



photo by Jim Munch

Panache

The Story of Three Morgans Competing and Winning at the World Pairs Driving Championships

by ANN MUNCH
Part I

BY THE END of September's first week, the news had reached the Americas — Larry Poulin of Falmouth, Maine, USA, driving a pair (and alternate) of registered Morgans, pitted against the most superlative reinsmen and horses in the world, had competed and placed extremely well. Garnering an eighth place out of 48 in their individual rankings, and a first place, overall, in the dressage phase, Poulin and his horses have at-

tracted world-wide attention to the Morgan breed and have given a new dimension to the sport of pairs driving.

Freelance writer and Morgan owner Ann Munch accompanied the Poulin contingent on its voyage to Sandringham. The story she captured is one of friendship and esprit de corps, perserverance, and steadfast determination — how the Morgan community and three of its horses entered a new field of international competition, and succeeded — with panache . . .

"The challenge of going into a hazard is a thrill. Your heart starts pumping. You know there are seven gates and you've got to get there as fast as you can. It's a challenge, completely absorbing. Your blood is racing, really racing . . ."

Larry Poulin, reflecting on the hazards at Sandringham.

Part One of their story begins on the following page.

It all started in March of this year when Connecticut Morgan breeder Clarence Russell decided he knew just the driver and just the horses to show the driving world what Morgans can do. Money might be lacking, equipment was lacking, not one of the group had any international experience, but Russell knew one of the best reinsmen in America, Larry Poulin of Falmouth, Maine, and a trio of superb driving Morgans.

Morgans though, that was a catch. Everyone knows you need something large in the way of a European warmblood to successfully compete in international driving. Russell is not the man, however, to allow problems and notions obstruct his course of action.

Once he brought his idea up to Poulin things moved fast. Margaret Gardiner, of Woolwich, Maine, was willing to allow her matched pair of 15.2, golden chestnuts, Kennebec Count and Kennebec Russel, to be used in the competition. The spare would be Clarence Russell's 16 hand dark bay mare, Teckla Brandy Time, except in this case the spare was the other half of the marathon pair. The American Morgan Horse Association was ready to help raise funds, and New England Morgan people pitched in with loans of the essential, and very expensive, equipment.

To qualify for the United States Equestrian Team going to England, a pair had to compete successfully in three out of five selection trials, including the final one, the Chrysler-Myopia Driving Event in the end of June. After the usual difficulties of conditioning during the cold Maine spring, compounded by having only three months in which to accomplish it, Poulin and the Morgans came out highest scorers in the three trials they entered. This clinched their selection, together with Sharon Chesson and her Holsteiners and Charles Cheston and his Appaloosas, to make the trek to Sandringham.

Thirty-six-year-old Poulin is a Mainer whose family originated in Quebec. Horses were part of his fam-

ily's life, but he did not become committed to a career with them until 11 years ago when he went to work for Margaret Gardiner at her Kennebec Morgan Horse Farm. Gardiner's breeding philosophy has been to produce what is now called a sport horse, a versatile, hardy Morgan with the temperament to be a good using horse. The excellent showing in combined events of her 15-year-old stallion, Count, and his eight-year-old gelded son, Russel, is proof of her success.

Poulin began his career as a com-

lin also competes successfully in ridden dressage with his Thoroughbred, Picasso.

This is the driver and two of the Morgans selected for the U.S.E.T. Who is the organizer of the venture, and what about the third horse? Coming from upper New York state, Clarence Russell has a specialty meat and grocery store in Chester, Connecticut. However, from childhood when he listened to his grandfather talk of his days as a trainer and later used horses for the early spring plowing on his



It is take-off time for the Morgan trio headed for Sandringham. On the left, the "flying trailer" that held the three Morgans while they were in flight. On the right, the inside of the trailer and Kennebec Count, Kennebec Russel, and Teckla Brandy Time. These Morgans went on to place eighth out of 48 at the World Pairs Driving Championships. Photos by Nancy Russell.

petitive driver with Count at the 1978 Myopia Driving Event. The following year the Count - Russel - Poulin combination won the Connecticut Valley Driving event, going on to win the Pair Combined Driving Championships at the New England Morgan Horse Show. This established their reputation as unbeatable at driven dressage, with the versatility to win the obstacles, plus the endurance to be successful in marathons.

Then, one year ago this June, going on their own, Larry and Michal Poulin set up their own place, Highland Dressage Center, in Falmouth, Maine. Kennebec Count came with them, on lease from Margaret Gardiner. They specialize in training horses under saddle, and in harness, based on the principles of dressage. In his spare time Pou-

lin's father's farm, his avocation has been horses. At his Teckla Farm, the site of the annual Connecticut Valley Driving Event, Russell has concentrated on driving horses, although his daughter, Nancy, in the past showed extensively in equitation.

Describing his mare Teckla Brandy Time, (by Serenity March Time), Russell said, "She's my favorite horse. I bred her, raised her, trained her myself. She's won a lot of (driving) events," including all four Russell entered in 1984. It was with Brandy, when she was four, that Russell first got interested in combined driving, and the man and horse are a perfect combination. "I can be beaten in dressage almost any time, but not on a marathon, and not with Brandy. She's like a charger. When she sees those

red and white squares (marking the gates of hazard), she just goes like blazes." Brandy has also had three foals, the most recent a colt by Kennebec Count, now owned by Poulin. "Super mare" is what Brandy should be called.

And super organizer is what Russell is. Once selected for the U.S.E.T. a multitude of small problems and questions arose, each taking energy and judgement. For starters, how would the flight over affect the horses, what should the crew take with them,

ringham, listening to rain drum on the canvas roof, Poulin told us of the problems of keeping horses fit during quarantine. Because the footing at Sandringham was reported as sandy and heavy, he didn't ride the horses during the month, rather concentrated on conditioning through driving. He weighted the vehicle. "Up to 1300 pounds (the weight requirement for the marathon is 770), the horses were really pulling. We had very little space, two little pastures to work out of, and it became very boring. You have to be

big move. Also, setting up his 40 stall horse facility, working on arrangements for Sandringham, and conditioning two horses at another farm, was wearing Poulin down. Getting on over to England and concentrating on the three horses and the upcoming competition sounded good.

The flight over was paid for by the U.S.E.T., and as Poulin said, "It was a real experience, it was the first time for all of us so we had no idea what to expect." Clarence Russell and Brandy met them at the quarantine station at Kennedy airport. The horses were shipped by air travel in what are called "containers," each of which holds three horses. "I had no idea what a container looked like," says Poulin. Was it closed, or open or what? It was a closed box with a canvas top, about eight feet in width. Tight quarters for three horses crossing the Atlantic.

The two mile journey from the quarantine station to the airport turned out to be the worst part of the trip. Count started scrambling, climbing the walls. He cut the top of his tail and tore his leg wraps up. Not an encouraging start, especially as Poulin knew, when a horse becomes unmanageable in flight, it is often put down.

The shipping procedure is: *cram thoroughly wrapped horses into the container, fasten with cross ties and neck ropes so they can't rear, shut up all doors, pick up the container by forklift and set into the front of the plane (nose lifts up) onto conveyor tracks and winch into position.*

Describing the experience Poulin said, "The worst part is taking off because all of a sudden the engine roars. The horses have no idea what all this thundering is. Then all the thrust. The average horse will lean back and sit down on his tail, but Count is a scrambler and he kept trying to climb the walls." Poulin was traveling alone with his horses and the only space he had was a two foot wide aisle inside the container in front of the horses. "I had a bag of apples, a bag of carrots. I kept feeding



what not, where would the crew live? A million details, and none of this group had ever been abroad before. As far as raising money for the venture and getting the loan of equipment was concerned, Russell said, "With the Morgan people supporting us it was feasible, without them we'd have stayed home." But it was Russell who got it all moving.

The first new obstacle was the federally supervised quarantine to satisfy British government requirements. One month of total isolation; only specified people were permitted near the horses and every item in contact with the horses had to be sprayed with an antiseptic, including the inside of the barn.

Later, sitting on a straw bale in the tack room in the stabling at Sand-

careful about confining a horse and at the same time overweighting the horses because you can run into training problems."

It was at this point that this writer, a Morgan owner, and very excited by the idea of a Mainer taking two Maine-bred Morgans to England, decided that I had to go too. Poulin and Russell generously agreed to my coming and staying with the crew in Sandringham. Jim, my husband, was able to come August 27th to photograph the competitions.

In order to leave for England on the 7th of August, the horses were put into quarantine immediately after the Myopia win. This gave them 20 days to get acclimated to England before the competitions, particularly Brandy, who loses her interest in food after a

Count, to get his attention, kept telling him he was alright. Normally the pilot asks you up front before he takes off . . . But I wasn't about to leave the horses. No way. That's when they really needed me." Poulin reflects.

By 11:00 that night the plane reached cruising altitude and the horses relaxed. Poulin went on, "I went above where the pilots were, fell asleep a couple hours, woke up, and it was daylight. The horses were fine. I knew we were getting close because I could see land – Ireland. It was really exciting; the horses knew something was going on but they had no idea what. Landing is three times easier than taking off. The noise isn't there. The plane glides down, it touches, and coasts in. That's it."

"The horses were exhausted, I was exhausted," says Poulin. "We'd driven all the night before, I couldn't get any sleep during the day (at the quarantine station and the airport) and stayed up

most of the night flying over. By the time I got there I was out of it." They arrived on the morning of August 8th, Poulin's 36th birthday.

Unloading and customs were quick and simple and it must have been a relief to see grooms Judith Bean and Nancy Russell, who had flown over ahead, and Douglas Barlou, an English friend of Russell's who had made many of the living arrangements for the group's stay in England.

It should be mentioned that the flight didn't go as smoothly for all U.S.E.T. members. On another flight Sharon Chesson was in the container with her Holsteiners when someone inadvertently turned off the lights. In the process of calming her horses' fright, her hand was injured. Later she competed in all three phases of the championships with a broken knuckle.

By seven that evening the Morgans and crew arrived at Swingletree, not

far from Sandringham. This farm belongs to John Parker, a four-in-hand driver of note, and one of the two show directors of the pair driving championships. Parker was another Englishman who did everything possible to smooth the Morgans' stay abroad. Poulin continued, "We put winter blankets on the horses, it's much cooler over there, put down straw, gave them water and didn't do a thing else. I slept in the next morning. Came back, checked them, walked them around a little bit. No swellings, nothing. We gave them two days off."

Did the horses suffer jet lag? "They were lethargic, very laid back," says Poulin. They didn't want to do anything. Just wanted to lower their heads and sleep, and wake up, and sleep again. It took them a week to get back to normal." But by the time Poulin and the horses moved to Sandringham Park on August 20th, it was "almost as if they were back home and they were

A British Show at Sandringham

The British have the capacity to set up their own community wherever they may be, whether colonists in India, or a group of horsemen moving in to the Queen's park at Sandringham. In the latter instance, the Queen had kindly made her parkland available for the F.E.I. World Pairs Championships, and the concurrent Norwich Union Driving Trials. The facilities consisted of approximately 150 acres of pasture bounded on three sides by heavy trees, lying against part of the wall around Sandringham House. A third of a mile away was a permanent arena with bleachers on one side, set in a large flat field. In addition were miles of driving roads and tracks, partly in the Queen's park and stud farm, partly over neighboring estates.

As first arrivals for the pair championships on August 20th, Larry Pou-

lin, Clarence Russell, and the Morgans saw all the stages of the construction of a British horse event. The Stable Manager was already settled into his trailer at the entrance to the pasture; the Show Manager had done the same over by the arena. The only other evidence of what was to come were strings on sticks dividing a section of the pasture into small lots and tucked under the trees on one side, a triple rank of temporary wood stalls with canvas roofs – 240 in all. Cold running water was laid on by the stalls, and at the end of each row were barrels filled with water, but water with a difference. Drollops of white paint had been added to make sure no one thought to use the "emergency-in-case-of-fire" water for any other purpose.

This peaceful scene didn't last.

Workers unloaded straw and hay bales from flat bed trucks and built rectangular mountains by the Stable Manager's trailer. (Poulin and Russell discovered their war wagon could carry three bales, provided the whip didn't mind perching sideways on the top bale while driving the Morgans back to their stabling.) Day by day the pair championship entries came in, filling the stalls and the pasture around with their trucks, and house trailers. A tent rose up one morning to shelter their driving vehicles. A huge tent sprouted farther out in the pasture and a truck dropped off hundreds of nested chairs; the cafeteria for the competitors and crews.

Closer to the start of the event, the Norwich Union Driving Trials entries began filling up the marked-off areas of the pasture with their trucks and house trailers. What the British don't know about trucks whose sides lift up to become the roofs of stalls, or how to



The Morgan trio was housed in temporary stalls in Sandringham. The horses had an outside row of stalls to avoid some of the commotion when all the pairs arrived.

going better than they've ever gone," Poulin said.

Clarence Russell arrived the 18th, and I got to Sandringham three days later. My first sight of the pair championship stabling was of three long double rows of stout wood stalls with canvas roofs, set beside a line of tall

trees on the edge of a vast meadow. On the other side of the meadow stretched a wall with a gate-house leading into the grounds of the Queen's estate, Sandringham House. All was deserted and quiet. Only the Morgans, Cheston's Appaloosas, and three Swiss pairs were in residence at that time. Being the very first to arrive, Poulin and Russell had chosen the far end of the outside row of stalls for their horses, to avoid some of the congestion and hub-bub when all the pairs had arrived. Also, there was a break in the trees such that those end stalls were the first to get the morning sun (those mornings it wasn't raining). The sunlight was a nice feature in East Anglia, where the wind is ceaseless from the North Sea and the mornings are cold.

The Morgans' crew, the Chestons and their crew, and that of Sharon Chesson stayed in a house Russell had rented in Dersingham, a very small town two miles north of the pair championship stabling. However, Judith Bean, who services Margaret Gardiner had contributed to the venture, spent the nights in a little trailer opposite the stalls. Her bed intentionally faced the stalls so she would hear if the horses had problems in the night. The very first morning Judith discovered she shouldn't raise her head from the pillow until she was ready to get up and start the day. With their heads over the stall doors the

horses could see her and let her know it was breakfast time.

Poulin's training and conditioning program was to ride each horse in the morning, then drive it in the afternoon. The saddle work was "to get the bending, mainly. Driving has a tendency to make the horses flat, to trot very flat, because of the pulling. Then when you ride the horse he's too much on the bit, he's heavy. He doesn't want to use his back." To counteract that Poulin "worked the shoulder in, which creates the impulsion and self carriage, then we work the tow tracks, which gives the collection. (Dressage) riding makes the horse lighter and more balanced," a quality which then carries over to the horse's work in harness.

As an observer, I felt fortunate standing out in the meadow early in the morning watching Poulin work the horses under saddle. The thick high grass was wet, the pheasants

build tidy stabling against the sides of trucks, isn't known.

Over at the arena the Royal Enclosure, the Members' Enclosure, the press tent, the show staff's corral of trailers, appeared. The day before the events began, more tents and trailers lined two sides of the arena, those of shops and charities and service organizations of the Horse Fair.

By opening day what had been a quiet country pasture was now a busy town of horsemen. Horses stabled, people housed and fed. By day an orderly place, everyone going out about their work, as though in their own stable yards. At night, quieter, but lit by the lights in trailers and punctuated by occasional voices and the movements of horses.

It is probable, if it proved necessary, that British show managers and horsemen could set up a credible show on the moon.



(hand reared on the neighboring estates and having a good summer before the fall hunting parties) rustling about in the trees, an occasional squawk. Poulin warmed up Count, or Russel, then put them through their paces, ending with a few passes of their floating, extended trot. Swallows were dipping down behind the horses' hooves to catch bugs disturbed by their passage.

Brandy under saddle was a different matter. Her heart-felt desire was to get down to serious bucking, which Poulin didn't allow. She'd trot out for a bit, then the urge would come over her again and Poulin had to work again. He didn't do the nice dressage things with her that he did each morning with Count and Russel, although with two side reins she was willing to bend. In the past Clarence Russell has shown his bold, elegant, mare in dressage, but her purpose this time was to be the "war horse", as Russell said, in the marathon. My thought,



Clarence Russell and Ken Sypher II hitching Teckla Brandy Time to an exercise cart on loan by show manager, John Parker.

however, was that any warrior riding Brandy would be hard put to find time to fight the enemy.

The afternoon drives would begin with 30 to 40 minutes of dressage work for Count and Russel, but not for Brandy, followed by a hard condition-

ing drive on the roads and tracks in the neighborhood.

After four days of hard work at Sandringham the horses were given Sunday, (August 25th) off, then worked lightly the three days remaining before the Opening Ceremonies. Poulin con-

Who Was Who at Sandringham

TEAM RANKING

First	Switzerland
Second	Germany
Third	Great Britain
Fourth	Austria
Fifth	Holland
Sixth	U.S.A.
Seventh	Poland
Eighth	Italy
Ninth	France
Tenth	Denmark
Eleventh	Sweden
Twelfth	Hungary, Eliminated

INDIVIDUAL RESULTS

1. Meinecke (Ger)
2. Merk (Swiss)
3. DeLeeuw (NL)
4. Rebulard (FR)

5. Gregory (GB)
6. Welde (Austria)
7. Feiner (Austria)
8. Poulin (USA)
9. Brzaskowski (PL)
10. Wodkowski (PO)
11. Eppinger (Ger)
12. Ulrich (Swiss)
13. Pendlebury (GB)
14. Kecskemeti (Hun)
15. Pieper (Ger)
16. Ditzel (NL)
17. Pointl (Austria)
18. Hennings (Ger)
19. Mascheroni (I)
20. Wolfmayr (Austria)
21. Cheston (USA)
22. Vagn Axel (Dk)
23. Hardman (Can)
24. Ruppert (NL)
25. Carminati (I)
26. Smith (GB)
27. Pasotti (I)
28. Willett (GB)
29. Rollans (Australia)
30. Pullen (GB)
31. Roger (GB)
32. Deroide (FR)
33. Bowman (GR)
34. Feher (Hun)
35. Chesson (USA)
36. Bastin (FR)
37. Robson (GB)
38. Ole Buch Jensen (Dk)
39. Zaugg (Swiss)
40. Hillestroem (Sweden)
41. Gustafson (Sweden)
42. Dick (GB)
43. Szabo (Hun)
44. Eigenmann (Swiss)
45. Konieczny (Poland)
46. Kleine (NL)
47. Nyul (Hun)
48. Joensson (Sweden)

Right: Larry Poulin and Clarence Russell bring Count and Russel back after a fast 10 mile drive – this was immediately after their 40 minute dressage work out.



Above: Teckla Brandy Time gets reshod five days before the start of the Pairs Championships.



Left: Clarence Russell drove Teckla Brandy Time in the pasture where the temporary stabling was located, just outside Sandringham House walls. Right: Count, Russel, and Poulin head out for a drive through the pastures.



It's bath time. Nancy Russell and Ken Sypher II give Teckla Brandy Time a refresher after a long hard day in Sandringham.





Prince Philip just after he opened the Championship. The pairs await the start of the grand event.

fessed to a nervousness about the upcoming trials. "We've had some bad luck previously with legs and I'm petrified, paranoid, of something freaky happening. A horse goes out there and he slips. All of a sudden he's got a swollen tendon . . . (this close to the competitions) they will have light work, and that's it."

Until now the emphasis was on the horses. Then, two days before the championships the pressure shifted to polishing the harnesses and vehicles for presentation. Poulin's small crew had been grooming the horses three times daily and washing and oiling the harnesses after each use. Now they added the job of getting the competition harnesses ready: Margaret Gardiner's, loaned for the Opening Ceremonies; New Hampshire Morgan breeder Phil Dubois' harness for Presentation, Dressage, and the Obstacles; and Clarence Russell's Marathon harness.

This is a good spot to introduce the rest of Poulin's crew. Twenty-three-year-old Nancy Russell carries on her father's love of horses and is a professional trainer at his Teckla Farm. Ten years ago she won the Morgan National Saddle Seat Equitation Championship. Ken Sypher, Jr., is a machinist by profession, who has discovered the sport of driving. Two years ago he bought Teckla Brandy Time's dam, Tina, and working under

Russell's guidance, has successfully competed in combined driving events. He and Nancy will be married in October. Ken Syper, Sr. decided to enliven his recent retirement by coming to England and helping out, and Londoners Marie and Douglas Barlow, moved up to Russell's rented house for the duration. A few years ago Douglas had driven for Russell in America.

Cleaning harness was now the pre-occupation throughout the stabling area. A Swiss crew sat in an absorbed circle in front of their stalls, polishing away, occasionally returning a piece to the harness racks standing in the back of their truck. An English crew worked on their harnesses arrayed on blankets spread on the ramp to their

Larry Poulin and Kennebec Count and Kennebec Russel in the Parade of the Nations and Opening Ceremonies.



truck. Up and down the rows of stalls the scene was the same.

Since March, when Poulin and Russell made the decision to show the driving world what Morgans are all about, they had lived and breathed getting ready for the championships. Now, finally, the preparations were over. On August 29 all the entries paraded into the arena and formed a double line before Prince Phillip, who, as President of the F.E.I., formally declared the opening of the championship competition.

Poulin said, referring to people who had been coming in a steady stream to see the Morgans, "Over here people have no idea what Morgans look like. They look at them and say they're small, they're cute." He added "People are going to be looking to see if they can do it, if they can pull the weight, if they can make the times."

And Russell, after speaking of how the Morgan community had rallied around the pair with financial assistance and equipment, said "Now they have to wait to see if we can do it. Can we make it, or can't we? Are Morgans strong enough, or aren't they? Do we have enough talent, or are we just dreaming?"

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Part Two, the conclusion of Ann Munch's story will appear in the December issue of THE MORGAN HORSE magazine.*

