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PETER ROBSON AND QUIETUDE GOLDRUSH— THE MORGAN BREED'S UNIQUE AMBASSADORS IN NEW ZEALAND

By Brenda L. Tippin

Since the days of the original Justin Morgan horse, the breed has become established not only in all 50 states of America but has also gained the support of dedicated breeders and ambassadors around the world. One such story involves the unique adventures of Peter Robson and his Morgan stallion, Quietude Goldrush.

ABOVE: New Zealand's Peter Robson drives Morgans, assembled as a "pickaxe hitch," to the stage coach he built himself. The 1991 stallion Quietude Goldrush is the far left horse with wide blaze and blond mane.



Ploughing contests, popular with spectators in rural New Zealand, are an important activity for Peter and his son Jase with their Morgan team.

QUIETUDE GOLDRUSH

A striking flaxen golden chestnut marked with a distinctive blaze and both hind socks, Quietude Goldrush was bred by Susan and Shannon Hanley, and foaled at their Quietude Stud in West Virginia in June of 1991. A grandson of their foundation sire, Criterion (Jubilee's Courage x Lippitt Robrita), he was a son of Criterion The Younger (Criterion x Honor Of Quietude by Criterion) and out of Quietude Sally Moro (Dyberry Royalton x Lippitt Sally Moro). Rich in the blood of Daniel Lambert through the Criterion crosses on his sire's side, and old Vermont breeding through his dam, Goldrush also had a very strong tail female line, tracing back through daughters of Billy Hoffman, Ethan Allen 3d, and Houghton's Beauty to a mare by the Dr. Sias Black Horse (Black Morgan x daughter of Royal Morgan). It is particularly interesting to note that Goldrush bore a strong resemblance in character and type to old Billy Root, which is not surprising considering he carries more than 500 crosses to the remarkable old horse. His early years were carefree as he played with the other young stallions and galloped in the rolling green pastures of the beautiful Quietude Stud.

A STALLION FOR ARMAGH FARM

Meanwhile, half a world away in New Zealand, Peter and Helen Robson, owners of Armagh Farm in Lochiel, Southland, were looking for a Morgan stallion. A member of the Carriage Association of America, Peter is among the increasingly rare numbers of expert wheelwrights in the world who follow the trade of building and repairing wooden wheels for horse drawn vehicles. Peter was looking for a sturdy, old-type Morgan he could use for farming, coaching, and breeding his own team of Morgans to compete in

ploughing competitions. He wanted a horse with a golden disposition, easy to train and handle, and who would truly be a part of the family and safe around his grandchildren.

In 1995, Peter was discouraged after a trip to the United States searching for such a horse resulted in finding none he felt would be quite what he was looking for, and he returned home empty-handed. Then he received a copy of *The Morgan Horse* magazine, July 1995, with an article by Roberta Grimes about the Quietude Stud, pictures of their foundation sire, Criterion, and the rare Lambert family of Morgans he represented. He called Susan and Shannon, explained his story and wondered if they had any young stallions available for sale. They sent him videos of Goldrush and his sire, as well as other members of the Lambert family, and Peter knew it was Goldrush he wanted.

Susan remembers, "It was in January in the middle of the night when the expected call came telling us that the horse transporter had arrived. So out of bed, and with only the winter night stars lighting the sky, our flashlights found Goldrush deeply asleep as he lay on the snow. Blinking his eyes as he awakened, he stood and shook off snow. He had no idea he was starting the rest of his life on a far-off island New Zealand. So Goldrush that cold night happily jumped into our old trailer that would take him on his very first leg to his far away life's adventure. Our remote farm is a winding narrow five miles from the small village of Hillsboro where we took Goldrush to meet the huge horse cross-country transport truck that was lit up like a towering transatlantic ship about to embark. There we were confronted with a narrow, long, and steep gangplank. Goldrush took it all in as we handed him over to the truck driver and without hesitation he eagerly walked up the gangplank, greeted the horses inside, and was backed into a



Morgans made friends in the cavalcade of 35 horses and multiple vehicles that traveled 600 miles from the southernmost island to the northern tip of New Zealand in 2007. Quietude Goldrush visited a pub in Bluff (photo courtesy Helen Robson).

narrow stall between two tall horses. I had slipped up behind him and was able to give him a last hug and say 'goodbye, Goldrush.'"

Helen Robson was later deeply impressed with how much Goldrush resembled Quietude Jubilee Kingdom (Quietude Barcelona x Honor Of Quietude), whose dam was the dam of Goldrush's sire, as well as sharing crosses to Criterion and other similar lines. Foaled in 1994, just a few years after Goldrush,

Jubilee Kingdom was Quietude's premier sire for several years until his death in 2019 (see cover, *The Morgan Horse*, October 2018).

NEW ZEALAND

Goldrush's new home was in far-away Southland, New Zealand, the South Island, the most sparsely populated area of the country with only a little over 100,000 residents in an area of 12,045 square

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Peter preserves a glimpse into old times with the stagecoach and wagon he built himself.

miles. It consists mainly of the southwestern portion of the South Island. By comparison, West Virginia has a population of 1.7 million living in more than 24,230 square miles. Known for its volcanic and earthquake activity, New Zealand lies in the southwest Pacific Ocean in what is known as the “Ring of Fire.” Armagh Farm is near Lochiel, about 16 miles north of Invercargill, which has about half of Southland’s population and is near the southern tip of the South Island. Invercargill is the regional capital and commercial hub of New Zealand, founded in the 1850s, and is one of the southernmost cities in the world. The area has long summer daylight hours with frequent appearances of the Aurora Australis, or Southern Lights. Southland offers a variety of landscapes with rugged coastline, temperate rain forests, and mountain peaks, contrasting with areas of fertile farmland, deep lakes, and meandering rivers.

GOLDRUSH “JOCK” OFFSPRING

Goldrush left the cold winter of West Virginia to arrive in the warm summer of New Zealand. The Robsons already owned two registered Morgans at the time, a gelding, Mt Tawonga Mitta

(Wawayanda Watch Out x Aura Dell Misty) and a mare, Mt Tawonga Georgina (Wawayanda Watch Out x Aura Dell Peekie). Wawayanda Watch Out was a son of Wawayanda Wallington by Kingston (Upwey Ben Don x Junefield) and out of Applevale Lyric (Sealect Of Windcrest x Betty Ross). Watch Out’s dam was Wawayanda Maequinn by the Ulendon son Brorock Markquinn (x Mayquinn) and out of the exceptional producer Brown Mae (Raymond S Sentney x Silver Mae), who was bred by the Theis Company of Dodge City, Kansas, and who became the dam of 18 foals, long before the days of embryo transfer.

These lines brought in a mix of Old Government, Brunk, Elmer Brown, Hill, and Sellman breeding. Georgina’s dam, Aura Dell Peekie, was a daughter of Saddleback Sultan (Orland Dondarling x Donene Pepper) and out of Saddleback Sundance (Applevale Donalect x Waltz Time). This added two additional crosses to Upwey Ben Don, along with old Vermont, Old Government, and Brunk lines. Georgina was soon bred to Goldrush (“Jock”), and Armagh Rebecca (“Becky”) was foaled in 1997. The Robsons retained another of Georgina’s daughters, Armagh Britney, foaled



Criterion The Younger, a sire in the unique “Lambert herd” of Morgans at the Quietude Stud in West Virginia; and his son, Quietude Goldrush, exported to New Zealand.

in 2001, to use for the homebred team, as well as Armagh Jesse and Armagh Billy, a couple of Morab sons of Goldrush from an Arabian mare. All of these, like their sire, were golden chestnut in color, marked with white blazes, some with varying degrees of flaxen in the mane and/or tail, and made an impressive turnout.

TRAINING THE TEAM, PLOUGHING COMPETITIONS

Peter spent the next several years diligently working with the horses and training them for farm work and coach work, and soon they were competing in the New Zealand ploughing competitions against Clydesdales and other draft horses. All the horses were exceptionally well-trained, knowing what was expected of them and responding promptly to voice commands, so they were extremely reliable and easy to handle for public appearances, demonstrations, and competitions. Jock was especially mellow and even tempered and remained unconcerned while Peter and Helen’s grandchildren climbed all over him, often enjoying sitting on him backwards.

The first known record of a plough in New Zealand was from 1820 by the Reverend John Butler, a clergyman farmer and missionary to the Māori in Kerikeri, New Zealand. Six imported bullocks were used for this plough, and Butler turned the first furrow. Since that time, ploughing became a way of life for farmers across New Zealand. Records of one of the earliest horse-drawn ploughing competitions in New Zealand were reported at the Hoteo North settlement of Auckland, New Zealand, on the north island as early as 1895. Ploughing matches continue to be one of the country’s most popular sports. Categories for horse drawn ploughing are still included, as well as vintage tractors.

In these contests, the teams are given a specified amount of time to complete a task, for example three hours to plough a 100 by 20-meter plot of grass and stubble. Judges then determine how many points to award based on such factors as the opening spit, how tight and straight the furrows are, and how much of the soil is available for crop, seedbed preparation, and finish when the ploughing is done. For example, out of 200 points awarded, 45 are allocated to completing the crown (the first three furrows on either side of the opening); 30 points for burying the grass and stubble; 35 for maintaining the uniformity of the ploughing; 30 for the firmness of the furrow; 10 for straightness, 10 for the “ins and outs” of the plough at the end of the furrows, and a final 40 points for the finish—the last three furrows on either side of the mould furrow. The mould furrow refers to the very last furrow which should be as straight as possible. The final few furrows are shallower for easier cultivation and the purpose of the mould furrow is to create some loose soil, or mould, for the harrow and for the seeds to go in.

Peter and his son, Jason, generally used a team of four horses for the ploughing competitions with Jock, Becky, Britney, and Billy. For several years they competed in local competitions all over New Zealand on both the north and south islands, as well as the annual Silver Plough New Zealand Ploughing Championship, which has been held each year since 1956. They won a majority of their contests, often defeating the Clydesdales and other larger draft teams, sometimes even scoring higher points than the vintage tractors, and winning the championship title at least seven times. Peter and Jason also competed at the 57th World Ploughing Championship in Methven, New Zealand, in 2010. The Robsons won there as they did at almost every event in which they competed. The World Ploughing Organization was first established in 1952 with the

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first world contest being hosted by Canada in 1953. Each year the contest is hosted by a different country around the world with competitors ranging from amateur to highly skilled expert ploughmen. The Robson Morgans always attracted a lot of attention at these events and were great ambassadors for the breed. Peter notes that even though Morgans are a small horse compared to typical draft teams they can “mix it with the Clydies” for ploughing and are much more agile for coaching and pleasure driving.

THE CAVALCADE AND THE ROBSON COACH

Among the most unique events the Robsons participated in with their Morgans was the cavalcade traveling from Bluff, at the southernmost tip of the South Island of New Zealand, to Picton, at the northernmost tip, a distance of more than 600 miles by the chosen route. It was a charity project to raise funds for the Otago Rescue Helicopter Trust through the Lion Foundation. The Otago helicopter provided a valuable service for many horsemen and horsewomen in the backcountry and so they felt this was an important fundraising cause. This was an idea which originally came at a ploughing competition in 2000. At first it was just talk, but in 2003, the Southern Horse Power Group decided it was time to organize the event. Peter Robson was named as one of the coordinators and a departure date was set for 2007.

When the day arrived on a Saturday morning, January 20, 2007 (midsummer in New Zealand), 22 people had assembled at the small town of Bluff on the southern coast of the South Island to participate. This included adults and children, along with 35 horses, four wagons, and a stagecoach. The stagecoach belonged to Peter Robson, and was built especially for the trip, a process which took approximately eight months of labor over a two-year period. Peter patterned the coach as a one-third scale replica of an 1820s Concord Coach, and painstakingly built it from scratch in his spare time using Southland beech wood (*Nothofagus menziesii*). Endemic to the South Island, Southland beech yields a lightweight hardwood that steam bends easily, and generally is easy to work with, having a fine and even texture and even wearing characteristics which work especially well for machining, turning, and finishing. It is also known as silver beech, due to its generally lighter wood color, although some varieties of the same botanical species yield wood with pinkish to reddish colors highlighting the grain, which is sometimes marketed as cherry beech. When fully seasoned the beech wood is remarkably stable and is less likely to split, warp, or break down than other hardwoods. It is naturally resistant to the several species of borer beetles which have become troublesome pests in New Zealand. Beech also requires very little sanding to achieve a high-quality finish and is easy to stain, polish, and paint. These properties were ideal for the detailed work of building a coach and combined with Peter's skill in woodworking the finished coach was a work of art. Paired with the spirited Morgan team the coach looked like a piece of living history.

The original Concord Coaches would carry 16 to 20 passengers, while Peter's smaller coach would carry up to eight passengers, including the driver. Peter's coach boasts padded leather bench seats for a more comfortable ride and, like the famous Concorde, has the unique thorough-brace technology. The thorough-braces

are made from long strips of tough cured leather and strung in pairs to support the body of the coach, providing a cradle-like swinging motion rather than the jolting of steel springs. The steel-rimmed wooden-spoked wheels have roller bearings in the hubs. The body of the coach could be lifted off and replaced by a wagon (which Peter also built) or a larger coach could also be bolted on to the undercarriage. Empty, the coach weighs 2,116 pounds. A hand lever is used to apply a brake shoe to the rear wheels for braking, and for very steep hills a chain is used to lock the rear wheels in place.

Why a stagecoach? Traces of gold were first discovered by whalers in the Coromandel area on the northern end of the North Island as early as 1842, and almost simultaneously a survey party found traces in the Takaka River on the northern end of the South Island. The first major gold rush of New Zealand was not until 1861 when gold was discovered near the Tuapeka River, a tributary of the Clutha River in Otago. Soon after this, Charles Carlos Cole, an American who had run coaches in Australia, arrived in Dunedin. He brought with him a deluxe American Concord coach. In his first attempted coach trip from Dunedin to the gold fields at Gabriel's Gully he managed to reduce the travel time from two days to nine hours. He then set up the Cobb & Co. Telegraphic Line of Coaches and immediately began running a daily service. Horatio Hartley, an American born miner, and his friend, Clyde Reilly, an Irish immigrant to the United States, made a gold strike in 1862 near the gorge where the town of Clyde now lies, triggering the Dunstan gold rush which brought in 40,000 miners harvesting over two tons of gold within the first year. Peter noted there were only about five original stagecoaches remaining in New Zealand, none of which were roadworthy and most in museums. Part of the coach's purpose was to memorialize this history and included re-enactments of holdups and gold discoveries along the way, which also served as an added attraction for the fundraiser.

For the trip Peter used five horses to pull the stagecoach in what is known as the pickaxe hitch. The two horses in the rear on the pole are the britchin' horses, with three leader horses hitched to an equalizer in the lead. Most often, Jock would be on the lead with his two daughters, Becky and Britney, while his two Morab sons, Jesse and Billy, would be the britchin' horses. Along the way Peter would often take Jock inside some of the pubs to entertain the locals, all part of the fundraising effort.

Each day the cavalcade would start about 5:00 a.m. and was busy with organizing the chuck wagon and feed wagon, along with other support vehicles to travel ahead and make arrangements for the group to stay overnight. Everyone then had to be packed and ready for a 7:30 a.m. departure. Their best day of roadwork over the trip was traveling a total of 62 miles in a single day, quite a feat for such a group. When they reached their planned overnight destination, portable electric fencing would be set up to create paddocks for the horses. Then the horses would have to be unharnessed and checked over for any spots of chafing or soreness, and wear on their shoes. Typically, three or four shoes would have to be replaced every four days or so, which would involve setting up a gas forge and reshoeing the horses that needed it. Days would usually not end until 11:00 p.m., making for very long

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days over the course of the two-month-long trip. There were lots of hills to negotiate along the way, both uphill and downhill, with winding roads. The planned route traveled through the towns of Invercargill, Gore, Raes Junction, Millers Flat, Alexandra, Naesby, Kurow, Waimate, Cave, Pleasant Point, Geraldine, Mayfield, Mt Sommers, Rakaia, Darfield, Oxford, Rangiora, Lake Sumner, Hanmer, Molesworth, and Renwick. The goal was to fundraise as they traveled, donating the proceeds to the Lion Foundation Otago Rescue helicopter.

On day 20, February 8th, they reached the town of Waimate. People in period dress from the Waimate Museum were on hand to greet them and the mayor of Waimate went for a ride in Peter's stagecoach, admiring the handsome Morgans. By day 26 of the trip, on Valentine's Day, the group reached the small town of Geraldine, where they stopped for a rest day. They then staged a mock robbery, holding up banks, police stations, tour buses, and shops, requesting donations for the Otago Rescue Helicopter. The residents of Geraldine readily joined in the fun and handed over donations totaling \$800 for the day. Peter also picked up the mayor of Woodbury for a ride. Other spots along the way provided swimming holes which were taken advantage of for a much-needed cooling off on long hot days. Many welcomed the cavalcade by opening up their land or offering facilities for the group to rest and refresh. Altogether, the trip took about seven weeks and Peter believed it to be the longest coach trip ever recorded in New Zealand. The team was very fit by the time they came over the hill to Picton and succeeded in raising several thousand dollars for the Otago Rescue Helicopter.

WEDDINGS, RE-ENACTMENTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Following the hugely adventuresome cavalcade trip, Peter's stagecoach and Morgans continued to be in demand for various events and sometimes the wagon was used as well. Peter and his son, Jason, took the coach and horses to many shows across New Zealand over the years and regularly competed at the shows in Gore, which were only about 40 minutes from Armagh Farm. They often did displays with the stagecoach and Morgans and sometimes

were judged if other wagons were present at the show. They also participated in the Garston School Centennial re-enactment of the early days of New Zealand, with hold-ups adding to the excitement. Peter and Jason also took the stagecoach and Morgans to participate in the Centennial Celebration held in Central Otago which included a re-enactment of the ride over the original trail through some very hilly country. Peter and Jason took people on stagecoach rides over the original trail for this event.

The stagecoach and Morgans were often requested for weddings and the Robson's daughter, Gina, used it for her wedding as well. One family had Peter drive them in the stagecoach from Queenstown to meet a helicopter which would take them up the mountain for photos. Another wedding was done at Lake Te Anau in a park and the team had to stand quietly for an hour while the service took place.

Peter also built a large farmer's wagon which could be used in place of the coach, and this was often requested for everything from funerals to Santa rides. Jock and Georgina, the dam of several of his foals, had to be put down in 2020 due to age, but the influence of these Morgans lives on in New Zealand. Five of Jock's remaining offspring are now with Jason in Fiordland, New Zealand, and currently are mostly being used as saddle horses. The strength and versatility of these Morgans, along with their kind and friendly disposition, made a lasting and favorable impression upon many New Zealanders and won them many friends in the process. ■

RESOURCES

- Allbreed Pedigree, www.allbreedpedigree.com
- American Morgan Horse Association, "Online Morgan Registry," <http://services.morganhorse.com/PortalTools/HorseRegistry/Index.cfm>
- Helen Robson, Armagh Farm, New Zealand
- Otago Daily Times, 22 October 2012
- Susan Hanley, Quietude Stud, West Virginia
- The Timaru Herald, 10 March 2007
- www.blufftopicton.blogspot.com



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