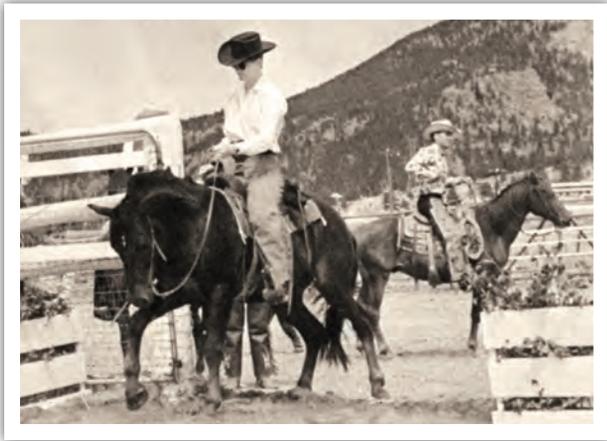


THE WAY WE WERE

Before there were Regional Morgan Shows, before there was a Grand National, the Morgan breed hosted a series of shows known as “nationals.” We take a nostalgic look back.

By Patti Brooks



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Waseeka's Nocturne and get Star Crest MusicMaid, Waseeka's Overture, Waseeka's Wild Orchid, Waseeka's Here Tiz at the 1964 Eastern National (Photo © W. Patriquin); General James & Judy Spurling at the 1967 Circle J National; Arthur Perry, Jr. with Bar T Invader, presented with a trophy by Vermont Governor Dean Davis and his wife at 1969 Golden West National (Photo © Fallaw).

1960

1961

1962

Parade & Broadwall Drum Major
& owner J. Cecil Ferguson, whip,
1960 Eastern National



Gay Dancer & Dr. Bob Orcutt,
1961 Eastern National



Sarah
Annis,
1960
Eastern
National



Prince Of Pride &
Mary Woolverton,
1961 Western National

Panorama & Bob Baker,
1962 Eastern National



Lippitt Victoria Amanda,
1962 Gold Cup National

In the late 50s, New Englanders were troubled by rumors of a significant change. The Morgan Horse Club (predecessor of the American Morgan Horse Association) was under pressure from breeders across the country to create a network of several all-Morgan shows with the designation of “national.” Eventually, in 1965, The Morgan Horse Club published the criteria a show must meet to become a national:

“To encourage the advancement and uniformity of Morgan Horses throughout the United States, the Board of Directors of The Morgan Horse Club has authorized a maximum of three shows each year in addition to The National Morgan Horse Show...in Massachusetts.”

Five rules, with many subsections, followed.

What were the directors thinking? The Morgan horse world already had a “National” that had been in existence for 20-some years.

A national title was beyond so many exhibitors’ dreams, as not everyone could afford a thousand-plus mile trip to get to Northampton, Massachusetts. More shows spread around the country with national status meant more horses had a chance to tack a national champion title to its name. That would lead to people keeping an eye out for a good horse, which would encourage breeders to upgrade their stock.

So, sputtering and complaining, New Englanders joined the

trend and the New England Morgan Horse Association took over the reins of the show in Northampton, as it became the Eastern National. Name changed, but New Englanders knew deep down that only the show at Northampton had it all. The sprawling nostalgia-filled fairgrounds made it possible to have two or three simultaneous venues, as well as races. Where else but at New England would you find six hundred-some horses showing not only in the traditional classes, but also races on the track, family classes, trailer races, and the famous Justin Morgan Class which included a stone boat pull?

“Not so fast,” said Mary Woolverton, who worked with Cecil Ferguson (Broadwall Farm, Rhode Island), Ted Davis (Windcrest Farm, Vermont), and Darwin Morse (Green Meads, Massachusetts) to create the Colorado Circle J show in 1959, advertising it as the Western National, although it did not become an official national until 1965. This show introduced cutting, reining, stock horses, hunter pleasure, jumper and dressage. These were the kinds of classes offered to folks at local shows, Mary explained. They were comfortable with them and the classes filled. “Some judges,” Mary said, “were not so comfortable.”

A hundred-plus horses from across the country went up—7,500 feet up—the twisting mountain road to the fairgrounds in Estes Park, Colorado. Exhibitors were encouraged to stay an extra day or so and Mary took Easterners, like Jeanne Mellin Herrick and Suzy Lucine, riding in the Rockies.

1963

1964



One Mile Trotting Race, won by Gallant King & Everet Reed of Colorado, Eastern National 1963 (Photo © W. Patriquin)



Lady Ginger, Eastern National 1963 (Photo © W. Patriquin)



Manitoba with Susan & Sally Fish (Longenecker), Eastern National 1963



Art, Gloria, Maria and Terry Jones (Brennan), Golden West 1964 (Photo © Gloria Art)

Also, in 1959, some 1,300 miles east of Estes Park, The Morgan Club's president, Gerald Taft, promoted the creation of the Gold Cup Morgan Horse Show, Inc. Ever since the late forties, Mr. Taft joined a contingent of Midwesterners making the yearly thousand-mile trip to show at New England. Something needed to be done. After studying road maps, it was felt that Bucyrus, in northern Ohio, had the best access to good roads (an issue at the time). Over the years, the show moved to Lebanon and then on to Columbus, where exhibitors were apprehensive about keeping their horses upright on all the cement. They laid down tarpaper where the horses walked and some exhibitors dumped sand on top of the tar paper in stalls to prevent horses from slipping.

Big things came out of the early Gold Cup shows. Gerald Taft had talked up his idea for a world championship that the nationals could lead up to. The Gold Cup jumped on this idea and made history by offering a \$2,000 purse in the 1970 World Junior Park Saddle Class. It was a wild class of 17 entries out for blood. One exhibitor told me the young stud she was showing was scared to death. Not only did Funquest Bo-Jean, shown by Raz LaRose and owned by Pinehaven Farm, win the largest purse offered at Morgan shows, she became the breed's first

“World Champion.”

Jumping back out West to Sacramento, California, the exhibitors at Golden West National did more than just show horses. “This group knew how to party,” said Terry Jones Brennan, recalling when Bud Higgins had a good win he'd fill an over-sized wooden wheelbarrow with champagne and move the party around the grounds.

Bob Morgan, of Red Fox Stables, started the tradition of donating a yearling to the 4-H-er who wrote the winning essay on why they wanted a Morgan horse. He made that presentation at the Golden West.

Art Perry's first California show was the Golden West. Art remembers to this day showing his mare in front of judge John Lydon. As John walked around the

mare, Art was a little taken-back when John mumbled, “Is she for sale?”

Many folks gathered ringside when Bar-T Invader, Art's stallion, showed. In 1969, he won the triple crown of champion in saddle, harness and in-hand. Yes, they looked at the horse, but they also studied how Art presented his horses. Terry Brennan credits Art (Perry) and Byron Turner for bringing more finish and polish to the Western show scene. Red Fox Stable imported Byron,

More shows spread around the country with national status meant more horses had a chance to tack a national champion title to its name.

1964

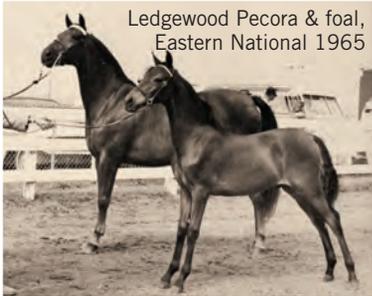
1965



Bay State Gallant & Joe Parker,
Eastern National 1964



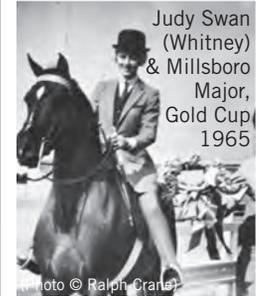
Versatility class,
Eastern National
1965 (Photo © Freudy)



Ledgewood Pecora & foal,
Eastern National 1965



O C R, winner of Sire & Get Class,
Gold Cup 1965 (Photo © Ralph Crane)



Judy Swan
(Whitney)
& Millsboro
Major,
Gold Cup
1965

a Kentucky Saddlebred trainer, to show Morgans.

Back East, Joe Parker Stables presented a very professional image with everyone wearing white pants and maroon shirts. With this type of Eastern influence, Phyllis Shopbell noted, not only did exhibitors take a second look at how they dressed for the ring, but also had two handlers with whips for the in-hand classes.

Exhibitors, judges, and breeders saw the need for judging uniformity. As early as 1959, The Morgan Horse Club sponsored a judging clinic at Townshend Farm in Bolton, Massachusetts. Cy Tirrell of the University of New Hampshire led the group through placing and discussing three groups of horses. Professor Tirrell was instrumental in spreading the need for uniformity. With his nudging, the American Horse Show Association (AHSA) held annual judging forums where rules were discussed.

Then in 1966, The Morgan Horse Club ran the first “live-horse” judging seminar for licensed AHSA Morgan judges at the Eastern National. Eventually, in 1972, with Professor Tirrell as a key judging standards committee member, AMHA adopted our Judging Standards that “established an accepted standard for all Morgan horse judges.”

Seeing the value of understanding breed uniformity, the New England Juniors held their first judging contest in 1971. The next year, their judging contest morphed into the now famous Youth of the Year Contest. The general format is the same today with just some modifications to make it more modern.

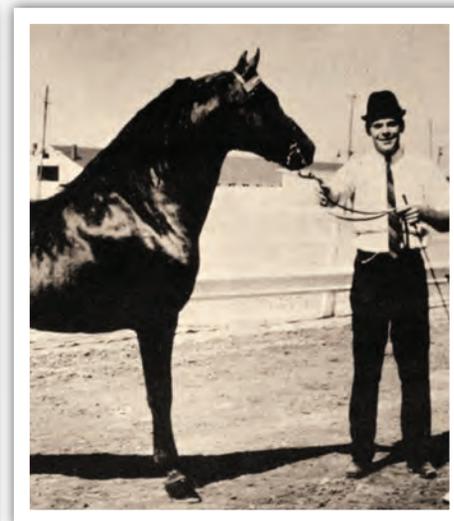
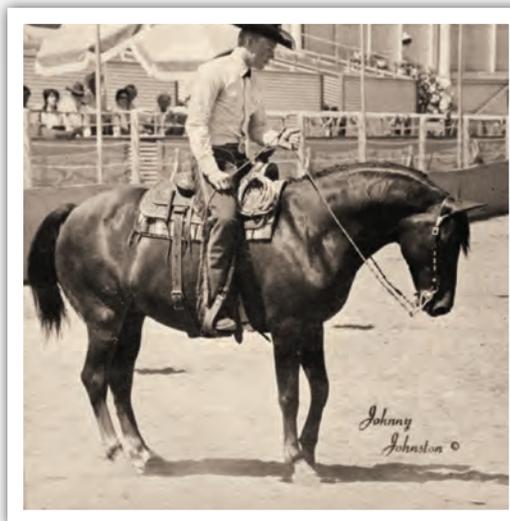
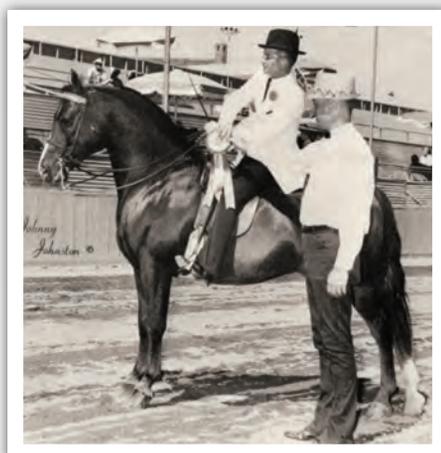
If the topic of shoeing came up, it was sure to cause heated discussions. By 1965, AHSA had rules, but they were not well defined. It came to a head on a Friday at Eastern National. During the day, a protest was lodged against Stan Crafts’ Deerfield’s Dr. Boyden. Stan’s daughter showed the gelding in an amateur class. The strange shape of the horse’s front shoes was the issue. They were deemed illegal and Stan was ordered to return the horse’s ribbons and trophies. Stan did not immediately comply.

During the Stallion Park Harness in the night session, a second protest was lodged on John May’s stallion, Bay State Gallant, sighting overweight shoes. John refused to have a shoe removed and weighed, so the officials had no option but to demand John and his trainer return all Bay State Gallant’s ribbons and trophies.

Angry confrontations erupted at the in-gate and soon moved to the office with trainers threatening to boycott the show. The announcer, Russ Smith, wasn’t at all sure there would be classes to announce the next day but folks settled down and the show went on. In 1966, new rules offered more details and made for slightly less controversy.

While the concept of creating multiple nationals was brewing, Stuart Hazard called for a meeting with Mississippi Valley Morgan Horse Club and other Midwestern Morgan folks to discuss having a National Morgan Show. Renee Page’s mom, Mary Gerhardt, came up with “Jubilee” as a name and in September of 1965, the National Morgan Jubilee drew exhibitors from California to Vermont to

1966



TOP TO BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: Kelly's Jim & Bob Smith, Keystone's Nuchief & Terry Jones, Bert's Norchief & Bert Stevenson, Golden West; Irish Lee & Doris Ryan, Gold Cup; Lippitt Pecos, Golden West; Funquest Falcon & Stu Hazard, Gold Cup; Waer's Royal Hawk & Dee Dee Foster, Golden West; Brookwood Melanie & Craig Cathcart, Golden West; Townshend Debadonna & Nancy Ela Caisse, Eastern National; Kane's High Society & Claude Morrette, Eastern National (Photos ©

Johnny Johnston, Ralph Crane).

1967



Orcland Dondarling & get, Orcland Farms
Eastern National 1967



Merriehill stall front,
National Morgan
Jubilee 1967



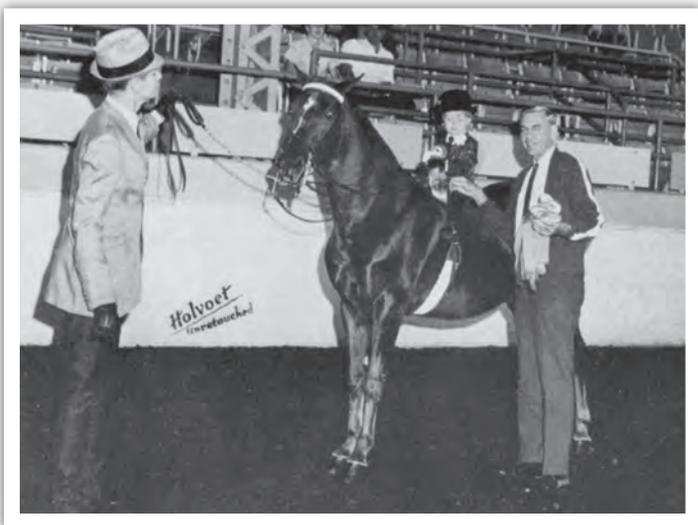
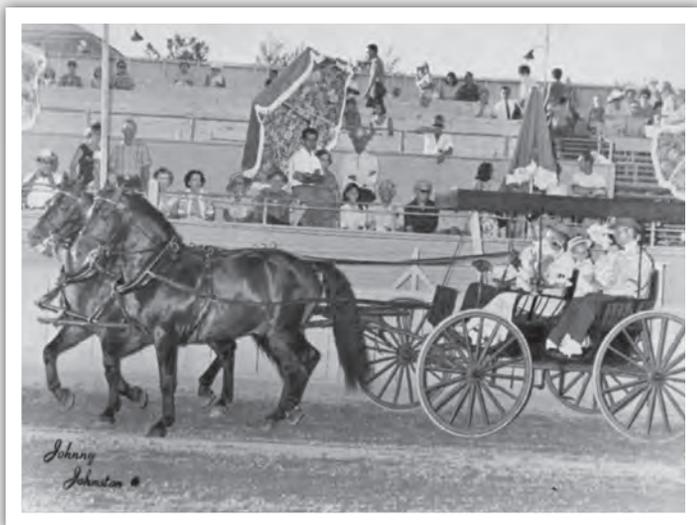
Duke Of Lebanon
& Renee Page,
1967 Jubilee



Harold Childs,
Helen Crabtree, Frank
Evans, Eastern
National judges, 1967
(Photo © W. Patriquin)

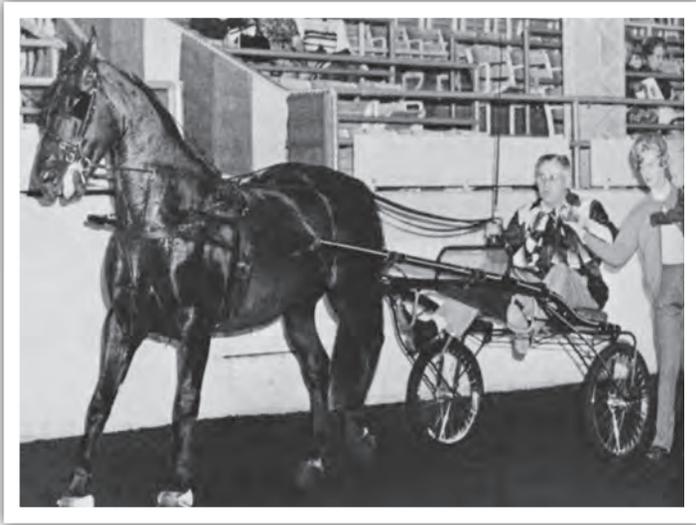


Westwold Dona Resa
& Dr. Bob Orcutt,
Eastern National 1967
(Photo © W. Patriquin)



TOP TO BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: Heritage Ethan and Bay State Ideal, Matilija Morgans, Golden West; The Ela Family, Family class, Townshend Vigilissa, Townshend Vigilass, Townshend Cornita, Townshend Debadonna, Eastern National; Waseeka's Skylark, Golden West; Sally De Jarnette & Pendleton Liza Jane, Jubilee; Orcland Ike, David & June Brockett, Gold Cup; Tami Buecker, Jubilee (Photos © Fred Droddy, Johnny Johnston, Holvoet).

1968



TOP TO BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: A banquet at Jubilee National in 1968, the year of the Eastern Invasion. Back: Fred Herrick, Jeanne Herrick, Nancy Caisse, Jane Blue, Anna Ela, Joan Dickerson, Barry Caisse, Mark Werts. Front: Mickey McGuire, Gordon Voorhis; Mrs. Greenwalt, Mary Gerhard, and Renee Page, After Jubilee Dinner Party; Atomic's Granada & Jane Blue, Gold Cup; Irish Lane & Ed Ryan, Jubilee; Lorida Princess & Billy Breazeale, Golden West; Paulette Staehne Bodnar, Jubilee; Mr Breezy Cobra and get, Lewis Pape, Jubilee (Photos © Fred Droddy, Johnny Johnston, Holvoet).

1969

1970

Prince Omar & Phil Price,
Gold Cup 1969 (Photo © Fred Droddy)



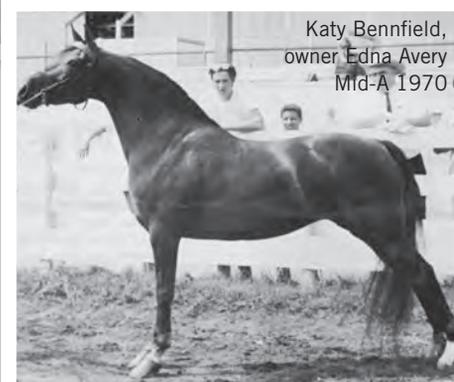
Orland Linda and produce,
for owner Sandy Wooding, Mid-A 1970



A-Okay,
Mary DeWitt,
Gold Cup 1969
(Photo © Fred Droddy)



(Photo © A. C. Drowne)
Orland
Bellendon
& Karen Homer, Eastern National



Katy Bennfield,
owner Edna Avery
Mid-A 1970

compete in sixty-five classes.

The 1967 Jubilee is firmly stamped in Renee's memory. The Capelles asked her to show Applevale Adonis which upset Renee's mom, who expected her to show their own mare, Falcon's Ladylove. Happy endings here, as Adonis was Junior Park Harness Champion with Renee, and Max Parkinson won the Junior Park Saddle Championship on Falcon's Ladylove.

Back in California, the Golden West made the move to Monterey. What a challenge for exhibitors! For a start, the ring was directly under the flight pattern of the airport. Kind of like having dozens of cracker whips and rattle cans for the park horses, but that was not so tranquil for the Western horses. "And if that wasn't enough to contend with," Susie Parks Walker Morgan said, "the entire grounds sat on top of a major earthquake fault," (most people feel being over a fault makes animals tense-up).

Until exhibitors got a handle on how to cope with the diverse challenges of Monterey, the show did have its share of accidents. "Don't forget how chilly Monterey was," Phyllis Shopbell said. At a time of year when many horses came from sweltering summer heat, horses and people found Monterey's 60 to 70 degree temperature, with a cold breeze off the Pacific, almost

cold. Horses were blanketed in their stalls and full of snort when heading for the ring. "Nice part about this," Phyllis continued, "was the ladies got to wear fur jackets in the evening driving classes."

At Eastern National there was an accident made "famous" across the country because it was all caught on camera. The

horses and people involved were not hurt, but it did have the earmarks of a demolition derby. During the reverse in a 21-entry park harness class, a horse took off, careening around to crash into another buggy, setting that horse loose who, in turn, took off and ran into yet another buggy, setting Kane's Classic loose. Complete pandemonium!

"She's alive!" the announcer said as the driver of Kane Classic got to her feet. All three horses were caught up and debris cleared as Andy Marticello dashed across the show grounds to get another buggy for the horse—all within the seven minutes allowed for equipment adjustments. Kane Classic didn't just complete the class—he was reserve champion.

Everything wasn't a trauma at Eastern National. After a long day of showing—at times running until midnight—exhibitors and grooms were known for their shenanigans. Those interviewed for this article loved talking about horse show pranks. "Remember the

Terry Brennan credits Art (Perry) and Byron Turner for bringing more finish and polish to the Western show scene.

1971

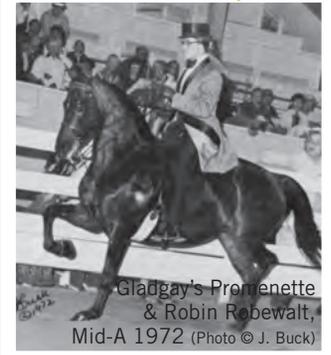
1972



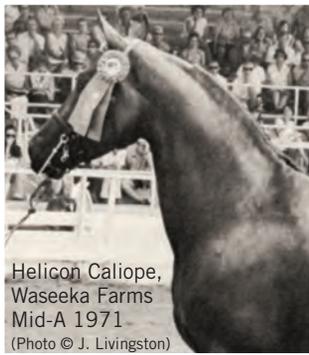
Black River Pegasus, Phil Price, Mid-A 1971
(Photo © Freudy)



Windy Hill Lee Moro & Elizabeth Jane Lucine, Mid-A 1972
(Photo © J. Buck)



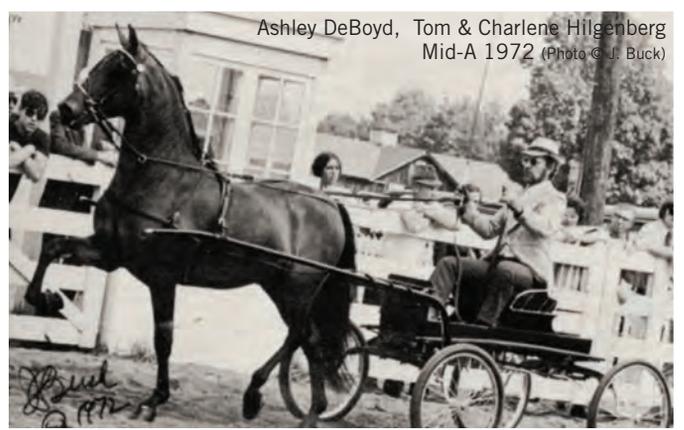
Gladgay's Promenette & Robin Robewalt, Mid-A 1972 (Photo © J. Buck)



Helicon Caliope, Waseka Farms, Mid-A 1971
(Photo © J. Livingston)



Fiddler's Contender & John Lydon, Mid-A 1971
(Photo © J. Livingston)



Ashley DeBoyd, Tom & Charlene Hilgenberg, Mid-A 1972 (Photo © J. Buck)

morning the owners of a popular gelding arrived at their stalls to see the horse had been painted with zebra stripes?" "Don't forget," someone else added, "how the cut-out of a prancing horse propped on the stable roof top over Storybook Stables at New England just begged for mischief." One year the orange horse was tacked up, including action chains. Another year, an exhibitor wrote, a pile of manure was strategically placed under the horse's back end.

No New England show was complete without its water fights. Taking advantage of the fairgrounds' fantastic water pressure, participants would find a few minutes throughout the day to stockpile water balloons. After the horses from the last class of the evening were settled, battles began. As balloon brigades snuck through the grounds, folks readied their hoses and fought back. It was understood that tack rooms were off limits.

Several weeks after the New England Show, Morgans trucked to Pennsylvania, (some years held at the famous show grounds in Devon and others at the beautiful show grounds in Quentin) for the Mid-A show, which received national status in 1969. From the beginning, the show earned a reputation for fun. The Brown family, of Hoss-pitality Stables, were often key instigators, starting with the famous tugs-of-war. Jim Brown signed contestants up during the day, dividing them into two teams. The team that pulled its opponent into the stream was the winner.

That little river at the Quentin grounds held way too many opportunities for pranks. In a year with more entries than stalls,

stabling tents were set in the field across that stream. The Browns parked their little camper right next to the stalls—unfortunate for one young Hoss-pitality groom. "Seems there was one night," Guy Brown said, "that Mike Higgins had settled in the camper with a beer...or two." Knowing Mike was not of drinking age, the Brown boys thought something should be done. They hitched up the camper to the truck and backed it into the stream.

Two families of professional trainers were great adversaries and met up yearly at Mid-A. Cecil Brown had his hands full with energetic show horses and fun-loving boys. Owen Price was the patriarch of Carousel Stables where he and his family turned out top contenders of the era.

Guy Brown tells the story of his brothers rail-birding a strip class. Even though the ring had a well-tended grass infield, Phil Price would never set his saddle on the ground—even on a towel. He'd have Conky Price set it on the ring fence.

Temptation was way too great for Gene and Jim. They hid the saddle and continued to look at the horses in the ring. The call came for "saddles on, riders up." Where was Phil's saddle? The Brown boys stayed poker-faced. They saw Phil gesturing angrily at Conky in the middle of the ring. Conky ran over to Jim and Guy and pleaded. "Guys you gotta give it up. It's going to cause me my life if you don't." And, of course, these young men, proud of their Southern heritage, could not leave Conky in such a predicament.

Horse shows were the road trips for Morgan horse families.

1973



The never forgotten accident in a 21-horse park harness class, Eastern National 1973

They packed up the family and popped a couple of horses in the trailer and headed out for a weekend. The horses would live up to their Morgan heritage by showing in many classes, moving from harness to saddle (often English and Western) and then safely caring for the youngest family member in leadline.

Cece Green Yelek was a young mother during this era. With a happy note in her voice, she talks about the mischief and freedom kids enjoyed at those shows. “We all looked after one another’s kids.” At one Circle J, when her daughter was four, Martin Cockriel told Cece he watched the child walk up to a puddle in front of his stalls. It was a quiet afternoon and after the child looked left and right she jumped right in and splashed about. Cece was pleased Marty cared enough to both observe her daughter was safe and then left her to her fun. “This is how it always was,” Cece said.

Karen Homer-Brown seconds that feeling saying Mid-A always had fun things for kids to do. More importantly, she is grateful to this day of Mid-A’s willingness to help prospective judges along the route to their big “R” status.

Mid-A will always be remembered for their unique Nationwide Three-Year-Old Filly Futurity. Mike Goebig explained there were no classes where the fillies earned points as yearlings and two-

year-olds, but rather saved it all for one big blast as three-year-olds. “Few exhibitors today,” Mike noted, “would consider showing a three-year-old in three classes at one show.”

The Jack Benny class (for riders over 39) was one of countless successful ventures the New England juniors carried through under Nancy Caisse’s guidance. Roger Ela, Nancy’s dad, entered one of the early classes. Knowing the competition was stiff, he was prepared and when called to receive his fourth-place ribbon, he pulled a blue ribbon from his pocket.

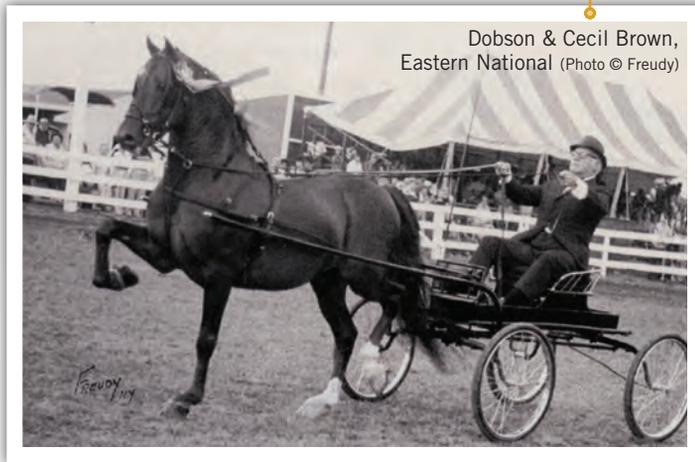
Nancy Caisse, who had enjoyed the Hospitality Booth at the Eastern States show in Springfield, Massachusetts, brought that tradition to Northampton.

Hospitality was strategically located at the crossroads of stabling and the racetrack’s entrance, where the horses often gave a better show than in the scheduled classes. Trainers and exhibitors milled around much like a cocktail party as there wasn’t any seating. This is where one learned the real scoop on the hot topic of the time. “I think it got the day off to a good start,” Nancy Caisse said. Coffee and doughnuts helped resolve many problems before they escalated.

The crowning glory of the national Morgan shows came in 1968 when Waseeka’s Skylark (Waseeka’s Nocturne x Windcrest

“1968 was the year of the Eastern invasion,” Renee Page wrote of the Jubilee.

1974



Dobson & Cecil Brown,
Eastern National (Photo © Freudy)

These undated photos (right, far right) highlight two memorable moments:

They knew how to party at Golden West National. Here Bud Higgins rolls out a wheelbarrow full of champagne!; Our author Patty Brooks showing evidence of inclement weather while driving at the Eastern National (Photos © Johnny Johnston, Freudy).



Delight) took on the challenge of crisscrossing the country to seek all five National Grand Champion Stallion titles. Trained by J.T. Brown and owned by E. E. Davis of Royal Oak Farms in Ohio, Waseeka's Skylark did capture all five titles in one season. And he was just a four-year-old!

"1968 was the year of the Eastern invasion," Renee Page wrote of the Jubilee. In addition to Skylark, Fred and Jeanne Herrick won championships with Ledgewood Pecora, Applevale Donalect, and Applevale Challenger. John Lydon won with A-Okay. In addition, Nancy Caisse turned heads with Townshend Debadonna, going back to New England with several championships.

Folks took a closer look at the little mare, trying to figure out what tricks Nancy had up her sleeve to make Debadonna so outstanding. Of course, Nancy played into their curiosity. In the warm-up ring, she placed thick rubber bands on top of the mare's hocks, cutting them off before entering the class. The bands had no effect on how the mare showed, but thick rubber bands in the warm-up ring became popular.

At the Jubilee, Debadonna was stabled back-to-back with Lewis Pape's stallion, Mr. Breezy Cobra. When the mare came in heat, the two horses caused quite a commotion. "I wouldn't mind seeing that cross," Nancy said to Lewis when he came to move Breezy Cobra away. Lewis agreed and offered to get the mare bred that night behind the barn. Nancy was for it but her mom, Anna Ela, didn't support the idea.

Most of today's shows either have all their classes in coliseums or can escape indoors when storms hit. Not so much back in the 60s. While the Golden West in Monterey held classes under the airport's flight pattern, the horses at Mid-A in Devon struggled with deep sand in the ring. Gold Cup exhibitors at Columbus developed ways to keep their horses safe on cement and New England exhibitors could always count on at least one torrential downpour. Exhibitors soldiered on with horses that met every challenge.

The first Morgan show in 1939 was held at the completion of Vermont's Hundred-Mile Ride in South Woodstock. That year marked the 150th anniversary of a horse named Justin Morgan. From there, shows grew to six recognized nationals by 1969. Those nationals morphed into ten regional shows where horses qualify to compete at the Grand National, which began in 1973 in Detroit, Michigan.

And so we "grew up." Numerous new "All Morgan" shows were in place. Numbers of entries at shows increased over the years. More classes evolved. Some would say training became more sophisticated. But, to this day, nostalgia reigns for the "good old days." This can happen at the drop of a horse's name who is now a fixture a few generations back in a pedigree, or the recounting of some famous prank played out in a more innocent age, or warm recollections about show grounds as picturesque as Estes Park or Monterey.

As you load up the trailers this summer, remember you are at play in a historic tradition. ■