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# WORKING CLASS

*Pretty is and pretty does at Rodger and Chris Holm's Devine Morgans.*

By Laura Hornick Behning

**W**e were looking at nominations for an article on one of the Morgan programs belonging to AMHA's Ranch Network when we came to the website for Devine Morgans. There the picture of the Lippitt stallion Sandrock Joel stopped us in our tracks. He's looking over a fence in a perfect pose. You can't help compare him in this photo

to the statue at the University Of Vermont or, indeed, the early depictions of Justin Morgan himself. At The Morgan Horse magazine we make every attempt to be inclusive of all Morgan bloodlines. We thought if this picture had this kind of effect on us, it would do the same for others and we became curious to know more about the Devine Morgans breeding program.



**ABOVE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT):** Sandrock Joel (Edgewood Hallmark x His Mark Charity) 1983 bay stallion, pictured at about age 13, working at a branding on the ranch with Chris Holm up, 2004, and pulling the sleigh that Rodger built. Chris Holm on the lines. **BACKGROUND:** The Devine herd.



**ABOVE:** The newest addition to the facilities at Devine Morgans is this 80 x 152 indoor arena with attached barn which was completed fall 2015. Chris Holm's "dream come true." **INSET:** Chris on Dreamcatcher Angyl (RDK's Shilo x Valdez's Maravilla), 2000 palomino mare, and Chris's husband Rodger on Devine Mountain Echo (Devine Spirit of Hope x Devine Catalina) 2005 brown buckskin mare, riding out on the ranch, 2010.

Lincoln, Montana is located just west of the Continental Divide on Hwy 200, and borders the magnificent Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness areas to the north and the Blackfoot River to the south. This rugged but beautiful landscape is home to Rodger and Chris Holm's Gehring Ranch and their Devine Morgans. The ranch has been in Chris's family since her father and uncle purchased it in 1948. Nestled amid rolling mountain meadows and valleys, Gehring Ranch comprises more than 3,077 deeded acres with another 1,320 acres on lease—the kind of vast expanse of land most of us in the eastern United States only dream about.

Chris was raised on the ranch and her love of horses started very early. She and her sister first started riding on a series of ponies, and then graduated to the ranch horses. Their neighbor had a Morgan stallion, and they bred a few mares to him. "We ended up with two half-Morgan geldings," Chris remembers. "Years later, after trying Tennessee Walkers and Quarter Horses, we fondly remembered Chief, one of the geldings that my Dad had raised. He had a personality and intelligence that made him stand out from the rest. A real character. We decided it was time to get a Morgan."

"We wanted a good Morgan stallion to cross on our grade mares to produce good using ranch and mountain horses," Chris says. At Bruce and Margie Brown's Silver Sage Morgans in Hot Springs, Montana, Chris spied a beautiful palomino mare with a foal by her side, but she was already sold. They ended up purchasing the two-year-old mare Silver Sage Bonnie, a 1982 chestnut (Bird's Banner x

Red Butie). Chris laughs, "We were shopping for a stallion prospect and bought a two-year-old filly!"

### SANDROCK JOEL

Chris's second Morgan ("and the real cause for my addiction," she admits) was Sandrock Joel (Edgewood Hallmark x His Mark Charity), a Justin Morgan look-alike bay yearling Lippitt colt. "I had contacted Betty Cichowski [I think she may have been the secretary of the Big Sky Morgan Horse Association at the time, but I don't remember for sure] and she sent me a map of Morgan breeders in Montana. I found out from her that she had Joel for sale," Chris recalls. Jerrome Cole of Sandrock Morgans in Musselshell, Montana, bred Joel, who was foaled in 1983. He had been purchased by Betty who intended him to be her junior stallion. Her senior stallion was another beautiful Lippitt, Marvelous Mariner. Circumstances changed for Betty, and Joel became available. "After getting to know Joel, training, and riding him, I fell in love with the breed. He is the standard that we strive for in all of our horses. His type, disposition, and willingness to please in all things are hard to beat. It's his attitude of 'Yes, let's try it' that makes him such a joy. He has been sound all of his life, and ridden barefoot most of it." Though Joel has had no professional training, the few times he has been shown he has been successful in reining, ranch horse versatility, and trail classes. In 1991, Joel was the Reserve Champion Working Stockhorse at the National Morgan Cutting and Stockhorse Association finals. In 2007 he won an Extreme Trail Challenge with more than 50 entries. He has been

in numerous parades including the Lincoln 4th of July parade, where—in the middle of the crowds in downtown Lincoln—he stood quietly as kids were lifted up to get their picture taken. “Wherever he goes, people are surprised to learn he is a stallion,” Chris says. “He has been a great ambassador for the breed and the Lippitt Morgan.”

Chris has many “Joel stories.” Those of us who know and love Morgans might not be surprised when we hear them, but that does nothing to put a damper on our delight! One of the first adventures Chris recalls with Joel was teaching him to drive. “When Joel was a three-year-old, I decided I wanted to drive and bought a harness. I didn’t have any experience, just wanted to do it. So I put the harness on and I did a lot of ground driving. I didn’t have anything to hook him to, so started looking around and I found an old car hood. I put a bale of hay on it, and away we went. The problem with that was when he would jerk us to start, the reins were the only thing keeping me from going off the back of the bale. I had to be careful not to slide into his back feet when we stopped, too. Talk about a forgiving horse! Even though I was pulling on him in the start, he would get us going and never seemed to hold it against me.” The duo had so much fun with the car hood that Rodger built a sleigh for Joel to pull. “The first winter I really used the sleigh,” Chris says. “We took it to town [three miles] and picked up my sister’s kids at school. We even went through the drive-through at the telephone office to drop off a check on the way home.”

Joel’s main job in life is that of a working ranch horse. While Devine Morgans no longer maintains a cattle operation of their own, they pasture cattle for other ranchers, and still use the Morgans in routine gatherings, branding, and sorting. Due to his career as an airline pilot for Skywest, Rodger is often away from home, so Chris does a lot of the necessary ranch work by herself. “I need a horse that is sensible enough to get the job done and bring us both home safely,” she says. “A horse that is sure footed and will go where ever a cow might lead you, as scary as that can be at times. We sort cattle in the corral to work through the chute or for branding, on horseback. Joel is very cowy as he pins his ears and turns on a dime to dominate the cow or bull we are working. He pulls calves to the fire at branding. We sort pairs at calving and he will push a three-day-old calf along, using his knee when they stop to bump them along. He takes on the protective mothers without hesitation. A cow buried her head in his chest one day and he reached down and bit her. A 2,000-pound bull moved us backwards on the frozen ground because he didn’t want to go in the corral, but Joel is fearless and will not back down. With pinned ears and a menacing look, Joel is determined to put them where they need to go.” Recalcitrant cattle, beware!

“Once after a cow had a C-section, I needed to get her in for antibiotic shots for the next few days. After being up all night with her, I wasn’t thinking when I let her out of the barn into the corral. The next day I walked into the corral to get her back in the barn, and after her ordeal, I guess she decided there was no way she would go back in there. She just came at me and knocked me down in the mud to make her point.” Chris went and changed her clothes, then got on Joel. It didn’t take long for Joel to convince that cow that there was only one good place she could be—in the barn!

Once inside, they needed to maneuver the cow into the maternity pen and a head catch. “After getting knocked down earlier I didn’t really want to get off of Joel to put her in the pen, so he did that too, in very tight quarters,” Chris says proudly.

Rodger and Chris moved away from the ranch several times over the years, as Rodger attended school and worked to build time for his airline career. Joel always went with them. In Pasadena, Texas (outside of Houston), Joel lived in a stall for the first time in his life. “He was very popular in the barn because he always greeted anyone who came by his stall,” Chris remembers. “People would stop and ask about him all of the time. A few years later we moved to California City, California. It’s high desert and Joel was not happy about living there. Unfortunately, the place I kept him had boarders that didn’t take very good care of their horses, and he stressed over that. He colicked for the first time in his life, from sand, and I think from the stress of the other horses that weren’t cared for properly.”

The boarding facility was old and in disrepair, but there was a pipe corral with a shelter in good condition that was safe for Joel, and Chris would put him in the arena every day for exercise. One evening she arrived to turn him out, and as usual he ran, bucked and sniffed the ground. Then he did something out of the ordinary. At the far end of the arena, he went up to the fence and started leaning on the top board. “I couldn’t believe it when it popped off,” Chris says. “Then he used his knee to pop the lower board off also. I wasn’t too concerned at this point because there was an outer fence that would keep him in. I hadn’t noticed that the fence was down in one corner, but obviously Joel knew! Out he went into the Mojave desert at dusk.”

Chris wasn’t overly concerned at first. She thought she might know where Joel was headed, as she had ridden out about six miles to a friend’s house a few weeks earlier, and had seen several places that had horses. She jumped into her rig and took off in the direction Joel was going. “As I got to the main crossroad, a vehicle was turning off the main road and they saw me there and stopped to ask if I was looking for a horse. Thankfully they stopped! They had seen Joel change direction and head north across the desert,” she recalls. “A sinking feeling came over me then. He wasn’t going to Fremont Valley after all. Where was he going?” It was almost dark and her beloved stallion was loose in the desert, with no fences for miles. Where would he find water? Where would he find food? What about predators? Chris drove back to town, feeling very sick and worried.

She went to every place she could think where she had seen horses, giving out her phone number to the owners in case Joel came by. She called the highway patrol, police departments, and everyone she knew. “There really wasn’t anything else I could do until morning, which seemed like it would never come,” Chris says. “I wasn’t working at the time, but I had promised to fill in at a glider place at the airport while the owners were gone for the weekend. Morning came. No phone calls. No Joel sightings. And I was supposed to be at work! My husband was flying skydivers in California City, so he had access to the jump plane. At first light he took it up with our friend Bill and started looking for Joel. Every other friend I had was driving the desert in jeeps and on



**MAIN PHOTO:** Devine Mountain Echo, 2005 brown buckskin mare, and Devine Jada (Sandrock Joel x M Classic Tabby Sue), 2014 brown filly pictured as a yearling, Summer 2014 (Photo © Heidi Osgood-Metcalf). **INSETS:** Devine Mountain Echo. Shown in the second photo with Chris Holm aboard, along with Hope Quay on Dream Catcher Angyl (RDK's Shilo x Valdez's Maravilla), 2000 palomino mare, one of Devine Morgans' broodmares, at the 2013 Lincoln Fourth of July Parade, where they won the Best Equestrian trophy; Devine Mountain Echo was the 2012 Northwest Montana Fair Champion Morgan. Pictured at the bottom with owner/breeder Chris Holm and Bill Fratt of Red Mountain Morgans. Bill donates a trophy every year for the Champion Morgan (First and third inset photos © Heidi Osgood-Metcalf).



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Devine JB Cassidy (Sandrock Joel x Good News Joy) at a horseback archery competition with Tom Kelner, up (photo by Patrick Chaplin); Devine Cool Hand Luke (Sandrock Joel x M Classic Tabby Sue), 2009 brown stallion, with Chris's nephew Josey Sutton, up. June 2013; Devine Diamond Delight (Sandrock Joel x KRP Pixie Pat), 2005 bay mare, with her owner Ann Moyer, after winning the Light Breeds mares class at the 2013 Teton County Fair in Jackson, WY; Chris Holm with KRP Pixie Pat (Sunup Neptune x High Ridge Victoria), 1996 buckskin mare, and the first colorful foal for Devine Morgans, Devine Mist Of Gold (Blacksaddle Starbuck x KRP Pixie Pat), in 2001; Devine Lucky Star (Blacksaddle Starbuck x Devine Catalina), 2003 palomino stallion, on his way to a third place win out of 60 entries in the Extreme Trail Challenge at Ride the West 2008 in Spokane, WA. Ridden by Shann Webley, owned by Wheatland Morgans.

motorcycles looking for tracks, knocking on doors, and talking to the sheepherders that were camped out there—while I was going crazy stuck at the glider place! My friend Jennifer knew the folks that sold the glider company to the people I was working for, so she talked to the gal and she came in and took over so I could go look for my horse.”

Tracks were found where Joel had circled a water tank looking for water, and the sheepherders had heard him go by in the night. Finally at four o'clock that afternoon Chris talked to someone in North Edwards (some 20 miles from California City!) who had heard about someone in town that had found a horse at their place. “We went right over and knocked on the door,” Chris remembers. “I told them we had talked to someone that told us they had a horse there, and that we had been looking for him. They seemed pretty annoyed until I told them we came from California City. They had a mare in heat, and Joel had found her!” When the relieved couple returned with their trailer to retrieve Joel, the finders sent their Arab mare along to be bred to him. “They had already fallen in love with him,” Chris says, “and if we hadn't found him I'm thinking they would have just kept him for themselves!” After that misadventure, Chris moved Joel to a new facility, where he seemed happier, for the remainder of their stay in California.

Sandrock Joel became the nucleus of the Devine Morgans

breeding program. “We didn't know anything about Morgan bloodlines or families until after we bought Joel,” Chris says. “After we got him, I started learning about Morgans and Lippitt Morgans. We subscribed to *The Morgan Horse* and became members of The Lippitt Club.” Soon after his purchase, Joel had been joined by the half Lippitt weanling fillies, Doe Run Marvelouslee (Marvelous Mariner x Chasley's Syndey) and Doe Run Maritine (Marvelous Mariner x Shamrock Joy D'Vivre), both foaled in 1984. “Later I was searching for Lippitt mares and loved the photos I had seen of Meredith Bilirubin. We ended up buying the full sisters Good News Joy and Good News Abigail [Good News Joshua, by Meredith Bilirubin x Meredith Jessica].” To date, Joel has sired 38 registered Morgan foals, 19 of them full Lippitts. He has many half-Morgan offspring to his credit as well. Now, coming 33 years young, Joel's most recent foal, a buckskin filly named Devine Joel's Sierra (raf) out of CFM Sierra Pearle, was born in 2015. He may have a 2016 foal coming as well!

Many Joel offspring have joined the breeding herd at Devine Morgans over the years. Currently there are three of them in the broodmare lineup at Devine Morgans. The oldest is the 1992 bay mare Devine Catalina (out of Doe Run Marvelouslee), who has produced seven Morgans with the Devine prefix. Her youngest, the 2007 buckskin mare Devine Isabell (by Devine Gemini), is training



Devine Isabell (Devine Gemini x Devine Catalina), 2007 buckskin mare, driven by Murari Bishop and owned by Rosemary Roney. Isabell will make her CDE debut in 2016.

for combined driving for owner Rosemary Roney of Whitefish, Montana. The 2008 dark bay mare, Devine Jorja (Sandrock Joel x M Classic Tabby Sue) had her first foal, a full Lippitt bay filly by Brookhill Constellation, in 2015 while on lease to Dale and Sue Beach of Beaches Triple T Ranch in Ellensburg, Washington. Jorja is back in foal for 2016 to Constellation, for Chris this time. Jorja's 2014 full sister, the lovely brown filly Devine Jada, is an up and coming future broodmare for Devine Morgans and is Chris's pride and joy.

Devine Cool Hand Luke, a 2008 brown full Lippitt stallion (x M Classic Tabby Sue) will carry on for his sire at Devine Morgans. In 2015 he was leased to Harvey Seidel of Bar None Morgans in Thermopolis, Wyoming, and bred to Harvey's full Lippitt mares Sandrock Dolly, Sandrock Nancy, and a Sandrock Jill daughter, Bar Non Jill. This linebreeding of the same families which have produced so many good working Lippitts will make the 2016 foaling season at Bar None Morgans an exciting one!

Like their sire, Joel's offspring are much-loved family, working, show, and breeding horses. One of them has had a unique and interesting career in the challenging sport of horseback archery. Devine JB Cassidy (1995 bay gelding, out of Good News Joy), has participated in horseback archery with his owner Tom Kelner for the last eleven years. Horseback archery competitions involve

entering a specified track area at a canter or gallop (and the horse must maintain that gait) while the rider fires at either a single target multiple times, or multiple targets. There is also a time component to the score. "I belong to a Hungarian-based school called the Kassai School of Horseback Archery," Tom explains. "In the competitions we compete in, if you complete the course under the allotted time [generally 20 seconds] then the time left over is added to the arrow score. The competitions consist of multiple runs [Hungarian—nine runs] that are tallied for a cumulative score. Our competitions have been here in Montana and a couple in Edgewater, British Columbia, Canada. Most recently we won the Borsos Torzs Open Cross Country in Edgewater, in July, also finishing second in the Kassai Open World Cup competition at the same event. We managed to win the overall that weekend by one point. Then we won the Open Kassai World Cup in Hamilton, Montana and placed second in the Borsos Torzs in Hamilton, finishing second overall in that competition weekend by one-and-a-half points."

Purchased as a weanling and trained by Tom, Cassidy has had a long, incredible, and versatile career. He has been used for team penning, roping calves, herding cows, chasing bears, hunting, packing, training colts, endurance competitions, and a lot of trail miles. Tom says, "He has been my once in a lifetime horse. He has

never shirked a task and has been a willing partner in whatever I need to get accomplished. He has gained a moniker among the horseback archery crowd as ‘the Wonder Horse’ as he is arguably the most steady and reliable of all the horses that are used for horseback archery. He has helped a number of participants pass their riding exams in horseback archery. His most recent accomplishment has been to babysit my wife’s two-year-old Thoroughbred/Arabian gelding and teach him the ropes. He still loves to run through the woods, rocks, and pasture, kicking up his heels. You wouldn’t know that he is 20 years old.”

“Cass has achieved old gelding status, a stomach with legs who thinks that being tied is for lesser horses. He has become quite adept at untying himself and others, a trait that can be traced to his grandsire Edgewood Hallmark,” Tom says.

Devine Diamond Delight (Sandrock Joel x KRP Pixie Pat) is owned and adored by Jeb and Ann Moyer of Coldsmoke Morgans in Victor, Idaho. This 2005 bay mare was originally purchased by Marcus and Forrest Barnes of Trust-T Morgans, Ririe, Idaho, as a weanling. The Moyers first saw Diamond in 2009 when they visited the farm to look at another mare. “At that time, Diamond was not for sale, but she was always in the back of our minds, as she was beautifully built and very sweet tempered,” Ann explains. “In 2013 we were looking for a mare to lease to breed, so we called the Barnes on the off-chance they might be interested in leasing Diamond to us. They agreed and we brought Diamond home and bred her to Little’s Reece.”

“Diamond had thirty days of saddle training before her first foal in 2012, so we spent the summer of 2013 exploring the Teton and Big Hole Mountain ranges, brushing up on groundwork, and generally getting to know each other. I showed her in halter at our local fair show, where she was calm and even tempered around all types of livestock, carnival rides, and throngs of people. Diamond did great in the mountains and had a boldness about her that I really admired. On one ride, Diamond and I were ahead of my husband on his Morgan gelding, when she suddenly stopped on the single track trail. There was nothing apparent to me, so I asked her to continue. On the next corner we were nose to front tire with a mountain biker. She calmly stopped and looked back at me as if to say she’d warned me. There was no fuss or reaction, and my admiration for her grew.”

Happily, the Moyers were able to purchase Diamond at the end of the lease. The mare may have another career soon. Ann explains, “I’ve volunteered several years with the Citizen’s Mounted Patrol in Jackson, Wyoming, which assists the Jackson Police Department, and I think Diamond would make a wonderful mounted patrol horse, with her willing attitude and confidence. She happily gives our nephews pony rides, and is patient with riders of all abilities. We’re very much looking forward to many more years and adventures with her!”

Heather Blom of Drummond, Montana, bred mares several times to Joel. “Every foal was lovely, easy to handle, and great looking. I no longer have those foals, they were also the ones people wanted to buy,” she says. “I recall a trail class where my horse and I were manning the tree drag, which was next to my llama at a campsite obstacle. It was the advanced/pro class, which

was the last of the day. To get to the tree drag, the competitors had to canter towards the tree and do several flying lead changes. From my vantage point I could tell how the competitors were doing. From what I could see, the best of the bunch was a crotchety old cowboy riding a pretty well-broke mule. The mule really was good, but struggled on the flying lead changes. The last competitor of the night was Chris on Joel. I watched him literally breeze through every one of the obstacles, then approach the tree and perform a few flying lead changes that would make Anke van Grusven green with envy. Chris and Joel ended up winning, the mule rider pouted, and Joel acted like it was just another day for him. What a horse.”

### ADDING COLOR—BLACKSADDLE STARBUCK

Chris has always been a fan of the golden dilutions and in 1995, with color just beginning to gain in popularity in the Morgan breed, she began her search for a buckskin stallion. She wanted one with that undeniably Morgan look to breed to her Joel daughters, and compared everything that she saw to Joel. After five years of looking without success, her search led her to Sharlene Anderson’s R-Two Morgans in Belgrade, Montana. The colt she had come to see wasn’t what she’d hoped for, but Sharlene told her about a buckskin mare she had with a trainer who also was for sale. “I started thinking I might have to raise my own colorful stallion, as I just hadn’t found the right fit,” Chris says. “Buying a quality colorful mare might have to be the way to get what we wanted.” That mare turned out to be KRP Pixie Pat (Sunup Neptune x High Ridge Victoria), and Chris got pretty excited when she saw her. She had been a fan of Sunup Neptune and his son L J Morning Reveille during her search, and Patty was a full sibling to Reveille. “I couldn’t believe my good fortune to be able to purchase this mare,” Chris says.

During her stallion search, Chris had been interested in a buckskin colt in California. Her friend Jeanne Michaelis, of Baymount Morgans in Red Bluff, California, had looked at him for Chris and sent video. Included was footage of the colt’s sire, Blacksaddle Starbuck. “The colt was a yearling at the time, in his ugly duckling stage. His sire on the other hand knocked my socks off—or, if I had been wearing one, blew my skirt up! There he was—the stallion I had been searching for! He wasn’t for sale at the time, so I really didn’t think he was a possibility.” Though Chris had kept on looking, she couldn’t get Starbuck out of her mind. Now that she had Patty, she decided to see if Starbuck might be available. “His owner really wasn’t promoting him or using him. She had him leased out. Maybe, just maybe, she would sell him.” In partnership with Jeanne, Chris was able to buy Starbuck, and finally, she had her colorful stallion.

Blacksaddle Starbuck split his breeding season each year, standing at Baymount Morgans in California in the early spring and then traveling to Devine Morgans in Montana for the summer. “It was a wonderful opportunity to make the most of this very special stallion,” Chris explains. Blacksaddle Starbuck had 80 registered Morgan foals at the time of his passing in 2009, most of them born after Chris and Jeanne bought him. One of his most famous offspring is the palomino stallion, Farceur’s Fool’s Gold, who was exported to Sweden where he stood at Ice Morgans.



*© Heidi Osgood-Metcalf*



**ABOVE:** Devine Spirit Of Hope (Blacksaddle Starbuck x KRP Pixie Pat). **BOTTOM INSET:** Chris and Spirit Of Hope taken after Chris won the Horsemanship Award at the 2010 Judged Trail Ride put on by the Vigilante Appaloosa Club. (Main photo © Heidi Osgood-Metcalf).

Another Starbuck son, Devine Lucky Star (out of Devine Catalina by Sandrock Joel), championed multiple times in trail and reining at the 2007 Far West Morgan Show, as a four-year-old. He went on to show very successfully in Extreme Trail Challenge competition, including a very impressive third place finish out of 60 entries in the Extreme Trail Challenge at Ride the West 2008 in Spokane, Washington, with trainer Shann Webley up. “Spud” was owned by Wheatland Morgans in Palouse Washington. This wonderful talent was lost much too soon in 2014, but fortunately left a dark palomino son, Wheatland Yukon Gold (out of Wheatland Brindel), who now stands at Wheatland.

Today, Starbuck’s son Devine Spirit Of Hope (x KRP Pixie Pat) carries on for his sire at Devine Morgans. Spirit is a perlino—a bay horse with two cream genes—meaning he is homozygous for the cream dilution and passes it on 100% of the time. “When I found Spirit after he was born [about three in the afternoon] it was because I was feeding hay in that pasture and Patty left him to come to eat!” Chris laughs. “He was born under what we call ‘The Perlino Tree.’ Two years later Patty had Gemini [full brother to Spirit] under the same tree. I was so excited as I had hoped to get

a double dilute colt, and there he was!”

In addition to using Spirit for work around the ranch, Chris has taken him to lots of events, including Trail Challenges and Judged Trail Rides, which she particularly enjoys. “They are like things you might encounter on your horse any given day, much like here on the ranch,” she explains. “You never know what critters you might run into—elk, deer, moose, bear, and most recently, since my nephew acquired goats, goats! Judged Trail Rides include opening gates, crossing creeks and bridges, machinery, the mailbox, being able to maneuver around, through, over, or under whatever you might encounter along the way. The Judged Trail Ride is a little different than the Trail Challenges. It is a ride across a big ranch where they have obstacles throughout, each one with its own judge. You go out in groups, spaced out. So you get this beautiful scenic ride and get to do the obstacles too.” One of the team’s most memorable awards in these events was winning the Horsemanship Cup at the 2010 Vigilante Appaloosa Club Judged Trail ride. “That was such a great award to win. The people there really didn’t know he was a stallion. I am very aware of other horses and people when riding my boys in public, but they are so well behaved it doesn’t



**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Devine Jorja (Sandrock Joel x M Classic Tabby Sue) 2008 brown Lippitt mare. Jorja produced her first foal (by Brookhill Constellation) in 2015 for Dale and Sue Beach, and is back in foal the same way for Chris in 2016; Devine Joel's Sierra (Sandrock Joel x CFM Sierra Pearle), a 2015 buckskin filly, who was conceived when her sire was 31 years of age!

take much. There was a little girl [four maybe] riding by herself, what a little cowgirl, and she was going to ride up to me to visit. I just started backing Spirit away as she came towards us, and told her she probably shouldn't come any closer. She stopped. Spirit was fine, didn't even talk to her horse."

The Holms just recently completed a new barn with an attached indoor arena, something Chris had dreamed about for a very long time. Spirit was chosen for the first ride in the new indoor. After a bit of ground work, Chris saddled him up. With a soundtrack of music by Heidi Osgood-Metcalf playing in the background, the two had a beautiful ride. "A truly Zen experience," Chris says. "Except for the high winds outside, it was perfect."

### GIVING BACK, AND LOOKING FORWARD

Those of us who love Morgans know that once you meet one, they are hard to forget. The problem is getting the breed (which is tiny in numbers compared to Arabians and stock horse breeds) in front of the public, where they can interact with people—something "the horse that chooses you" does with enthusiasm. Chris has taken up the challenge of promoting the breed by taking her Morgans to Horse Expos across Montana, the largest of which is the Northwestern International Livestock Expo in Billings. "We have taken both Devine Spirit Of Hope and Devine Gemini to that one," she says. "Big Sky Morgan Horse Association did a booth there, and along with Lisa Spors-Murphy and her black stallion Black Hat Knight Raven, we had the Morgans there to represent. Black and White," she smiles "I love getting our Morgans out in the public eye. People see them and fall in love!"

Chris has stayed active in a number of Morgan clubs over the years, including the Big Sky Morgan Horse Association (BSMHA), Rainbow Morgan Horse Association, Cornerstone

Morgan Horse Club, The Lippitt Club, and the National Morgan Reining Association. She has served the BSMHA on their board of directors, as secretary/treasurer and as their Directory Editor. Chris and Rodger have graciously hosted various club events, such as clinics and trail rides, at the ranch.

Chris enjoys helping people learn more about the breed, and provides support and education to new owners of her Morgans. "After purchasing Diamond, I exchanged photos and updates with Chris, who was very interested in knowing how she was doing," Ann Moyer says. "I have not met Chris in person, but she's kindly helped me with breeding questions and stallion keeping questions, and is a wealth of knowledge and information. I have a great appreciation for her breeding program and the horses she produces. I hope to soon visit her in Montana to meet her in person and see her stock. My husband and I feel extremely lucky to own a Devine Morgan."

Heather Blom agrees, "Chris herself is just as awesome as her horses. She's the kind of person everyone wants to have as a friend."

There have been 47 Morgans bred to date with the Devine prefix. "We raise up to five foals a year and love all of the possibilities breeding has to offer. With Spirit we can be guaranteed buckskin or palomino foals from bay, chestnut and black mares, but to us the color is a bonus—type, conformation and disposition are first and foremost. Maybe you have heard the old saying, "pretty is as pretty does." Here at Devine Morgans, pretty is *and* pretty does!" After more than thirty years, the curvy "Justin Morgan look," good sense, substance and versatility of Sandrock Joel continues to influence the breeding program at Devine Morgans. Heather Blom reflects upon a conversation she once had with Chris. "We were talking about that once in a lifetime horse, and how much money it would take to let that horse go. Suffice to say, if someone were to offer Chris untold millions for her Joel, they would be keeping their cash." ■