiency while

running, tend, when they trot (a gait at which they are not so dependent in nature) to do so with more stiff legged motion. Put conversely it is more efficient for a Thoroughbred, for instance, to gallop than it is for it to trot. The trot is not the highest use of its muscle and skeleton, and not its most efficient gear.

Growing up in the 1970s I was highly influenced by Gladys Brown Edwards who regularly wrote essays on breeding and horsemanship in the old *Arabian Horse World* magazines. Through friends I had the opportunity of meeting the lady a number of times, a memory I will always treasure (When I told her I was publishing *Show Horse* magazine for Saddlebreds, Morgans, Arabians and National Show Horses, breeds shown in the same disciplines, she said, "If you can get all those groups to get along, you'll have a major achievement." She was a little bit sarcastic.).

Gladys was an equine artist and she was an employee at the Kellogg Ranch, on a first hand basis with the horsemen and the disciplines that were practiced with Arabians at the ranch. At the cereal magnate's California operation Arabians were not only bred and marketed, they were used in weekly Sunday shows for the public. In these shows Arabians would do almost every discipline under the sun. There were reining horses that could spin with



Above: This is a page from the 1971 *Arabian Horse World* article by Gladys Brown Edwards. It shows how she illustrated the article with frames captured from 8 mm filmstrips of horses of various breeds and disciplines to prove how efficiency at the trot involves bending the knees and all the joints equally. Reproduced with permission of the *Arabian Horse World*.



Two photos of Ma'Laga ridden by Rob Marsh in a trotting race at the 2012 Vermont Heritage Days event. The photos, taken in a non-show ring setting, illustrate that a horse employed in a mode that values practicality and efficiency will bend its knee at the trot. Also much in evidence in the photo are flexion of all the hind leg joints and a long, weight-bearing stride behind. Photos © Denlore Photography.

few equals; trick horses that could skip rope and jump at liberty; Vaquero roping tricks were demonstrated; high school dressage horses would show off the Spanish walk and trot.

And there were, remarkably, strains of the farm's breeding program that were quite adept at showing off in the saddle seat, fine harness tradition then en vogue as an urban American show ring discipline for the California audiences. One such horse was the Skowronek son Raseyn (Skowronek, bred in Poland and owned by Lady Wentworth of the Crabbet Stud in England, was sort of the Upwey Ben Don of Arabian pedigrees; except this being the Arabian breed he got to deliver significant descendants to England, Poland, Russia and America—where his two sons Raseyn and Raffles would both found dynasties, the way the brothers Wham Bam Command and I Will Command did in recent years in our Morgan breed).

Raseyn and some of his barnmates would put on demonstrations in fine harness, three gaited (remember the modern day Arabian and Morgan breeds' park divisions are a derivative of the Saddlebred three gaited division where horses take lofty, square and, ideally, hesitant steps—hesitant for showing off longer in the park!) and even five gaited. Thus, Gladys was conversant in the rather pure language of these trotting discipline adherents.

And keep in mind Gladys was a sculptor and artist whose horse portraits were prized the way Jeanne Mellin Herrick's are.



I've bought a number of bronze book ends that are Gladys Brown Edwards castings from the '40s and '50s. They were given as trophies in their day and today are considered equine collectibles. So the woman knew equine anatomy and function in a very real way.

In the 1970s she wrote a series of articles for the *Arabian Horse World*, the purpose of which was to lay down a printed, intellectual base for what horsemen were doing in practice. A revolution was taking place with horses like *Oran Van Crabbet (from England) and *Bask (from Poland) where park and English pleasure entries were again starting to bend their knees and do a square trot. Gladys welcomed this as an alternative to the stiff-legged trot that had developed and was championed by others in the Arabian arena. The stiff legged horses "dwelled" which means they extended their legs, rather than raised them, and held them in suspension before landing, usually on their heels. It was an exotic looking trotting gear highly favored by some, especially those who had breeding stock that tended to pass on the trait. They called this "natural." And natural versus artificial could be the subject of another entire column.

Gladys railed against these dwellers calling them goose steppers; daisy clippers; bean shooters; fly swatters; and flap doodlers. These modifiers would often show up in her show write ups and I can only imagine that the editorial staff of the *Arabian Horse World* must have gotten their share of flack over it. But they

Above: A foal at play showing not only bend of knee but equal and impressive flexion of hind leg joints. This picture has been selected to illustrate that high action is natural and not man made through shoeing or training sleight of hand. And that action is as much a subject for the breeder as it is for the judge and the trainer. The foal is CBMF Something More (JW That Special Flaire x French Crystal) owned and bred by Ann Hailey. Photo © Howard Schatzberg.



View from the Ingate



These photos are of Chester Weber's championship Four-In-Hand of Dutch Warmbloods. The animals are employed in highly utilitarian work and, even as they negotiate obstacles and perform patterns, we see them trotting more like a Morgan or a "Baroque" breed, than like a Thoroughbred or flat trotting breed. Again, it is a discipline that calls for efficiency and bending the knee and folding the joints is very much in keeping with the task at hand. Photos © Picsofyou.com.

never seemed to censor the great GBE.

What Gladys did to uphold her point of view was remarkable. In her series of articles she took old 8 mm film clips of those breeds born to trot and printed the film as a series of stills that today we would call a film strip or thumbnails. She would put an x under one support leg and follow that leg through one single step of the trot, in other words the time from which that leg was solidly on the ground, through its departure, its flight of hoof and its final landing back on terra firma.

She would do the same exercise with the flap doodler. What this exercise proved with such visual evidence was the fact that the goose steppers were covering almost no ground in a single step. They were departing and returning to the ground without moving demonstrably forward. This cumbersome gait, while showy to some was, and is, inefficient as a mode of transportation.

She took particularly great joy at breaking down the motion of two breeds so clearly bred for pure trotting purposes: the American Standardbred race horse and the Hackney Horse originally raised in Great Britain for coaching purposes. These breeds could not survive the demands placed on them or perform the duties expected of them, she argued, if any part of their motion was inefficient or wasted.

I wish Gladys had dissected some Morgan trotting horses in her illustrations. I think we'd all profit today from what she might have to say.

A few years back, prompted by my tendency to invoke Gladys in writing and in conversation, my mother went through our collection of old *Arabian Horse Worlds* and found my dogeared copy of one of the issues with Gladys's theoretical writings. In her article "The Trot Is A Many Splendored Thing" Gladys wrote (and this will be an important quotation in subsequent articles in this series) that, "In all horses with a free and easy trot, the hoof does indeed follow the rim of a wheel..." In other words, the flight of hoof is circular, not flat and extended.

What she showed with her 'x' under one leg in a film strip is that horses that bend their knees, that travel with the knee at level or above are actually covering more ground, more efficiently than animals with lower, longer motion.

Her research and her illustrations fly in the face of those who are opposed to high stepping horses and who disparage the saddle seat, fine harness tradition as unnatural.

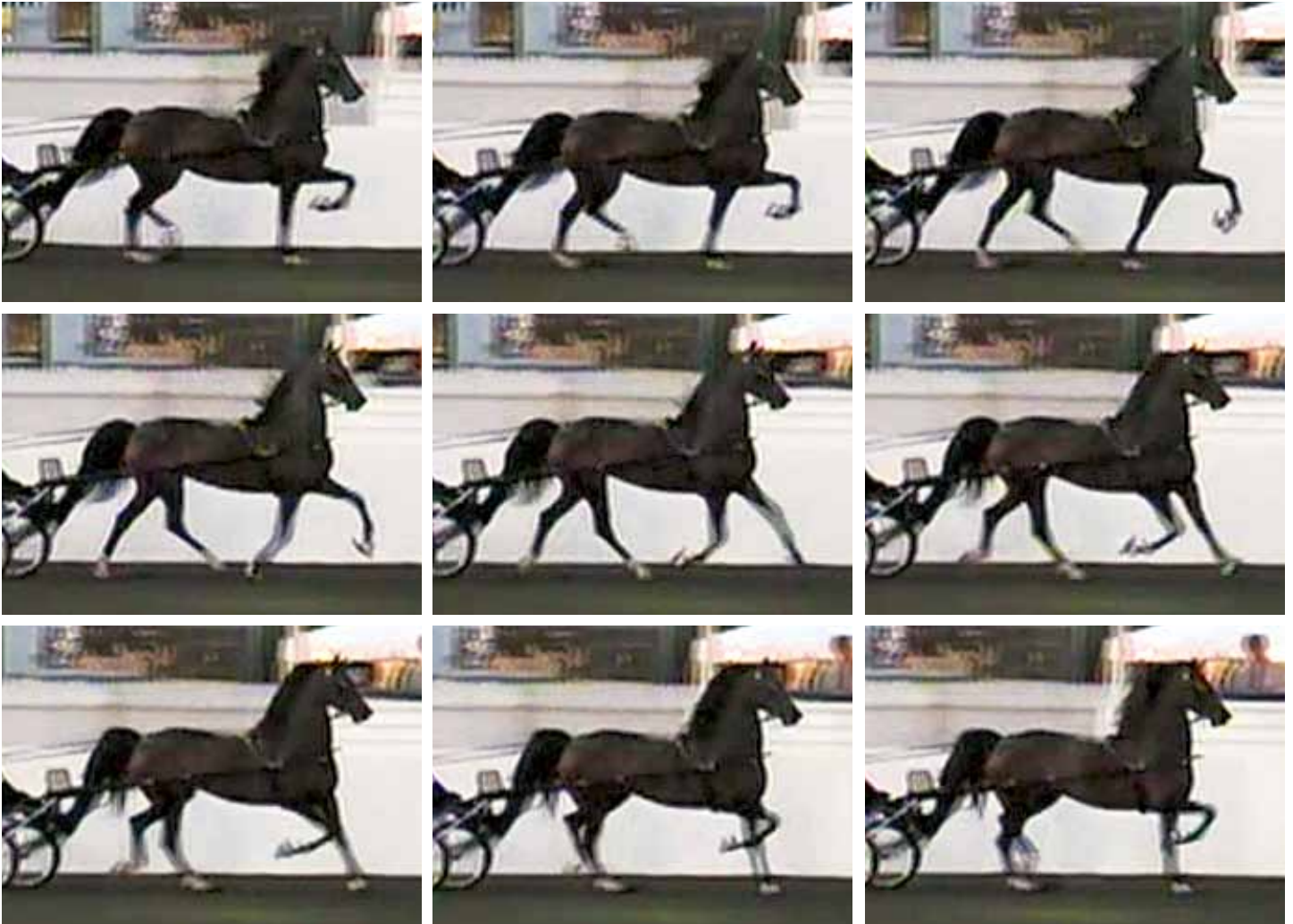
This is important knowledge to have in the evaluation of the Morgan whether by trainers, by judges or by breeders. There is a standard of good trotting motion, though unlike getting over a jump or across a finish line, which can be judged by objective measures, this must be evaluated by the trained and expert eye.

In the next article we will delve more into how correct trotting motion, which implies bending the knee and folding the joints of the legs equally, complies with the classical definition of athleticism. ■



Above: There is only one standard for greatness in the American Standardbred racing breed. It is how fast you can go at the trot (or the pace in the case of a pacer). If action were inefficient then it would have long ago been bred out using this objective standard. This is a picture of the horse of the moment, Googoo Gaagaa, showing him going high before he unfolds to go long. Flexion of the knee joint and high action are not considered wasted or superfluous in such an amazing trotting machine. Photo courtesy of Lisaphoto.

View from the Ingate



This is a breakdown of one stride, from the time the support leg is vertical to the ground to the point where the opposite support leg returns to vertical. It shows a horse in a utilitarian discipline (roadster to bike), which must perform with efficiency, bending the knee at the trot. The horse is Flairetation driven by Peggy Alderman at the recent New England Regional. Photos courtesy of Hawk Multimedia/Premier Horse Video.



The park horse is the peacock of high stepping Morgans. This sequence "height of action" in a park harness horse shows equal use of joints, fold of knee and hock, and parallelism, all terms that would be just as easily at home in dressage as in the fine harness tradition. The horse is Get Busy driven by owner Kathy Gutting at the recent New England Regional. Photos courtesy of Hawk Multimedia/Premier Horse Video.