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TREASURE DOWN UNDER: RANCHBOSS CORTEZ

The handsome buckskin stallion has been making a name for the Morgan breed in a foreign land.

Morgan breeders in the United States and Canada have ready access to an assortment of bloodlines of all the families present in our breed. Whatever your Morgan preference, there is a horse to fill it. It might be difficult to imagine, then, what it must be like to be a Morgan breeder living in another country, limited in selecting breeding stock from a much smaller gene pool. Importing new bloodlines, whether via frozen semen or actual bloodstock, is not an inexpensive endeavor. So what drives foreign breeders, who could much more easily get

involved with a breed native to their country, to become devotees of the Morgan horse instead?

For Greg and Kathy Lyons of Wilga Park Morgans in Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia, it was the famous Morgan temperament. “I rode as a kid on our sheep station, but was always nervous,” Kathy says. “Greg had also ridden as a kid and was a much braver rider than I, playing ‘cowboys and Indians,’ hanging off the side of his horse, pretending to shoot one of his brothers from under the horse’s neck [just like in the movies]. We came to trail riding in our early

By Laura Hornick Behning

ABOVE: Kathy and Greg Lyons with RanchBoss Cortez (Primavera Valdez x Tellura’s Black Gold), 1999 buckskin stallion, and Chris Maroni, up.



ABOVE (LEFT): RanchBoss Cortez. **INSETS (TOP TO BOTTOM):** RanchBoss Cortez is well known for his extremely laid back, mannerly behavior. Here he is at the 2013 Brisbane Royal Exhibition (EKKA) after a bridless demonstration and with Emma Gaskett (photo © Kathy Lyons).

forties and when I decided that the pony that I had could be traded in for my ‘real’ horse, I began to look at which breed I might like. I had many, many people tell me that I should have this breed or that breed, but once I had read about the wonderful steady disposition of the Morgan horse—about how the Morgan was a horse that would suit the whole family, how this horse could be left in the paddock for months and when next you mounted, would give you as good a ride as if you had just stepped off its back the day before—I just had to have one of those.”

After a very long search, Kathy finally found an email address for the AMHA in a horse magazine, and sent them an inquiry about Morgans in Australia. Two weeks later a parcel arrived, full of information. “One breeder, Diane Burgess [now Howard] was only three hours from us, so we made contact and went to visit,” Kathy recalls. “Diane only had her young breeding stock and since I was looking for a horse of riding age, she told us of the Australian National Morgan horse show that was held annually in Victoria, as that is where most of the Morgans were back then. She suggested we would see more Morgans in the one place there. We headed to Victoria and as well as watching the wonderful Morgans at the show, we got to visit each of the studs to meet their stock.”

There were only about 90 purebred Morgans in Australia at the time, and very few were available for sale. It took six months and two trips to Victoria for Kathy to find her first Morgan, the black mare Eagleview Skybeau (Marvelous Encore x Mt Tawonga Bea), a.k.a. “Calypso.” “Greg was very supportive of my choice, even though the

cost of a Morgan horse was ten times the price of my riding pony,” Kathy says. “Calypso looked after me as if she were a much more mature and experienced mount—not the green broke, not quite three-year-old that she was. I convinced Greg that he must have one of these Morgans, as well.” She discovered that unbeknownst to her, while she had been searching for a Morgan, Greg had also been looking—for a buckskin Morgan! However, cream dilutes—indeed, colorful Morgans of any variety—did not exist at the time in Australia, so the dream was put on a temporary hold.

“HERE IS YOUR NEXT HORSE.”

“Greg had to take me to the competitions that I began to go to, as I was quite nervous without his support,” Kathy says. “He would tow the trailer for me and ensure I had everything I needed, and then wait until we were ready to head home. While he waited [such a patient man] he would watch the other women and their horses getting ready to compete. Many of them had horses that had to be lunged prior to the rider getting on [not so with my Morgan] and many of them would end up in tears either before, during, or after their ride. I always seemed to come out of the arena with a smile on my face, riding Calypso with reins drooped—and would most times get a ribbon. Greg made the decision that we had to make more of these Morgan horses, so that many more people could enjoy their horses. His reasoning was that most of those people he watched struggling with their horses were not going to the Olympics, and their chosen sport was obviously not giving them



LEFT TO RIGHT: A bridleless RanchBoss Cortez with Linda Shore, up, and with owner Greg Lyons, up.

much pleasure. He wanted to change that.”

The couple purchased several other mares and then began their search for a stallion to head their fledgling program. They had never handled a stallion before, so temperament was a prime concern. This was also Greg’s chance to own that beautiful buckskin horse that he had been dreaming of, which would mean importing a Morgan from the United States. They purchased a young dun colt from Ragtime Morgans, but before his importation to Australia he succumbed to a reaction from the West Nile Virus vaccine. Greg was devastated.

“Diane Howard again was the person who steered us in the right direction,” Kathy says. One day, an email arrived from Diane that simply said “Here is your next horse.” Greg opened that email and there he was: the beautiful buckskin stallion, RanchBoss Cortez. Cortez was six years old and already started under saddle. Greg knew immediately that he was exactly what he’d been searching for.

Cortez’s pedigree is strongly linebred along old California Working Western lines that are very rarely seen in this concentration today. His sire is the well-known buckskin Primavera Valdez (f. 1979, Primavera Vaquero x Tia Margarita). Cortez is out of the 1974 black mare Teluras Black Gold (Hedlite’s Mickey Waer x Danni Jo), who was 25 when she delivered Cortez. “I had planned to use my only breeding to Primavera Valdez on a younger mare, and one more likely to conceive as, by that time, Valdez was gaining in years, and Carol Simpson, his owner, was only accepting a few breedings,” says Cortez’s breeder, Nina Bates. “As it transpired, when I had all my breeding mares checked, only Teluras Black Gold

was in season and Valdez was over 300 miles from Bossert Ranch! I was having some horses delivered from a friend who, as luck would have it, was hauling horses up near where Valdez was located at Carol Simpson’s ranch in Marysville, California, so, by chance, two old, well-bred Western Working Morgans were united—and a star was born.”

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

“We had no real idea of bloodlines, except those of the Morgans already in Australia,” Kathy says. They belonged to the online group “Friends of Valdez,” a group of people dedicated to the bloodlines of Primavera Valdez, who were a great source of support and information. “So it was on total faith that Diane and this wonderful group of people knew what they were talking about that we contacted Nina about Cortez,” says Kathy.

Nina sent a DVD of Cortez as a youngster and under saddle, but Greg needed to see how the golden stallion interacted with people. “He already loved what he was looking at,” Kathy says. “So it was way more important to see the nature of the horse on the ground.” At the time, Cortez was being leased by Wendy LeGate of Old Growth Oak Morgans, which was five hours away from Nina’s Bossert Ranch in Coarsegold, California. Nina and her two daughters made the trip to take additional video footage for the Lyons. Jacque Hofer, Nina’s daughter, rode and bathed Cortez, with Nina’s younger daughter Natalie helping. All the while Cortez stood calmly, clearly enjoying the attention. Seeing this new video sealed the deal for Greg.



ABOVE: The Cortez legacy will continue in Austria at Elke Matevi Muller's Emperor Mountain Morgans via the 2016 bay dun colts RBD Adonis N Dun and RBD Thor Dun N Gold, both sired by the Cortez great grandson, Amberfields Blaze N Dun. Thor is out of the Cortez daughter, RanchBoss Reining Gold, doubling up on the Cortez breeding.

"It took a few months before Wendy's mares were all safely pregnant and we could start the importation process," Kathy remembers. "Nina also wanted to collect and freeze semen from Cortez before he left the country, so Greg had to hold onto his excitement just that bit longer." Crispin Bennett International Horse Transport was hired to take care of Cortez's importation. Everything that was required, including vet paperwork and vaccinations, transport and insurance, was covered under one fee. "It was \$10,000 U.S. [around \$14,000 AU] back then," Kathy says. "It is way more expensive now since the Equine Influenza outbreak in Australia, which was brought into the country through inadequate quarantine processes with the Thoroughbred breeding stallions that were shipped around from country to country. It costs around \$25,000 – \$30,000 AU these days."

Cortez was in quarantine for four weeks in the United States before boarding his flight from Los Angeles to Australia. He then had another two weeks of quarantine in Sydney, finishing the process just before Christmas of 2005. "What an amazing Christmas present that year!" Kathy says.

The Lyons have family who were living in Sydney at the time, so Greg decided to visit—horse trailer in tow—and bring Cortez home after his quarantine. Cortez was to be temporarily boarded at Central Mangrove, just north of Sydney, for about a week until his new owners could pick him up. Kathy recalls "when we found it was at Mangrove Mountain, we contacted a Morgan owner/breeder who lived in the area and asked if we could visit her and her Morgans while we were there. Deborah Saunders of Windsor

Park Morgans was excited to hear from us, and insisted that Cortez was not going to be living up the road somewhere on someone else's property. He was to be taken straight to her property! There was no talking her out of it—and we were so appreciative of the offer." Deborah was the first Australian Morgan owner to see Cortez, and she was mightily impressed. "She phoned us to tell us just how magnificent he was," remembers Kathy. "Deborah was full of praise for Cortez and whoever had handled/trained him. He was such a gentleman on the end of the lead rope and so very willing to do exactly as you asked."

The trip down to Sydney to pick up their new Morgan was filled with excitement—and for Greg in particular, a bit of trepidation. How would Cortez behave on the trip home? What if things didn't go as planned? He needn't have worried. Over the course of a few days during their visit to Sydney, Greg took time to get to know Cortez, building trust prior to the 11-hour drive home. "I have a photo somewhere of Cortez looking at Greg through his long, blond streaked forelock for the first time," Kathy says. "Greg was silent, but I knew he'd fallen in love!"

The trip home had been carefully planned, with stops every few hours at show grounds that had horse facilities. It was summer and very hot, so there was concern that Cortez might not drink enough and become dehydrated. Kathy says "After the first two stops I could almost hear Greg's heart singing! Cortez backed off the trailer, looked around and snuffed the air, then put his head down to eat and drink. He would have a roll in the dust and then walk obediently back onto the trailer. He did that at every stop. Such a gem!"



ABOVE: Greenbank Hollows Renley (RanchBoss Cortez x Danville Dea), 2013 buckskin gelding, owned by Cynthia Stanton.

PROMOTING THE BREED

The Morgan is still a relatively unknown breed in Australia, so Greg was determined that Cortez would go out to show people what a Morgan horse was all about. “The decision was made to pay a professional to train Cortez and to ride him at significant events,” Kathy says. “We took Cortez to the agricultural shows and Greg or I would ride him at those events, but the high profile events saw dressage trainer Linda Shore on his back.” Linda took Cortez into the dressage arena for the first time in 2006, just months after his arrival in Australia, with the goal of qualifying him for the Queensland State Dressage Championships in October. To qualify at novice level (roughly equivalent to our U.S. training level) Cortez had to get three scores over 65 percent at official competitions.

“Cortez had been a green reining horse when he’d had his three months of training in the USA, so it took a little while to train that slide stop into a more sedate halt,” Kathy says, with a smile. Cortez and Linda made it to the Queensland State Dressage Championships that year, and it was just the beginning of many proud moments for Wilga Park Morgans.

Cortez’s impressive show career includes Supreme Champion Morgan—halter and ridden, Supreme Led dof Show, Grand Champion Dilute—“every title that was possible to win, Cortez did it over and over again at the Agricultural Shows, the Royal Toowoomba Show, and the two Australian National Morgan Horse Shows he attended,” Kathy says. “I think to us, though, the accomplishment we appreciate the most is the People’s Choice Award that Cortez was granted at both his Australian National

Morgan Horse Shows. This is an award that is voted on by the other competitors and visitors to the Show.”

Greg began working as the Operations Manager for the Toowoomba Showgrounds around 2008, which allowed him to make plans for the Toowoomba Royal Show. He came up with the idea of using one of the arenas to create a display of horse breeds—and of course Morgans had to be a part of it! Kathy contacted the Queensland Morgan owners in search of participants, asking everyone to come up with a short, interesting demonstration with their horse(s), performed to music. “How awesome were the Morgan people of Queensland!” Kathy remembers. “They all jumped on board and we put together a fantastic half-hour display. The practice sessions looked so good I put a proposal to the MHAA [The Morgan Horse Association of Australia] board to have it professionally videoed and put to DVD. We still love to look back on that video that was made in 2009.” Every year thereafter there has been a Morgan Breed Spectacular at the Toowoomba Royal. Cortez has joined the presentations, first exhibiting as a traditional dressage horse, then Western dressage, and most recently, bridleless. The Morgan breed had begun to make a mark on the Australian horse scene—in no small part due to Cortez’s many appearances at promotional equine events.

This point was driven home during the team’s experience at Equitana 2013. Linda and Cortez had by then moved to Western dressage, performing a demonstration at the Australian National Morgan Horse Show in Queensland in 2012. Then, Linda was invited to be a Western Dressage Educator at Equitana, using Cortez



LEFT TO RIGHT: EMM Heartbreak Kid (RanchBoss Cortez x Disco Patricia CH), 2012 bay gelding, winning the 2016 Morgan World Championship Green Reining Snaffle bit/hackamore with trainer Josette Conti and owned by Cindy Nord; Hodgsen Park Telopea (RanchBoss Cortez x Mt Tawonga Marella), 2013 smoky black gelding, owned by Michelle Higgins.

as her demonstration horse. “In the September edition of the *Horse Deals* Stallions section, Greg included in our usual advertisement an announcement that Cortez would be at Equitana, and to come meet him in the flesh,” Kathy says. The Morgan Horse Association of Australia had a Breed Stall in the Breed Village, where they had a horse in the stable and promotional material to hand to the public, so Cortez was also in the Breed Village for a day. He performed in the Breed Displays as well as in Western Dressage. Linda and Cortez were also asked to be part of Wayne Hipsley’s (former AMHA executive director) presentation. They had no idea how famous their stallion had become. “Both Greg, in the Morgan Breed Village with Cortez, and Linda with him in the other demonstrations, were totally gob-smacked at the hundreds of people who lined up to touch this horse that they had been admiring for years. Greg had to ask people to go get him a coffee or something to eat as he just could not leave the stall, so many wanted to talk to him about Cortez—and simply to tell him what pleasure he gave them, just by looking at him.” Cortez had become an equine celebrity!

THE U.S. OFFSPRING

Before leaving for Australia, RanchBoss Cortez sired four AMHA registered foals. Three of them have Wendy LeGate’s OGO prefix, and have not bred on, but the fourth—the 2004 buckskin mare RanchBoss Reining Gold (out of What A Foxy Lady), bred by Cortez’s breeder Nina Bates, has been a successful broodmare, with six foals to her credit so far. She was recently purchased by Peggy Malone of Takilma Gold Morgans, Cave Junction, Oregon. “We are

very excited to add this wonderful beauty to our herd of brood mares,” Peggy says. “I owned her dam, What A Foxy Lady, for the last nine years of her life. She was a beautiful Western bred mare that I loved dearly. I have always admired RanchBoss Cortez—I saw him show at the Gilroy Morgan show before he was exported to Australia, and am very happy to see him excel at Wilga Park as their foundation stallion.”

RanchBoss Reining Gold’s first foal, the 2008 dunskin stallion Amberfields Embossedngold (by Amberfields Starsnstripes) has sired seven foals to date including the 2012 homozygous dun stallion, Amberfields Blaze N Dun (out of Amberfields Lonesome Dove). “Blaze” is beginning a promising career at stud for Sue and Derrick Olson’s Rafter Bar D Morgans in Sarona, Wisconsin. Both of his 2016 colts, RBD Adonis N Dun and RBD Thor Dun N Gold, went to Elke Matevi-Muller’s Emperor Mountain Morgans in Austria this fall. Elke also imported Mulberry Sahalie, who is in foal to Blaze for 2017, so the future of this European branch of Cortez’s descendants seems assured.

Several U.S. breeders have availed themselves of the U.S.-based frozen semen from Cortez. Patricia Sullivan and Bruce Brink of Greenbank Hollow Farm in Danville, Vermont, have bred two Cortez foals to date, both buckskins out of Danville Dea: the 2013 buckskin gelding, Greenbank Hollow Renley and the 2016 filly, Greenbank Hollow Poppy. Ellen Palillo of Endless Mountain Morgans in Meshoppen, Pennsylvania, found Cortez when she was looking for the perfect cross for her many-time champion reining mare, Disco Patricia CH. Ellen says, “I did quite a lot of research on

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LEFT TO RIGHT: Wilga Park Lisianthus (RanchBoss Cortez x Haymeron Park Ruby Jane), 2009 buckskin mare, ridden brideless by Joshua Lawson Smith during the 2016 EKKA Horse Breeds Expo Morgan demonstration. “Lisi” is owned by Tim and Lisa Wong (photo by Tim Wong); Wilga Park Serjania (RanchBoss Cortez x Eagleview Skybeau), 2007 smoky black gelding, owned and ridden by Jan Tucker (photo © Peninsula Pix).



what I thought would be a good cross when I was looking for a stud to breed to Disco Patricia. She has been an awesome reining mare for us and she is something of Morgan Reining Royalty, having both a sire and a dam that had highly successful reining careers. I wanted to breed her to a performance-bred Morgan stallion that had also had a successful show career, and Cortez fit the bill. I liked him on paper because he had a proven performance line on top [Valdez] and his dam is from old California ranch stock, which really appeals to me, as well. I also like Cortez as an individual because he is a very balanced horse with a nice deep hip and a lot of Morgan type. His temperament is exceptional, and he seems to pass that on to his get. That is certainly true in EMM Heartbreak Kid’s [Buster] case!” 2016 was Buster’s first year in the reining pen, and he won the Green Horse Reining class at New England and then won the Grand National Reining three- and four-year-old snaffle bit, as well as the Reining Snaffle Bit/Hackamore World Championship. A great start for this talented son of Cortez!

Several more Cortez “frozen” foals will arrive in 2017. Patricia Sullivan is expecting two, and Tom Nobles of Noble T Morgans in British Columbia has one due, as well. The Lyons are planning a trip to the U.S. and Canada in May, to visit the U.S. Cortez foals, and hope to time their visit to be at Tom’s when his mare gives birth!

CORTEZ’S AUSTRALIAN OFFSPRING

With the 2016 Australian foal crop, Cortez will have 50 foals on the ground in Australia. This is the highest number of purebred Morgans sired by any Australian Morgan stallion to date—

surpassing the record of the late, great Marvelous Encore.

Most of Cortez’s foals have been purchased as saddle horses, fulfilling Greg’s original goal of creating Morgans that people could enjoy riding. A good example is the 2012 brown gelding, Wilga Park Grenadier (out of Red Bluff Paprika), who has been in his new home with Angela Brown for a year now. “I’m having the best time training him so I’m glad he’s mine,” Angela says. “‘Ren’ has just turned four and is filling out beautifully. One of my highlights was a comment from a Grand Prix trainer and competitor who watched us warming up and said ‘your horse is amazing, so obedient and responsive and he can do so many things!’ He asked a number of times if he really was only three-and-a-half years old. He then said, ‘why ride a warmblood, people should get one of these horses!’ Ren was the first Morgan this trainer had met, and I think we made a good impression!”

Michelle Higgins is the proud owner of Hodgson Park Telopea (RanchBoss Cortez x Mt Tawonga Marella), a 2013 smoky black gelding. Michelle was already a Morgan owner when she discovered Telopea on a trip to Perth in November 2014. “Two years earlier, I had scoffed at the ‘no one ever owns just one Morgan’ line I had heard from breeders and owners,” Michelle says. “But now I was on the inevitable journey for my second Morgan. The idea was that I would find a beautiful, unstarted Morgan that I could try out my new skills on. I was unsure if I would know the right horse straight away or if it might be a slow burn. On my last day in Perth, on a whim, I visited Rachel Whan at Hodgson Park. I went to see Hodgson



LEFT: Wilga Park Conquistador (RanchBoss Cortez x Mt Tawonga Natasha), 2010 buckskin stallion, and owner Rachel Whan riding (photo © Jessie Lloyd).

Park Fringe Lilly, a lovely four-year-old. Rachel had to halter the highly inquisitive Hodgson Park Telopea so we could spend some time with Lily. Telopea was a purebred yearling with a bold and cheeky nature and refused to be left out of anything. I watched his incredible movement as he played in the paddock and managed to get some video of him moving [not just his nostrils in the lens of my phone]. The next few days, I was home in Melbourne and I couldn't stop thinking about the stunning black yearling with a star and a sock. I tried the mantra 'you are not looking to buy a yearling' a few times a day, but still found myself researching his breeding. His sire, RanchBoss Cortez, was a magnificent buckskin all rounder with some seriously nice progeny! So it wasn't long before I was on the phone to Rachel that Telopea was on a truck from Perth to Melbourne. In two years, he has matured to over 15hh and still has an extremely outgoing nature. Telopea has shown me what a clever and brave horse is capable of, and I will never regret my last minute trip to Hodgson Park."

A select few of Cortez's offspring so far have found their way into breeding programs. From one of Cortez's first foal crops in Australia, the 2009 buckskin mare, Wilga Park Lisianthus (x Haymeron Park Ruby Jane) owned by Lisa Wong of Eatons Hill Stud in Warner, Queensland, has made her mark both as a show and as an exhibition horse and a broodmare. Beginning her life in the spotlight as a youngster, Lisianthus sparkled in Morgan Breed demonstrations at the Breed Expo pavilion at the Brisbane Royal Exhibition (EKKA) and at other Morgan breed demonstrations. This year she was shown in dressage, and both she and her two-

year-old buckskin daughter Eatons Hill Malou (by MEMC Crown Royal) went to the EKKA Breed Expo. Lisianthus produced a handsome buckskin son in 2015, Eatons Hill Malou, who is also by MEMC Crown Royal.

The 2012 bay Cortez daughter, Wilga Park Kachina (out of Mt Tawonga Tabitha), has produced two foals by the gray stallion SFG Drayton for owners Stephan and Leonie Smith of Leambro Stud in Lanefield, Queensland. Kachina has also been out to a few shows and in keeping with the family tradition, she has also been exhibited at the Morgan Breed Expo at the EKKA. "It certainly gives us a great feeling of achievement when the breeder who has one of our progeny in their program chooses to take that particular horse out to the busiest environment because they know that the horse has a great mind and can cope with everything thrown at it," says Kathy.

Another young Cortez daughter just beginning her broodmare career is the Lyons' own mare Wilga Park Desert Rose (out of Wilga Park Tippuhana), a 2009 bay. Desert Rose had her first foal in 2015, a palomino gelding by Ragtime Oro Blanco named Wilga Park Desert Storm. "He is certainly the epitome of what we had hoped to produce with Casper over a Cortez daughter," Kathy says. "Desert Storm was snapped up at birth by a lovely lady, Wendy Brown. Wendy became a close friend when she lived across the road from us and re-gained her confidence in riding, after some bad experiences, on my riding gelding, Mt Tawonga Oscar. With Wendy, Desert Storm will go out to many, many shows and continue to promote the Morgan breed."

The 2008 buckskin mare Wilga Park Golden Glory (out of



RIGHT: Wilga Park Grenadier (RanchBoss Cortez x Red Bluff Paprika), 2012 brown gelding, with owner Angela Brown, up, winning the Working Equitation class at the 2016 Victorian State Morgan Horse Show.

Red Bluff Paprika) will be having her first foal, by SFG Drayton, in 2017. Owned by Tammie Pike of Stoneleigh, Queensland, Glory has been a riding horse for a good number of years, but Tammie always wanted a foal from Glory and finally chose a stallion for her. “We are looking forward to seeing what these two produce,” Kathy says.

Cortez has two stallion sons currently. Wilga Park Conquistador, a 2010 buckskin out of Greg’s first mare Mt Tawonga Natasha, was “a tall, gangly, ‘ribby’ colt with a crooked tail and a crooked ear,” Kathy says with a smile. “Greg saw him and knew instantly that he was going to be kept entire. I saw him and wondered if Greg had lost his marbles! However, Greg has an excellent eye for a good horse, and Conquistador blossomed into a magnificent young colt with a mind just as sweet as his sire.”

The original plan was for Conquistador to stay at Wilga Park, but that all changed when Kathy’s former riding instructor, Rachel Whan, saw Conquistador. Rachel, who had moved to Western Australia (WA), was determined to increase the Morgan population in that state. There were only 13 Morgans in WA at that time. “When Rachel asked if we would consider her as his owner if ever we wished to sell him on, it didn’t take Greg long to make up his mind,” Kathy says. “He knew Conquistador was going to be a magnificent stallion and that Rachel would do him more justice than we would.” Conquistador matured to 16hh, well suited to six foot tall Rachel. In addition to his stud duties, he is promoting Morgans in the dressage arena.

The second Cortez colt that has been kept entire is Wilga Park Silver Sabre (out of Eagleview Skybeau, a.k.a. “Calypso”). Sabre was

born to a surrogate mare, as his dam had survived a breach birth of a beautiful buckskin filly that unfortunately did not survive. She lost another filly at seven months gestation the following year, so the decision was made to do embryo transfer instead. “We did two successful embryo transfers; one resulted in Wilga Park Silver Sabre and the other in Wilga Park Summer Storm,” Kathy explains. “Two magnificent babies, each fulfilling the dream of two people: Tammy-Lee Penney, who was replacing her beautiful Summer Beauty [Cortez and Calypso’s first born] who was lost to colic at five years of age, and me, who wanted to ride the magnificence of the combination of Cortez x Calypso.”

“The following year Calypso managed to carry her foal full term, but the birth was a ‘red bag’ birth and we were very lucky indeed to end up with the only Cortez x Calypso daughter, Wilga Park Sassafra,” Kathy continues. “On questioning our breeding vets on the possibility of it happening again, the decision was made never to have Calypso carry another foal as we would not risk losing her for the sake of breeding another little Morgan.”

Silver Sabre recently returned home from being started under saddle. The day before, Kathy had ridden his older full brother, Wilga Park Serjania, while in Victoria training to become a Cowboy Dressage judge. “To come home and ride Silver Sabre at the walk, trot, and canter and find that same amazing smoothness—like gliding across glass—was simply awesome!” Kathy says. “Greg’s ambition was always to ride Cowboy Dressage with Cortez. Now, my ambition is to ride his son, Wilga Park Silver Sabre, in Cowboy Dressage. We can’t wait for 2017!”



LEFT: Wilga Park Silver Sabre (RanchBoss Cortez x Eagleview Skybeau), 2013 smoky black stallion, owned by Greg and Kathy Lyons.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, DISPOSITION

Cortez is allowed to attend clinics that usually prohibit stallions because he is so well known for his extremely laid back, mannerly behavior. There is actually a running joke among Cortez's connections about how he likes to sleep between important events in his life! "When we think of the trepidation we felt when we were about to become the owners of a Morgan stallion it is really quite funny to look back on our life with Cortez," Kathy says. "So many stories relate to how Cortez loves to doze when he knows he's not required to do anything important. However, I believe this stallion is well aware of what is going on around him and makes the decision to act accordingly. He is a very sensitive, sensible, 'thinking' horse and intuitively knows when he is to be a performer or when he is to just relax and bide his time. Cortez always 'slept' between his classes at the shows he attended and often times the judge would ask if he actually 'woke up' enough to do his stallion duties—whilst they were awarding him the Supreme Ribbon!"

Kathy remembers her friend Tammy-Lee Penney's experience with Cortez one day when the dentist was at the farm. It was raining, so the horses were taken to the stable to be worked on. "Tam caught Cortez in his paddock and walked him toward the stable complex—the area he usually goes to breed a mare. As they approached, Cortez grew a few inches and began to prance gently on the end of the lead rope and gave a few little 'mumbles.' Tam interpreted them as saying 'Tam, I'm The Man! I really am The Man!' She gave him a little tug on the lead rope and said, 'No, Buddy, you are not The Man, we are only getting your teeth done today.' Cortez immediately went back

to a [disappointed] head low walk that said, 'OK, I guess I'm not The Man today.' Now that is the temperament we speak of!"

Recently the Lyons grandchildren were visiting for a couple of days. Kathy was at work and Greg was in charge of entertaining the kids. Abigail, their just turned 14-year-old grand-daughter, is interested in horses, but is not experienced around them. Kathy says "When I arrived home from work, I found Greg busy with grandson, Samuel, on the Bob-Cat and Abigail finishing Cortez's shampoo and conditioning treatment—just 15 meters from the mare he had bred just the night before! Wilga Park Malaynee was making eyes at Cortez and giving him all the signals that a mare in full season would be giving, but Cortez seemed to know that he was being tended by a young girl who was happy to pamper him, and it was not time to be a stallion!" Greg has such faith in his stallion that he is confident that Cortez will not ever step outside the boundaries that he seems to have established himself.

The Lyons realize every day how very lucky they were to have found Cortez. "Greg might say that Cortez's biggest accomplishment is the wonderful temperament he puts into every one of his foals," Kathy says. "He lends truth to the phrase 'One in a Million.' His mind is unique. Every horse professional—Linda Shore, Ken Faulkner, Ian Leighton—who has had anything to do with Cortez has repeatedly told us just how special he is."

Wilga Park's breeding program began because the Lyons saw a need for a kind horse that people could enjoy, no matter their discipline of interest. Thanks to RanchBoss Cortez, they are doing exactly that. ■