



≈ MORGAN PEOPLE ≈

A VISIT WITH TONY LEE

The Morgan breed has few greater friends than C.A. “Tony” Lee III.

He is a showman, a breeder, stallion owner, an AMHA Board Member, Grand National Show Committee member, President of the American Morgan Horse Educational and Charitable Trust (AMHECT), equine marketing guru, and, quite plain and simply, a lover of the breed and its people.

Indeed, it became clear when he answered the questions for this interview, that it is a pure passion for Morgans that motivates the incredible amount of volunteer work he does on behalf of the breed. He speaks lovingly of the horses he has shown and he is purely positive in his outlook about the industry he serves.

Says Kelly McFaul, with whom he serves at Grand National and with whom he has formed a well-known friendship, “He absolutely loves the Morgans. His ultimate goal is to do good things for the

breed. He does a lot for the Morgan breed, for his family, and for his husband Patrick.”

Tony has shown to the highest level available in our breed Morgans that cross the disciplines from Western pleasure world champions to high stepping park horses.

The stallion he stands at stud is the highly popular Astronomicallee. Much of the horse’s success can be attributed to Tony’s skillful promotions.

He studied marketing and graphics in college. If you go to Grand National his hand is everywhere, from the videos on the jumbotron, to the decorations in center ring, to the graphics on the show’s website.

In that same vein Tony is the advertising agent for a number of Morgan show barns including RAND, Illahee, Merriehill, Twisted Rose, Ledyard Company, and his home stable of Broadmoor.

By Stephen Kinney

ABOVE: C. A. “Tony” Lee and Funquest Altair (photo © Glenn).

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TOP ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT): C. A. "Tony" Lee III riding Sarlin's Commandant (photo © Glenn); Tony and Mtn Laurel Election Day (photo © Howard Schatzberg); Mike Goebig, Dwayne Knowles, and Tony; **BOTTOM ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT):** Astronomicallee (photo © Scott Trees); Cindy Nord, Tony Lee, and Allyson Nord Wandtke (photo © Susan Colleton).

When you see their ad pages in this and other magazines, they are the result of his handiwork.

As Dwayne Knowles of Broadmoor describes the process, "He makes decisions about advertising and marketing for us. We trust his ideas and what he wants to do. We leave it up to him. He knows our taste, which is nice."

Broadmoor's Mike Goebig adds, "That's what he went to college for. I think, because of his love for the horses, it is a great melding of two passions. When he does our advertising and our promotion the horse is never in the background. He has a great way of keeping the horse in the foreground in all of his promotions."

"He's very media savvy. When you see the television exposure Grand National gets it's directly attributable to Tony. The show was on the weather every morning on one of the local stations. Every morning they talked about the weather in Oklahoma and Grand National."

Dwayne speaks about Tony's other roles with his horses, which have been in training at Broadmoor for many years.

"He's had great horses. He's always taken care of his horses,

allowed us to do what we need to do for them, it makes our jobs easier. He has taken care of all his horses until the end. He's always done that. He says, 'they do a lot for me' and 'Vanity' and 'Brass' and others all lived out their lives at his Shingle Branch Farm in Alabama."

Dwayne's insight continues, "Everyone knows him as this very quiet person. But when he steps into a cart he's fierce. When you get him behind a horse to drive he's all business and he's a perfect student. He does everything he's supposed to do and it's really good. He knows where he is in the arena all the time and knows what is going on around him. He's always where he should be."

"He's a real participant in the barn. He's a big cheerleader for us, which I think is important to him. He wants to have a good time with horses."

When you read what follows one notes the incredible array of memorable horses with which he's been associated. As Mike Goebig observes, "You go all the way back to that wonderful Funquest horse he had. He has a certain eye for a nice horse and he is for sure invested in type. He likes them to be 'Morgany'—it's



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Tony with UC Top Brass; French Design; Liberation Starbrite; and Triton Royal Dawn (photos © Howard Schatzberg).

important to him when he picks a horse. I think he has a really good trained eye—he had resident trainers during the early years at Shingle Branch Farm and he really understands the whole process from having foals to watching them come along.”

Indeed, everyone to whom you talk about Tony remarks on his ‘emotional’ involvement with and commitment to the Morgan breed. Those words are completely affirmed by the tone and content of our ‘Q & A’ which follows.

Who in your family started your interest in horses?

My sister Jeannie always loved horses. My grandparents had horses when we were all growing up and my sister always wanted a Morgan. She had read all about Justin Morgan and the Morgan breed. Her husband went to buy her one for Christmas and ended

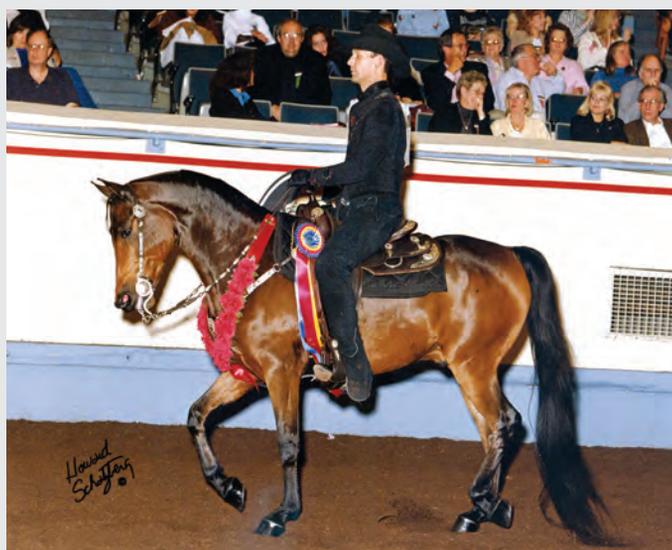
up bringing home four! The rest of the family fell in love with them and we ended up making it a family affair.

Your mom derived great joy from the horses, correct?

Yes, my mom shared my sister’s love for animals and was the driving force in pulling the entire family into the breed. In the 1980s and 1990s it was a family passion. My dad was never one to be directly involved, but he loved watching us ride and show. He also loved to work on projects at the farm.

Talk about how your interest in and involvement specifically with Morgan horses began?

As my sister had pointed out, the Morgan was a people horse. Their disposition and willingness to please really transformed all of us



TOP TO BOTTOM: Tony and Queens Vanity Flair; Futurity's Caveat; and CHMH Spice Town Girl (photos © Bob Moseder, Howard Schatzberg, Shane Shiflet).

into champions of the breed. Being in the South, the Morgan was not that well-known. It became our goal to introduce as many people as we could to this wonderful breed.

You have had an early interest in breeding as well as showing, correct?

As with most of us when we plunge into the breed, we definitely wanted to have babies. I was the one who tried to study and plan the crosses that would produce horses we all liked to own. I was and still am a novice, but we did get a lot of enjoyment out of seeing several horses with the LEE suffix go on to great things with several owners.

Over the years you've shown some prominent Morgans to great success. We thought we'd name a few of them and ask you to share thoughts and memories of each:

SARALIN'S COMMANDANT

'Dante' was my first park horse to ride. He was our first big-time stallion too. He taught me a lot and gave me some valuable ring time.

GRANADA'S OMEN

'Fudgie' was our very first show horse. We all fell in love with him at first sight. Scott Thacker, who was our first trainer, introduced him to us the summer after my sister got her first Morgans. We crazily bought him and headed to our first show, New England, where he won the Four-Year-Old Park Harness Stallion & Gelding class. If we weren't hooked before, we were absolutely hooked after that win.

EQUINOX TEMPO

'Tiger' was originally purchased to be my English pleasure horse. I was definitely not ready for prime time. He was above my skill set at the time but certainly not for Peggy Alderman. We were amazed at her talent and finesse as she took him to the World English Pleasure Championship win in 1989. That was one of many great experiences in Oklahoma.

FUNQUEST ALTAIR

'Altair' introduced me to the art of Western pleasure. I felt like he was the epitome of the discipline. I learned so much about riding from this great stallion.

UC TOP BRASS

'Brass' was a fun horse that brought me into prime time in the English pleasure division. He was always game and ready to give every ounce he had when he hit the show ring. Riding or driving, he was always a blast to show.

FRENCH DESIGN

'Design' was elegant, sweet, and dependable. She gave me my very first world championship. I always remember having the best time every time we went into the ring.

FUTURITY'S CAVEAT

'Tony' was purchased as a young park prospect at the Futurity Farm Sale. It wasn't long before we realized his sweet disposition and willingness to please suited him more for Western pleasure. He

was always eager to please and enjoyed showing which made each class a total joy.

LIBERATION STARBRITE

Words cannot express how special this mare was to me. She had the beauty and presence like no other horse we ever bred or owned. I still remember very early one morning in Oklahoma before the show started. As we all do, I was watching horses work trying to scope out the best horses. I was walking to the performance ring and saw a horse from far away jogging and thought ‘OMG, Who is that?’ As I got closer, I was stunned when I realized it was my horse. ‘Starbrite’ will always be one of the very best in this breed.

QUEENS VANITY FLAIR

Another ‘wow’ horse in my life is ‘Vanity.’ I was always in awe of him in the barn. When the opportunity arose for me to own him, I couldn’t believe it. He and I just seemed to fit each other perfectly thanks to the talent and dedication of Broadmoor. I will always remember the great times we had at New England, Mid-A, and Oklahoma. As Mike would say, ‘there’s nothing like it when he would hit that special gear and the buggy starts to shake.’

TRITON ROYAL DAWN

‘Dawny’ was another great teacher and special horse. She would always give 110 percent. She was a wonderful show horse, broodmare, and companion.

MTN LAUREL ELECTION DAY

‘Bucky’ was the third Western horse to take me to a world title. He was another sweet and loyal horse to show. He always delivered a fun experience in the show ring.

CMMH SPICE TOWN GIRL

Another special mare I have been blessed to be able to show. We got her as a two-year-old with the idea of me showing down the road and eventually as a broodmare. I was pleasantly surprised when Dwayne said he wanted me to show her when she was three. She was always game, bright, and full of energy. She never disappointed us. And now, she is taking her job as a broodmare the same way. I cannot wait until her first foal starts in training.

You bred the successful breeding stallion Astronomicallee (Futurity French Command x Liberation Starbrite). What do you consider to be his contributions to the breed?

When I was approached about selling Liberation Starbrite, I never thought it would actually happen. But, the one thing I said upfront was if it were to happen I must have a baby from her. I was so lucky to get a stallion that carried so many of her traits and qualities. There is no doubt that ‘Astro’ is carrying on the legacy of Liberation Starbrite and that is his number one contribution to the breed.

What advice do you have for anyone considering promoting a stallion? What translates to success in the marketplace?

I am not sure I have done anything to ensure the success of Astronomicallee that he didn’t do himself through his lineage. I

started with the best with Liberation Starbrite and Futurity French Command. From there, I have always tried to give back to the community by donating his services to stallion service auctions. I have always felt this opens up the opportunity for everyone. After that, his babies have made it work.

You handle marketing for several Morgan show barns. How do you make ads unique for each customer and each horse?

Luckily, I know all my clients. I try to fit the ad to their personality. I don’t always nail it but a lot of times I can feel what they might like. As with anything I suppose, we all have good days and bad. I try to stay creative and I try not to avoid trying new things.

What graphic aspects are most appealing to the equine audience?

First, the horse. Second, having that horse captured in a great photo. I could not make any ad appeal to the equine audience without the amazing talents of our photographers. A great photograph makes it all easy.

Do you have advice for owners and trainers regarding their use of advertising and media in general?

Always support our breed and industry through advertising. It is the final touch on a great accomplishment. No matter if it is in the show ring or the breeding shed, be sure to lock your achievements into history by documenting it in our breed publications.

What forms of media, in addition to magazine advertising, are vital aspects of equine promotion today?

Social media for sure. Today’s world revolves around social media. That is why *The Morgan Horse* and other publications do such a great job tying social media in with your advertising. It is a great combination.

You are a long term member of the Grand National Show committee. How did you get involved? What motivates your volunteer work for the Morgan breed?

Many years ago it was my obsession with the Morgan horse that led me to volunteer. My love for the breed has only gotten stronger. I love to feel like I am giving back to the Morgan family that has giving so much joy to me.

If there is a downside to the Morgan community, it is that we occasionally experience divisiveness. As someone who volunteers so much energy toward breed promotion, how do you deal with that?

I ignore the negativity. Sometimes that is easier said than done. But, in the end, I focus on the one thing we all share and that is our love for the Morgan horse. When it seems like someone is totally focused in the opposite direction as you, you can always know they are passionate for the same reason as you...the Morgan horse.

Any parting thoughts?

It is an amazing feeling to be a part of a community that is so diverse and so spread out all over the world yet so connected and pulled together into one special family. ■