

## Editor's Note: The Provenance of a Historical Document

*This is a Morgan breed publishing occasion.*

*The article printed here on Morgan breed luminary John Lydon was written by W. Dayton Sumner. It was left unfinished among his papers when he died and, obviously, has never been published before.*

*For those who don't know, Dayton Sumner was a key player in the Morgan breed. He was longtime manager of the New England and Mid-A Morgan Shows and Grand National. He was a book author, magazine writer and breed historian. He bred Morgans under his Southerly prefix and he was an astute large "R" judge. He left behind a significant archive of papers, photos and video, the product of many years of collecting and researching.*

*At the time of his death in 1997, Sumner's video and photo archive was given to Mike Goebig. His papers were transferred to close friend Dr. Al Lucine, longtime president of the American Morgan Horse Association. More recently those papers have been passed on to Dr. Lucine's daughter, well-known photographer, writer and former editor of this magazine, Suzy Lucine. It is through Suzy's efforts that this article became available for this, the 2011 historical issue of The Morgan Horse. The article was unfinished except for hand-written marginal notes such as "tell such and such a story here." To complete the article, Suzy spent time with Mike Goebig, a protégé of John Lydon's and also a close friend of Dayton Sumner. Between the two of them the article was completed and the history put in chronological order. We are also grateful to Diane Sumner, Winnie DeWitt, Nicki Caruso and Maureen Lydon Campbell for their assistance, advice and for supplying historic candid photos.*

*Its subject, John Lydon, is one of the big names in the Morgan world. In partnership with Elizabeth Power, he was the architect of the Waseeka legacy in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s he concentrated his efforts at Mary DeWitt's Stonecroft Farm. His legacy will always be associated with two seminal stallions: Waseeka's Nocturne, who he trained and showed for Mrs. Power and Waseeka's In Command, who was owned by Mary DeWitt.*

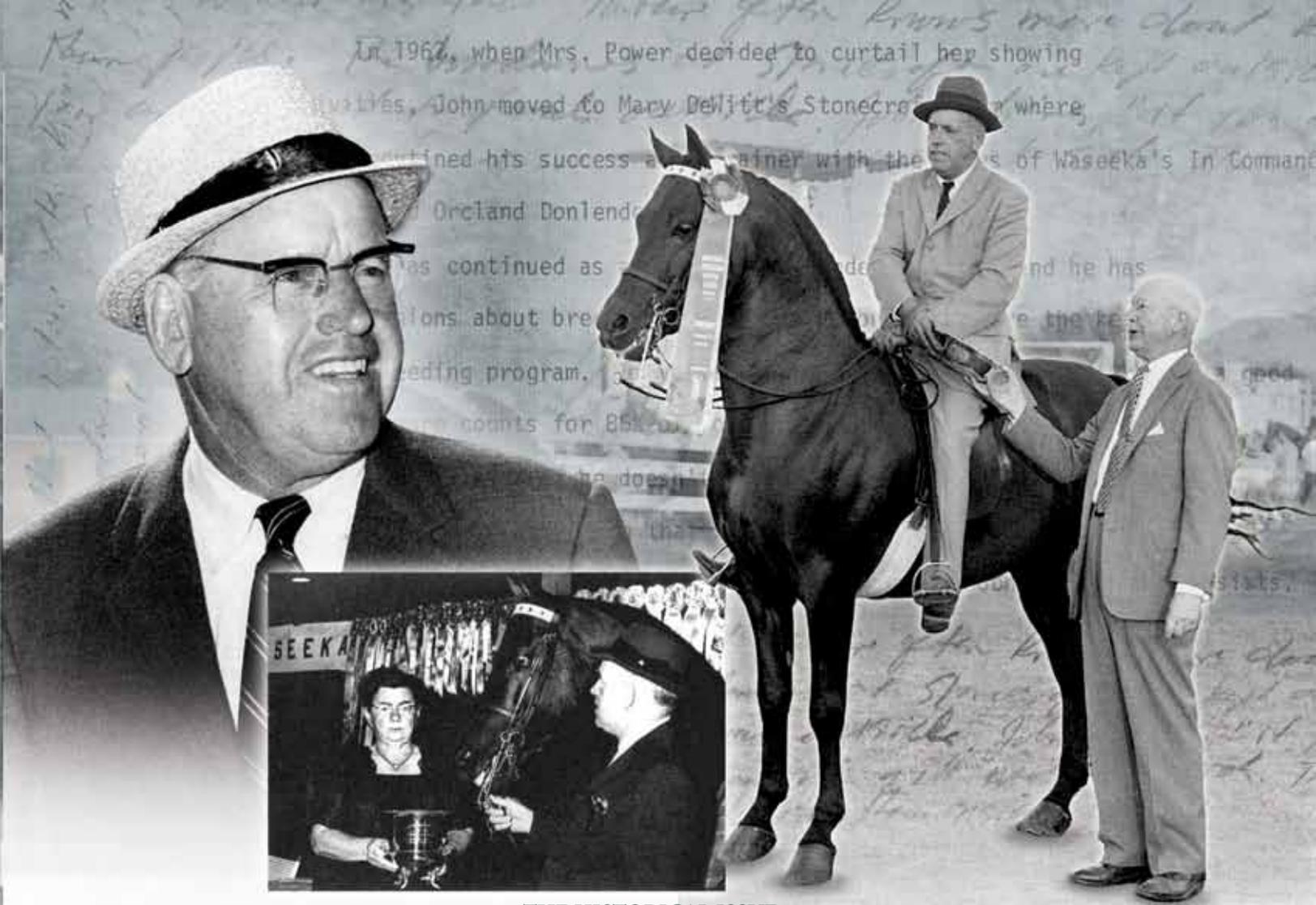
*Lydon was more than a horse trainer. He set the tone for how Morgans are shown, trained and ridden in his own day and well beyond. Many horsemen who are at the top of their game today are paying homage to Lydon every time they enter the ring.*

*We believe this article was written sometime in the 1970s while Lydon was in residence at Stonecroft Farm. John Lydon remained there until 1977. Mary DeWitt eventually succumbed to cancer. Lydon took up residence back in his native Massachusetts, enjoyed employment with the Tsamortis Family's Toils End Farm and managed Waseeka's Showtime for new owner, Brad and Kari Beaton of Hillock Farm. Lydon passed away in 1982.*

*We are proud to publish this previously unknown record, not only of John Lydon's life, but also of the opinion of one of the great commentators on the Morgan breed, W. Dayton Sumner.*



*Above: Dayton Sumner with Waseeka's Nocturne.*



~ THE HISTORICAL ISSUE ~

# The Lydon Way

**T**he Morgan world really has no other figure to compare to Johnny Lydon. For more years than most trainers have been alive, John has been riding, training, showing, winning, and in large measure, he has been shaping the future of the breed by setting an example of excellence for the next generation to emulate.

If he has become a legend in his own time, he got there by being—first, last, and always—a great trainer.

Bending over to work on a horse's foot, John tells us "a trainer has to be capable of doing everything himself. He must be a vet, a carpenter, a repairman, a farrier, and be able to handle any situation that comes up. You won't always have a farrier or vet around when you need him, so you'd better know what you are doing."

Talking on about the art and activity of a horse trainer, John insists that it is best "not to work a horse too much. If you do, the horse will go sour. Working a horse a few minutes a day is usually enough."

John doesn't believe in the same doctrine for trainers. His friends will tell you that they have often called him as late as ten at night, and when someone answered the phone, they would say that John was still out in the barn working the horses. Call that a "secret" of success if you like. John has won more than other trainers because he has worked harder than just about anyone.

Mary DeWitt, owner of Stonecroft Farm where John has been resident trainer since 1968, points out, "Never have I seen a man so dedicated to one thing as John Lydon is to horses. He cares about them. He actually loves horses more than anyone I know. And because he cares, he wants the rest of the world to care, too. That's why his only thought when he sends a horse in the ring is the blue ribbon."

"Riding under John's instruction, teaches you pretty quickly whether you really want to ride or not," Mary said. "John is used to winners and can't see sending someone in the ring if they are just going to ride around for the fun of it."

By **W. Dayton Sumner**

Above: John Lydon with Waseeka's Nocturne along side Frank B. Hills (right) and Elizabeth Power (inset).

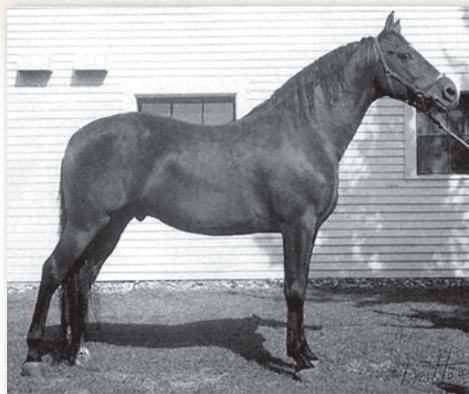
John was a very special person. He was an incredibly talented and intuitive horse and people person who spent every waking hour thinking about horses—checking the wellbeing of his horses, working horses, or just watching horses. He was the very rare person who could recall in detail every horse he ever saw, even when he hadn't actually touched it.

And John was a marvelous raconteur who could entertain anyone lucky enough to spend some social time with him, with these terrific stories of the horse experiences he had had. The stories could go on for delightful hour after hour. When we traveled all over looking for horses, the hours spent in the car with John were pure pleasure, because he could literally entertain us with stories that made eight hours pass like 15 minutes. Time after time I'd beg him to tell me about the police horses, or the time he tried to run a rental operation (that lasted one day!) or any of the dozens and dozens of amusing stories in his vast repertoire.

John meant a great deal to me. He made Waseeka's reputation. His discerning eye for the potential he could bring out in prospects put Waseeka on the Morgan map. John's insistence that horses enter the ring "properly" trained and presented with polish, set new and then unusual standards for Morgan competitions. They might be too rambunctious outside the ring, but he expected them to behave properly and appropriately once through the in-gate, at a time when few Morgans were completely trained or cleaned before they went into the ring.

At that time, with the exception of the National Morgan Show, the only shows were open shows, and John's quality presentations brought both professional and casual people flocking to the ring to watch his horses work. His demand for exceptional quality in everything he did, made him a premier ambassador for the entire Morgan breed. He brought owners into the breed that never considered a Morgan before and sometimes hadn't expected to own a horse. John had a commitment to the history and potential for the breed that surpassed all his passions, well except maybe his for Nocturne.

Sue Annis, Waseeka Farm



Top row: Upwey King Benn and Upwey Benn Quietude. Bottom row: Sarah Annis Lentini & John Lydon with Windcrest Sentimental Lady; Wind-Crest Donfield.

Mary continues, "I've never heard him suggest putting a horse in the ring 'just for experience.' Believe me, if the horse is not ready to show, he gets his training and experience at home. John believes that a show is definitely not the place for training."

### The Road to the Top

John Joseph Lydon was born in 1908 of Boston Irish parentage. By his middle teens, he had left high school and found this place in life—with horses. He went to work for McKenney's Sales Stable in Brighton, Massachusetts and received the kind of education that isn't really available anywhere any more. He had the opportunity to work with a tremendous number of horses of many different breeds. He also began to accumulate some of the stories for which he is famous.

### The Three That Wouldn't Go

John made champions out of Townshend West River, Orland Victoria, and Upwey King Benn. Then there was Thirlstar Tip—John's first saddle champion in 1947 at the old 'National' Morgan Horse Show

(and incidentally, the first gelding to win the stake).

There was also a mare, Upwey Benn Quietude, who carried John to victory in the stake at the Boston Garden. She was to figure importantly in his career a little later, but in a different way.

John moved to Millis, MA in 1951, and soon afterward renewed an old acquaintance. Mrs. Elizabeth Loring Power had been one of the McKenney's better customers for fine saddle horses. And, in fact, John Lydon's mother had worked for Mrs. Power's mother at one time. John met Mrs. Power again at a horseman's council banquet and the conversation turned to the Morgan horse she recently purchased for her daughter and son-in-law, Sue and Keene Annis.

Out of that conversation grew the beginnings of a new chapter in the Morgan history book. Soon afterward, John began training the Waseeka horses, and for the next 15 years, there was no serious challenger for their record of winnings.

First there were the champions Varga Girl, Sterling Velvet, and Windcrest

(Upwey King Benn photo © Ira Haas; Wind-Crest Donfield photo © Freudy Photos)

Our family held him in the highest regard. We always called him John. Not Mr. Lydon, or Johnny...just John. We were too much in awe of him to call him anything but that.

I miss watching John work horses. Sounds pedestrian, but it was really wonderful. I watch trainers these days and I see so much of the things John did right still being done right.

Driving with John was a different story altogether, though. I'm not sure but I don't think cars listened to him as well as horses, even though he would cluck as he drove or say "whoa Nellie Bell" when he stopped.

Nicky Annis Caruso

John was a real good friend. He helped me more than anyone at that time. He was a good horseman and showman, and man. John was good to the Morgan breed. He had more winning horses than any other trainer at that time.

After Mary DeWitt sold her farm, John lived with Ann and me at Hobby Knoll for about six months. He helped me out a lot, and he was a good guy.

John's granddaughter, Maureen Lydon Campbell is a good example of working with horses the Lydon way.

Jim Anderson, formerly of Hobby Knoll Stables

I feel extremely blessed to have had such a wonderful grandfather. All of his grandchildren called him "Daddy Jack." We called my grandfather "Daddy Jack," and I think it was because he wanted a name that would make him not feel old. He always loved living his life to the fullest.

He was a legend to me and when I decided to follow in his footsteps, I wanted to be half the horseman he was. He would come over almost every night and have dinner and tell stories. What a storyteller he was!

The one thing people tell me about him, was that he loved what he did and how he would always be willing to help anyone out when needed. I remember him letting me ride Nocturne, and now I think back how young I was and what a treat he gave me. It is nice to hear stories about Daddy Jack and how many people loved him. Daddy Jack, my aunt and dad were the reason I chose my career.

Maureen Lydon Campbell,  
Majestic Hackney Farm



(Left & inset photo © Warren Patriquin; Retirement photo © Freudy. Photos courtesy of the Intrepid Collection/Art Perry)



Waseeka's Nocturne with John Lydon and Frank B. Hills (left); at his 1977 retirement at the Northampton Fairgrounds (top right) and with Sue Annis (bottom right).

Sentimental Lady. And there was Wind-Crest Donfield—five times national grand champion stallion and twice winner of the 'triple crown' (saddle, harness and breed champion in the same year at the 'National').

John admits that Donfield was one of the toughest horses he ever had to break. Corner John some time and ask him to tell you how he finally did it. It's a story we can scarcely do justice to here!

In 1953, remembering his success with Upwey Benn Quietude, John advised Mrs. Power to buy her—and the bay stud colt by her side was included in the deal. Later named Waseeka's Nocturne, the colt became the undisputed king of the Morgan show world. Under John's guidance, he won 80 percent of the classes he was shown in over a 12-year career, and was never out of the ribbons in any class. He has been called "the greatest show horse of his time." It is doubtful that the man who trained and rode him would disagree.

### Nocturne Nostalgically

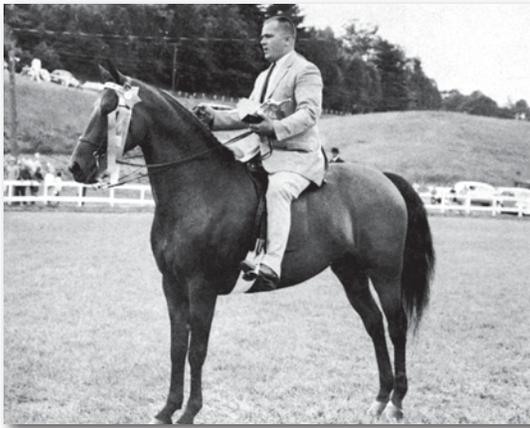
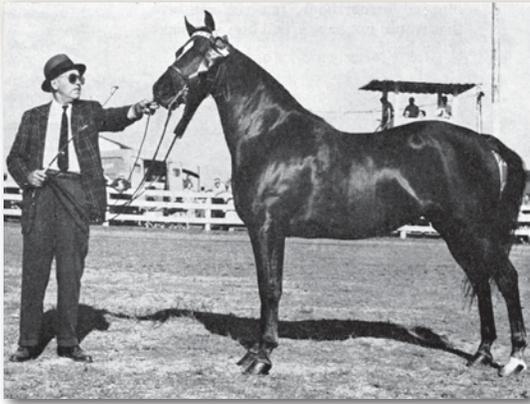
It is about 'Nocky' that John speaks

with most feeling. "I didn't have to work Nocturne. All I would do is take him out, and away he went. You know, to my mind, he never made a mistake in the show ring, and he never made a bad show. He was always good and often, he was great. Yes sir, he was great!"

Of all the events that Nocturne won, John singled out for special notice the 1964 "Special Saddle Stake" at Northampton's National. (John calls it the "Barefoot class.") The rules for this class stipulated that the horses must not be wearing weighted shoes, pads, leathers, long toes or artificial appliances. Wearing a keg shoe and with his feet trimmed only slightly from their usual length, Nocturne won the class, proving that a great horse can win in the ring no matter what rules are imposed.

The class was never held again. But, to this day, John insists that 5 3/4 inches is plenty of foot for any horse. "If a horse won't go on that, he won't go no matter what the length of his toe or the weight of his shoe."

Along with Nocturne, John rode the victory trail with Waseeka's Thisizit,



Top row: Waseeka's Thisizit and Waseeka's Buccaneer.

Bottom row: Waseeka's Theme Song (with Timmy Lydon) and Miller's Adele.

Waseeka's Buccaneer, Waseeka's Party Doll (all from Upwey Benn Quietude), Waseeka's Virginia, Waseeka's Theme Song, Miller's Adele, Waseeka's Here Tiz, Waseeka Wild Orchid, Sweet Pepper and Helicon Calliope.

But for all that he has been a dedicated competitor, his philosophy has never been one of "win at any cost." Nor does he have any interest in making silk purses out of sows' ears. "Begin with one that has what it takes," he says, "and go from there."

What does it take to win? John is fond of saying, "A show horse is like a show girl. First of all, she's pretty and, secondly, she can perform. Did you ever see a Ziegfeld girl with a homely face? Yes sir, a homely face?"

He is, as they say, "hung up" on heads. "You can help their trot, but you can't help that homely head."

Many young trainers have found him eminently approachable. If you seek for advice, you are sure to get words that are sensible and honest.

One long time friend states, "The typical thing about John is that you won't hear from him for months at a time. Then,

let's say, you have a problem. Something goes wrong in your stable—perhaps a good horse gets sick or hurt. Within hours the phone rings and John is on the other end asking "How can I help you out?" You never learn how he finds out so quickly, but always he is on-hand to offer help. He's that kind of guy—someone you can depend on."

### Judge and Breeder

In 1962, when Mrs. Power decided to curtail her showing activities, John moved to Mary DeWitt's Stonecroft Farm in Dalton, Pennsylvania, where he has continued his success as a trainer with the likes of Waseeka's In Command, A-Okay and Orland Donlendon.

He has continued as a successful breeder as well, and he has strong opinions about breeding. "The mares you choose are the key to a good breeding program," he said. "If you want to be successful, get yourself a good mare. A mare counts for 85 percent of your breeding operation. In fact, never breed to a stallion if he doesn't come from a good mare."

Growing up with John Lydon as a pseudo stepfather was a treat. There was never a time when I ever doubted his love, care and concern for me. As far as the horses, he never let me ride a horse that was too much for me, yet also did not spoil me by not challenging my abilities. So, of course, I rode In Command. John had trained him and knew that, although he was a stallion, he was completely safe for me to ride. He trained our horses to perfection.

John was also very good at dealing with children (having raised seven of his own), so much in fact that when I raised my own children I used some of his advice. For instance, when a child wouldn't eat I didn't get upset because as John Lydon used to say, "They'll eat when they get hungry." Or when a child wouldn't go to sleep, he'd say, "They'll sleep when they get tired." But then again he also used this same reasoning when driving and pulling out into traffic. My mother's knuckles would be white from gripping the dashboard as John would say, "Ah, don't worry, they'll stop before they hit us."

Another lesson John taught me which stuck with me my entire life was that if I was ever out somewhere and a boy came up and asked me to dance, I was to accept the offer. He told me I wasn't obligated to dance a second dance, but I was to never hurt a boy's feelings by refusing that first dance. He really cared about people. And speaking of dancing, that man was a beautiful dancer! He taught me how to ballroom dance. Every woman and girl I knew used to love to dance with him and we all got such a kick out of the way he would "click (just like he would to the horses)" to keep time to the music.

One of my favorite things to do was to hang out with my mother and John. We traveled to many different places and though I was teenager, I seemed to prefer their company to that of my peers at times. The conversation always revolved around horses, but I never got tired of listening and hearing the same old stories over and over. I had such a sense of security being with them. There was plenty of laughter but there was plenty of seriousness also. I wouldn't trade my time with them for anything.

One of the most important things—John was such a great father figure that we all called him by his nickname, "Daddy Jack." Boy we loved that man.

Winnie DeWitt

We met John Lydon in the mid 1970s. I had two young children, Maggie and Danny, riding with John's daughter, Ginny Kenney. Ginny introduced us to John.

We became close friends. He helped me get a better horse for Maggie to show, and he taught us all so much about the Morgan breed. With his encouragement, we all became very involved with Morgans.

Both Maggie and Danny tagged along with John and showed their horses. I got involved with the New England Morgan Horse Association, serving on the Board of Directors and as president.

After we met Mary DeWitt, we had the opportunity to swap foals with her out of her mare, High Meadow Kadie (Kadenvale Don x Chief's Autumn Queen).

He celebrated many of the holidays with our family, and my kids really looked up to him. We also had fun visiting many of our mutual friends, including Mark Hannah at his restaurant, Ken's Steakhouse in Framingham, MA. John was with us the night before he died.

John knew the Morgan breed better than most. He was the best horseman, a gentleman, and the best of friends.

Fred Kelley, original owner of Kelley Green Acres

When I was growing up, John Lydon was the person to emulate. He rode every class like it was the most important one ever. His horses were always perfectly presented with spotless equipment.

Most of all, he 'practiced what he preached.' His view of what a Morgan should look like was absolute, and the horses that he showed and judged, and his guidance to breeding programs always reflected that vision.

John was special to me because he was so generous with his time and mentoring when I was starting my professional career, and his influence still effect decisions I make today.

Mike Goebig, Broadmoor



(Waseeka Wild Orchid photo © Budd; Waseeka's Here Tiz photo © Morris)

Top row: Waseeka Wild Orchid and Waseeka's Here Tiz.  
 Bottom row: Helicon Calliope and Waseeka's Virginia.

But it was of judging that John has the most to say. "To be a good judge, you must be a good horseman first," John vehemently insists. "Even if you have to use Saddle Horse judges at Morgan shows, it is better than having someone who is not qualified to judge at all. Of course each judge has his own opinions. You know, if every man loved the same woman it would be one helluva world. The same is true for horses; if every judge liked the same horse, it would be a helluva thing to compete. As least with a judge who is a professional trainer, you can be pretty sure that his preference will be legitimate, as long as the judge chooses honestly. And, contrary to some opinions, professional trainers are not all crooks."

He also believes that he often knows more about horses than people. The broodmares at Stonecroft are kept on site all year and allowed to foal outside. John believes, "If you keep a horse outside, chances are it will never get sick. There's no need to baby horses by keeping them inside."

As a judge, the offense John condemns most is that of one exhibitor cutting another in the show ring. "An exhibitor has enough to do watching his own horse

without worrying about trying to cut off someone else. There are times when I've been cut off three or four times by the same exhibitor in a single class. A good judge can spot things like this, and penalize the exhibitor who does it."

"I am proud of my barn, and my horses, but most of all, I am proud of John for making my horses what they are, and for giving Stonecroft Farm winning horses for over 15 years. He is truly the best thing that ever happened to the Morgan breed."

### The "Millis Mafia"

Johnny Lydon is proud of the success he has had with horses. But, if it's possible, he is even more proud to be head of a large and intensely loyal family. When one of them has a problem, they all have a problem. When one of them has a triumph, they all have a triumph. And, when "Daddy Jack" is in town, all seven children, 17 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren would consider it unthinkable not to have a visit with him.

Just as John has worked hard all of his life, his children know the value of diligence. They are all successful, and three



**Top row:** In 1962, John moved to Mary DeWitt's Stonecroft Farm in Dalton, Pennsylvania, where he continued his success as a trainer with the likes of (from left to right) Waseeka's *In Command*, *A-Okay* (alongside Mary DeWitt) and *Orcland Donlendon* (with Winnie DeWitt).  
**Bottom row (from left to right):** John Lydon and Mary DeWitt; John at a very rainy Northhampton around 1965; John and Keene Annis; Kitchie Littel, Ray Pshadvo, Fay Hallstead, John, Dudie Allegrucci (behind John) and Mary DeWitt; John goofing off.

have followed John into career with horses. Daughter Priscilla O'Connor has replaced him as manager of the breeding operations at Waseeka. Daughter Ginny has continued to operate a training stable under the Sir Echo Farm name that John started. And son Tim (who, incidentally is probably second to no one at running horses in breed classes) is a highly regarded farrier.

The cohesiveness and industry whole family is a tribute to the man who set their examples for them.

They grew up with the man who made it to the very top of his chosen profession. They are used to hearing his voice fill a room with strong, often sharply expressed. But it is opinion you must respect because it is backed with the weight of success. More than that, it is backed with the warmth that makes Johnny such a compelling personality. When you are with him, you laugh a lot, for no one can tell a story better than he, and few have better stories to tell. He is a special kind of person.

At age 67, John talks about retiring. But then he turns the colts out and rattles a can to spook them—and a bay filly looks at him with sassy pop eyes and bounces off at a wild four-corner trot.

And you can tell by the way that Johnny Lydon watches her that he might stick with it just a little longer. Just until that filly is ready to go just until that one more great horse comes along.

Riding, with John's instruction, really does teach you numerous things. Basically, it teaches you that you're either going to ride or you're not. There is no halfway about it. John is used to winners and can't see sending anyone into the ring just "to ride around for the fun of it mind, and that is the blue ribbon.

Riding under John's instruction also teaches you to be more afraid of John than you are of the horse—which for me has been a great teacher in itself. He has made me annoyed enough that I have

gone into the ring and given a horse as good a ride as he, just to show him I can do it. I am sure Bill Brooks will at least do this. And when I come riding out of the ring with the blue, John said, "See, I knew you could do it, but you didn't."

Never have I seen a man so dedicated to one thing as John Lydon is to horses. I doubt if anyone realizes how much he has done for the Morgan breed. With the aid of Nocturne and hand-picked broodmares, he has made beautiful Morgans. He is, as they say, hung up on heads.

John is an extremely sensitive man, which many do not know. He is for the Morgan 100 percent, and takes it as a personal insult if something is said about a horse he loves, be it his or belonging to someone else. So many people feel that horse trainers use methods that are cruel. With John Lydon, this is not so. He has treated my horses as if they were his children. If they have needed discipline, it was given, not as a beating, but with one crack of the whip and that was the end. He knows that each horse has a different personality and some must be reasoned with kindly day after day. There are horses that are more excitable than others. These John works with so patiently that I can't understand where the patience comes from. On top of his sensitivity, John has a great sense of humor. He says you have to, to stick around horses for well over 50 years. He loves horses more than anyone I know. It really isn't the blue ribbons—it's the horses and most of all, the Morgans.

You may feel that I have been brain washed into thinking that some way John does concerning horses—but what better way to be brain washed than by a man who knows what he is talking about when it comes to Morgans? His logic on training, riding, showing, and breeding horses makes more sense to me than anyone I have ever heard. ■