



≈ DRESSAGE ≈

# THE ASCENDANTS CONTINUE

*The author has been tracking Morgans who attain Grand Prix status. This article is a companion to “The Ascendants” (Dressage, March 2014) and “Four More Ascend” (Dressage, November/December 2014).*

By Karin Weight

**W**hen a horse and rider go down the centerline in a Grand Prix dressage test, they have reached the culmination of years of training. They have mastered one-tempi changes (flying lead changes at every stride), canter pirouettes, half-passes, passage, and piaffe. The horse has proven that he is an exceptionally willing and trainable individual, that he has a sound body, legs that can withstand stress, and musculature that can deal with the intensity

of this very difficult work. Owners, trainers, and riders have to be dedicated to the endeavor, as it takes seemingly endless time, effort, money, and just a little good luck to get any horse to this level.

Warmbloods have been bred specifically for dressage for many generations, but the versatile Morgan breed is proving to be a superb alternative for dressage riders. The four horses featured below have made it to the heights of dressage and are true ambassadors for the breed.

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**ABOVE:** Emily Gill and Coulee Bend Kahlua (photo © Erich Linder).

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### COULEE BEND KAHLUA

We all know that a novice horse and novice rider, much less (horrors!) an eleven-year-old girl, do not make a good combination. Well, Emily Gill and Coulee Bend Kahlua are the exception to prove the rule. Granted, Emily already had more than a year's riding experience and was helped by her mother, but Kahlua was, and is, an exceptional horse.

Kahlua was sired by the Futurity French Command son, Season's Forever French, and his dam is Coulee Bend Anticipation who is by UVM Antietam. He was bred by Canadians Cindy and Lyle Dietz, who consistently produce strong Morgans with brains, good dispositions, and a willingness to work. Kahlua has all these traits as well as individual versatility and physical stamina, and his Morgan type and beauty are evident at first glance. As is common with the breed, he is an in your pocket horse who makes friends with everyone he meets.

With the guidance of her mother and trainer Francesca Nicoletti, Emily taught Kahlua basic manners in the cross ties and on the lunge line, and in the fall of his two-year-old year, Emily simply slipped a leg over the saddle and mounted him for the first time. He stood like a statue and she called her mother to come watch as she did it again.

Dressage was not in Emily's mind when she first took Kahlua to the shows and starting in his three-year-old year the pair were quite successful in Western pleasure, hunter pleasure, road hack, and over jumps. Then in 2011 she was bitten by the dressage bug and found that Kahlua could earn consistently good scores in training and first levels. The next year the pair advanced to second level and started placing as high as 67.69 in third level test 1.

Normally dressage entails a fairly slow progression up the levels, but the enthusiasm of youth and an incredibly willing horse made the transition from training/first to 4<sup>th</sup> level, Prix St George and even Intermediare I in just three years. But in 2015 Emily interned with Michael Barisone and missed the show season to regroup and seriously train for the very difficult transition to Intermediare II, which contains all the Grand Prix movements but in a somewhat less exacting test.

In October of 2018 the pair made their first entry down the centerline in a Grand Prix test, and are continuing at this most

difficult level this year, with a best-yet score of 63.84 at the Dressage Derby of Ohio.

Although Emily did all the riding and training herself, she participated in numerous clinics with world class trainers and was able to spend three months training in Germany in 2017. Emily believes that she and her horse have come so far because they really work as a team. She says Kahlua doesn't have naturally fancy gaits, but he is very, very smart and has a huge Morgan heart. Knowing

that he won't get high marks "just for having hair-blown-back gaits," she works on accuracy and correctness to improve his scores and appreciates that he is always willing to try his best for her. They still have plenty of time to continue to improve, as he is only 14 years old, but they are already performing at a level that most riders can only dream about. Emily has now started on another dream; she is training professionally in Ohio, and her success with Kahlua can only help her credibility in this new endeavor.



Josephine Trott and HD Redford  
(photo © Mattie Tucker Photography).

### HD REDFORD

In May of 2018 Josephine Trott rode HD Redford to a 65 percent in a Grand Prix test at the PEC Dressage Extravaganza, a noteworthy achievement for anyone, but particularly for an amateur riding a horse she has trained herself.

Raised and educated in Australia, Trott was introduced to Morgans when she joined the University of Vermont animal science faculty. She admired the Morgans at UVM, but was satisfied with her Hanoverian, a talented

dressage mount, and had no reason to look for a second horse. During her time at UVM, Trott became even more familiar with Morgans and Morgan people when she had a unique opportunity to travel through Europe and Australia with Betsy Greene, who had a contract with the state of Vermont to promote Morgans abroad.

In 2007 when she and husband Russ Hovey decided to take positions with the UC Davis animal science department, she needed a sensible gelding for her husband to ride and, more important, to be a companion to her Hanoverian, and it seemed obvious that the horse should be a Morgan. Hearts Delight Farm, part of the W. H. Miner Agricultural Research Institute, often sent horses to UVM, and their four-year-old, "Red," was recommended to her as a likely prospect. A dark chestnut by Tedwin Titlist out of Perinton Serenity, a Courage Of Equinox daughter, Red seemed



Lisa Johnson and EMR Maximus (photo © Susan J. Stickle).

to be a good fit. He had a good attitude, seemed willing to try new things, was sensible on the trail, was well-built, and at just over 16 hands certainly had enough size.

Hovey did ride Red at first, but now only gets on him for an annual presentation in front of his beginning equine science class. Trott was giving him some training and the horse just took to it, learning so easily, that the work became more serious. Except for one Prix St. Georges test at the Mother Lode Morgan Show, she only took him to schooling shows until she brought him out in 2018 in Intermediare II and Grand Prix. It is safe to say that Red is the only Morgan who was shown PSG in his first recognized show and Grand Prix in his second!

To help keep Red bright and happy, Trott occasionally jumps him, and he has won low level jump derbies. He is ridden on the trails as much as in the arena, and once a week Trott does a three-horse session, riding Red or her Hanoverian while ponying the other and a friend's horse up the hills and walking down "a bit like exercising polo ponies only with three instead of five horses at a time!" He's also been used in demonstrations, patiently putting up with having his body chalked for anatomy lessons or with wearing silly costumes.

Although the road to Grand Prix is not easy, Red's work ethic has helped. Extended gaits have been difficult for him, as has been

getting enough suspension at the canter for clean changes, though she says that is mostly her fault. Because he is such a quick and willing learner, she must take care not to rush his training, making sure he is truly confirmed at each stage before going on to the next one.

HD Redford, bought to be a companion to a dressage warmblood, is now a serious Grand Prix mount in his own right and yet another example of what a good Morgan can accomplish given the right training.

### EMR MAXIMUS

Nancy Motyka bought EMR Maximus (Coal Creek Dallas x EMR Starfire) for all the wrong reasons. A longtime horse admirer, she had become interested in dressage and purchased an appropriate older school horse who was probably a Morgan/Friesian cross. After he retired, she went through a series of warmbloods that just didn't work out for her. Finally, a friend who owned a lovely Morgan that came from the Radtke family's EMR Ranch in Montana showed Motyka a DVD of a young horse that was available. Motyka had planned to find a trained horse that she could ride and thoroughly try out before buying, but the video was of a gentle but unbroke two-year-old who lived 2,500 miles across the country. Circumstances would not allow her to even visit the ranch, but the video showed the youngster standing in crossties



Kimberlee Barker and Gladheart Linhawk.

looking at the camera with such big, kind eyes. Yes, it also showed him on the lunge-line and moving free, but it was the soulful eyes that really captivated her.

The Radtkes, who have raised sport and working Morgans for decades, never pressured Nancy nor pushed her to buy the colt. Valerie Radtke continued to give the youngster ground training and sent videos of his progress. After a few weeks, they reached an agreement and the young horse was sent to daughter Sally for six-months saddle training before being trailered to Nancy's New Jersey home. Sally Radtke Anderson is well-known in the Morgan dressage community as someone who has trained two Morgans to Grand Prix, but Motyka's only expectation was that Maximus would be a suitable mount for her to show in lower level dressage, hopefully at second level.

When Maximus arrived, she realized that he really was the ideal horse. Like most Morgans, he was exceptionally friendly, a fast learner and fun to handle. He always greets her with a whinny, and has a "Labrador retriever personality." She loved riding him and in a few years was showing him at training level. Soon, however, she had to have back surgery and needed someone to ride him. Trainer Lisa Johnson had just lost her horse to colic and needed a horse to ride, and soon a partnership between a horse, an owner, and a rider ensued, with neither woman anticipating the success to come.

Johnson was struck by how easily Maximus took to his training, says he absorbed training "like a sponge," and a decision needed to be made as to whether she should just keep him going as a first level horse for Motyka to ride, or whether she should see if he had the ability to do some mid-level dressage. Motyka's response was to continue training and "Let's just see what happens." What happened was fourth level and Prix St Georges in 2017, Intermediare I in 2018, and the excitement of their first Grand Prix test in 2019.

Maximus has the genetics of a sound body and the good mind needed to be able to do the movements of the Grand Prix dressage tests, but because he is so keen to be obedient, he gets upset when he doesn't understand what his rider wants. Stress doesn't manifest itself in balking or bucking; instead he holds his breath. Amateur riders often hold their breath when they are concentrating, but this is certainly an unusual response in a horse. As soon as he figures out what the rider is asking, he reacts with a loud exhalation as he performs the correct move.

Although Maximus now lives at Johnson's barn, Motyka is still intensely involved with him, trailering to shows, grooming, braiding, giving him massages. The reward she always looks forward to is the whinny she hears every time she walks into the barn. She says that this Morgan is "delightful, he just brings joy into my life."

## GLADHEART LINHAWK

Before Jack and Nadette Stang left their Oregon farm for a family vacation, they decided to leave Gladheart Linhawk (Funquest Diviner x Rogue's Midnight Melody) with trainer Kimberlee Barker while they were gone. Nadette had been taking lessons from Barker for a few years and had Linhawk confirmed at first level, but the Stangs wanted Barker to introduce the changes and evaluate him. Also, he'd been getting a bit naughty, and they thought the trainer could have a little discussion about submission.

On their way home they received a call: Barker had introduced Linhawk to canter changes, half pass, and passage, and she was convinced that the athletic little horse could make it to Grand Prix. The Stangs are fascinated with genetics and the study of bloodlines, and Nadette really is not interested in showing, so a decision was made to keep him in training and let Barker develop his talents. Some owners might balk at spending so much time and effort on such a little horse (Linhawk is only 13.3), but as Nadette says "He was talented...he moved and handled himself the way we felt a dressage horse should." They didn't think his size would be a bias issue at the upper levels, but were not so certain about the lower levels; however, when he won a first level class at his first show with a 71.053 percent, that put any doubts to rest.

Training and showing have had setbacks because of a horrible case of hives at the end of 2010 which lasted for months, then a spider bite right at the girth at the State Championships, and colic surgery in 2015. After each of these incidents Barker and the Stangs agreed to bring him back slowly and carefully, and the decision paid off. In 2014 Linhawk performed at both Prix St Georges and Intermediare I with commendable scores, and in June of 2018 he came down the centerline in his first Grand Prix test. A year later Lilo Fore awarded him a 63.261 percent, his best GP score so far.

Linhawk may be small, but no one has been able to convince him of that. Nadette calls him "opinionated and egotistical," while Barker says that although he can be naughty, he handles like a sports car and is "just really, really fun."

The Stangs will never sell Linhawk, and they say that he will probably become a School Master for Barker's students. In the meantime, they will continue having Barker show their little horse, though the emphasis is gradually shifting to their young stallion Gladheart Black Harris, a talented half-brother who is consistently winning with great scores at fourth level.

Nadette sums up her experience with Linhawk with the following: "He is the perfect example of why folks need to get away from stereotyping dressage as a sport for 'big' horses... breeders and riders need to look for talent first—the ability that will take you up well past the lower levels. And dressage is about going up the levels. If you have that talent and ride your horse correctly, you will shine. It's hard to argue that when you see a horse like Linhawk be consistently competitive under every judge from Axel Steiner to Lilo Fore."

Morgan riders and trainers everywhere can certainly agree with that philosophy! ■



In past years there has usually been one, or sometimes two Morgans competing at the Grand Prix level. 2019 is an exceptional year in this regard, with six Morgans showing at that highest level. Avatar's Jazzman and Blueandwhite Raven have been wowing spectators who watch Grand Prix tests at USDF shows for several years, each of them improving with each show season.

Readers of *The Morgan Horse* may remember Blueandwhite Raven (Night Hawk Of Rocking M x Four L Black Magic) (top photo © Pics of You) from the November/December 2014 article: "Four More Ascend." At that time trainer Catherine Echternach was working with owner Jennifer Drescher to ready her to show Raven at the Grand Prix level. This was first accomplished in June 2015, and the pair have come down the GP centerline dozens of time since then. With scores as high as 65.5 in the regular test and clear up to 75.25 in musical freestyle, they have become a force to reckon with.

Avatar's Jazzman (KJB All That Jazz x Avatar's Cassandra) (bottom photo © Suzanne Fischer) was featured in the September 2015 *The Morgan Horse* article: "The Little Morgan Who Can." Since that time, owner Melissa Dowling has kept Jazz with the indomitable Lauren Chumley, who brought him out at Grand Prix in June 2016. Since then, the 14.1 hand Morgan pony has had a big presence in the dressage world, with scores as high as 66.9 in the standard Grand Prix test and up to 69.3 in the freestyle. He also jumps, events, and can be found on the trails. ■