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BRYAN LUTTER: A SOUTH DAKOTA COWBOY AND HIS FIRST MORGAN

Bryan Lutter is a traditional cowboy with an insatiable, adventurous nature. Born in the rolling, vast country of the Dakotas and raised riding and wrangling, he became fascinated with the Morgan breed as he studied American history and participated in cavalry reenactments.

In Fort Meade, South Dakota, not far from where Bryan lives, there is an endurance race that takes place every year. The trails run past the historical location of the 7th U.S. Cavalry Regiment

barrack's and its more-than-145-year-old stables, winding through breathtaking hill country on the 50-mile loop to Bear Butte. The history of the area is closely connected with the Morgan horse, the preferred breed of the U.S. military back then.

Bryan, fascinated by this history, first participated in the endurance ride in 2017 but the activity has now become an annual event for him. In a sport dominated by hot Arabs and the latest-of-technology tack, Bryan showed up at his first race with a Quarter

By Adrienne Dymesich

ABOVE & RIGHT PAGE: Cowboy Bryan Lutter and his Morgan gelding SRR Tuscan New Moon at work and at play (photos © Jim Hopewell).

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ABOVE & ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES: Tucson trusts his rider while navigating a steep ravine (photo © Rockin' R Images, Becca Shelbourn for Outfitters Supply).

Horse, a McClellan saddle, and in full cowboy garb. Folks were skeptical, but true to form Bryan showed his capability with a horse by winning the race that day and making many friends in the distance community.

It was at his first Fort Meade ride that my husband, Isac, and I met Bryan. We raise Working Western type Morgans in our home state of Wisconsin and compete on them in American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) rides within the region and across the country. Over the years that followed, Isac and his three sons would go out to South Dakota with Morgans to join Bryan in herding cattle on the open range or seeking out buffalo in the rugged back country.

Bryan remembers, "When Isac rode 'Ranger' [Lindah Jefe] in the Badlands with us, he went up and down some crazy places where no normal person would go." Bryan's interest in the Morgan horse grew.

In 2019, Bryan purchased SRR Tuscan New Moon, a colorful, sooty buckskin colt sired by Ranger "Lindah Jefe" (who was our founding stallion) and out of a gray mare Amberfields Elegant Ash. Ranger is the Morgan who had first caught Bryan's attention for his surefootedness, toughness, and boundless energy when Isac came to help him round up cattle.

When he arrived at our ranch to pick up the Morgan yearling, Bryan was surprised at how small he was. I remember being

amused that he kept assuring himself by repeating, "He'll grow, I'm sure he'll grow up just fine."

Years later, Bryan recounts what it was like to start his young Morgan under saddle. "The first day in the round pen he was being a spoiled brat, more so than other horses, trying to intimidate me. He'd run close right by me, not exactly running me over, but he was obviously making a point to show leadership. Of course, that was corrected in the first five minutes, and it didn't take him long to learn that the pecking order wasn't the way he thought it was going to be.

"He got a quick attitude adjustment, and ever since he has been an extremely willing partner, in every way. Even if I know he doesn't really want to do something, he will work hard to do it for me when I ask him. His number one goal is to 'make Bryan happy' and he's extremely good at it. He knows what I want with very light cues. For instance, every day when I ride, I have him back in a circle trying to keep his nose to the inside. This takes a lot of him moving off my leg, and it is not easy for him. He does it better than my other horses, though I'd say he likes it even less than my other horses. I really appreciate that in him, because he doesn't fight me when I ask him to do hard things like that."

Living in the Dakotas means wide open spaces. From Bryan's house you can look out across the open country, and as far as the eye can see and in every direction, the land meets the sky. Bryan is a



(photo © Rockin' R Images, Becca Shelbourn for Outfitters Supply)

crop specialist and busy all summer, but he rides as often as he can and covers a lot of ground. Several times a year in the off-season, Bryan will take a dependable string of horses and pack out solo for many days over seriously rough terrain, often in snow. Tucson started out as a pack horse before graduating to saddle work and Bryan found even more he liked about his Morgan.

Bryan says, “I never have to pedal him. So, when I pick a gait moving out across the country, and he gets his heart rate up and is breathing a little quicker, he will stick to that gait without me making any adjustments or peddling him or pushing him. If I say we are walking, we are walking, or trotting, or loping, I don’t have to pressure him to stay in the gait. He will maintain till I tell him to go into a different gait, like driving a four-wheeler.”

Bryan is an expert horseman, and he takes great pleasure in a well-trained mount. His Morgan has not disappointed. “Riding Tucson is really fun because it’s almost a mind-reading level of minimal cues to get him to do exactly what I want,” Bryan says. “He’s extremely sensitive to very light cues. That’s probably my favorite thing about this horse; he’s just fabulous to ride. But because of that, Tucson is not really a kid’s horse. The lightest move will get him doing stuff that they didn’t know they told him to do.”

The Morgan horse is not common in Bryan’s region of the country. He says, “I think folks in this part of the country are

missing out a little bit because a lot of riders, even ranchers, are looking for, number one, a horse with less spook. The spook on a Quarter Horse is much worse than the spook on a Morgan and that’s a really big deal in the branding pen. Because you’ve got a lot of noise, it’s super loud. You got the propane burners that are very loud. The calves are bawling, the mommas are bawling, because they have just been separated. You got dozens of people there and you and your horse are pulling this calf out of a pen over to the fire. You can’t cut people off, because you’ve got a rope going by them, and you just can’t have a horse that spooks and then runs over people. There are people on the ground holding calves. There are injuries that happen with hot horses at branding time. Morgans are...a little bit calmer, and handle stress just a little bit better. So that’s number one. Number two, they are stronger, they are much stronger, so they can pull bigger, heavier animals.

“Tucson is still my best roping horse, because he’s my most trustworthy horse in a situation like that. My three Quarter Horses are not as good for roping as Tucson because they are afraid—if the rope goes under their tail for instance. Tucson will get afraid sometimes too, but his trust is just outstanding. I’ve done all kinds of stuff with him, like mounted shooting. He’s good with being shot off. Oh, and Tucson is good at jumping, he’s really good at jumping! He’s probably been the easiest horse to pop over jumps I’ve

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(photo © Rockin' R Images, Becca Shelbourn for Outfitters Supply)

had. That's another thing I like about him."

Bryan's Morgan has become his horse of choice for many things, and recently something even more out of the ordinary: modeling for Western photo shoots.

Last fall, Bryan was doing a photo shoot with Becca Shelbourn for Outfitters Supply. The early morning lighting was perfect, but to cross the creek was a steep descent, then a vertical embankment up the other side as high as the horse's withers. Becca, the photographer, said, "I don't think he's going to go up there."

With subtle encouragement that she could not even see, Bryan asked his Morgan gelding to clear the bank above them, and with willingness and strength that came as no surprise, his horse made the jump.

"I missed it!" Becca shouted in disappointment. She had not expected Tucson to leap the bank and was not ready with her camera. Behind them, the Quarter Horse packing the game had not been so willing and was left standing in the water below.

Bryan and Tucson repeated the maneuver until Becca got her shot. "Yeah, we cleared it all right," Bryan remembers. "It was fun. He's just that kind of horse. He knows I've never asked him to do anything that got him hurt, it always works out. He trusts me."

Becca says, "Bryan has been a favorite model of mine for many years because he owns great horses and is an amazing rider. Bryan's

young Morgan gelding was the perfect choice for the shoot. Not only is he gorgeous but he also was incredibly versatile and willing to do anything Bryan asked him."

Bryan has been doing this kind of photo shoot for photographers for years, but now it's his Morgan he chooses for the shoots. He says, "Tucson is my go-to horse for photo shoots for a couple of reasons. He's a really good-looking horse, nice neck and color, and I decided to train him to rear and, of course, the photographers just love this trick." But he only goes up at the word "up," Bryan assures.

"He won't do it any other time and he will hold this pose until the photographer captures him satisfactorily. This is simply not something I've been able to accomplish with any other horse I've tried it with."

Photographer Jim Hopewell says about Bryan and his Morgan, "I am not sure who is the bigger ham for the camera, Bryan or Tucson. It probably doesn't matter because they work so well together. As a photographer, I like action, emotion, and drama in my pictures. The image of Tucson reared up on his hind legs with Bryan waving a pistol has these in spades. Then to have the Badlands in the background makes this one of the best pictures I took last year. There is a canvas copy hanging in my living room so I can enjoy the look in Tucson's eye and wonder how Bryan was able to hang on." ■