



~ WESTERN ~

# “THAT’S WHAT A

*Breeding, training, promoting and selling working Western Morgans, the Pietenpols’ Mossrose Morgans is our 2015 Ranch Horse Network feature.*

By Laurie Sterling

“Morgans change lives for people; they’re amazing horses.” That is what Jane Pietenpol tells me in the midst of a lengthy discussion, her upper-Midwest inflection

serving to accent her evident sincerity and adding, perhaps, a touch of urgency. Clearly, these amazing horses have changed the lives of Jane and her husband, John, of Mossrose Morgans in River Falls, Wisconsin.

**ABOVE:** Mossrose Top Of The World and John going for a clean run! **INSET (RIGHT PAGE):** John & Jane Pietenpol.



# MORGAN CAN DO™

Breeding foundation Morgan horses, Mossrose is a member of AMHA's Ranch Horse Network, and Jane is on the board of directors of the Cornerstone Morgan Horse Club.

But it wasn't always Morgans for Jane.

After growing up in 4-H on different breeds, it was in 1986 at a clinic that Jane saw a horse that would change her life. "I went to the woman, and I asked her what kind of horse that was because it was so beautiful, and she told me it was an old-style Morgan, and I always remembered that." After college at University of Wisconsin, River Falls, Jane knew she wanted to do more work with horses. Remembering that beautiful horse from the clinic in 1986, she

bought a yearling Morgan, Jacque's Mr Montague (Jacque's Mr. Kid x Reverie's Rose Marie), a colt with Quizkid and Townsend Doubletake breeding. She remembers, "I was so very overwhelmed with how easy he was to train. He tested me a couple of times, but he ended up being part of my team. He was my buddy and just would do anything I wanted to do. And I loved that about him." After training Mr. Montague, who was not only easy, but smart, Jane was sold on him and the Morgan breed. Soon she sought out and bought his mother and his aunt, and she sold all her other horses and acquired some Morgan mares and "bred them to the best stallion I could find at the time."



**ABOVE:** Whipoorwill Newmoon; **INSET:** Jane Pietenpol and Mary Jean Vasiloff at her last versatility event visit, September 12, 2010.

Today, Mossrose is home to 12 Morgans. The farm, in a community of about 15,000 located approximately 30 minutes from the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, is actually two different farms, which is not uncommon in Wisconsin. And Jane stresses that they are a farm, not a ranch, since they are east of the Mississippi. The first farm, of about twenty-two acres, houses the horses along with pastures and dry lots, the horse barn with stalls, a round pen, and a huge roping arena with a crow's nest. Cattle live next to the arena. The Pietenpols host clinics and events here. A nearby 80-acre property, a former dairy farm, houses the cows and the calves in the summer, and the Pietenpols grow and store all of their own hay here as well, allowing them to control its quality and the consistency. This arrangement provides for an idyllic-sounding life for the horse. In the winter they eat from home-grown round bales. In the summer they spend their time turned out in small groups in one of three pastures.

"We don't ranch for a living," Jane emphasizes, another reason why she prefers the appellation "farm" to "ranch." Instead, they keep some cattle and use them to train their horses. It is, says Jane, "more of a serious horse-hobby." This, though, is a hobby

that requires intensive work and hours. Both Jane and John are very involved with the horses when they are not at work, and since they both have full-time jobs, their days start off at 5:30 a.m. with about an hour and a half of chores. After work, their daily schedule varies depending on the time of the year. "We're always riding," she notes. Often they host weekly team sorting practice as well as roping practice, making Mossrose a place to hang out and have fun with horses. All this activity proves to be very good for the young horses who are often saddled and tied out amongst all the activity. The Pietenpols use their Morgans regularly in ranch rodeos, ranch horse versatility, team roping, cattle sorting, mounted shooting, and trail riding.

It is clear that the Mossrose horses get a great deal of exposure and experience in their formative years, and it is clear that their training process is both collaborative and deliberative. Jane starts most of the young horses with John taking on a lot of the finishing work. In addition, John spends time ponying the young horses around the neighborhood and around the fields. Asked about her training philosophy, Jane's reply is well considered: "I call myself a student of the horse. I've spent my life going to various clinics

“That’s What A Morgan Can Do” ≈ WESTERN



**MAIN PHOTO:** Visitor Rob Robillard sorting on Mossrose Top Of The World. **INSETS:** Mossrose Wind-fall cutting practice; Ranch rodeo trailer loading; Mossrose Ysabella; Mossrose Blazin Cross working cattle with voice commands and hand signals; Red Rose Stardancer roping; Rope & Vet, Jane.



Whippoorwill Newmoon daughters and herd matriach, from left to right, Mossrose Dandy Jewel, yearling, Mossrose Blazin Cross, three years old, Whippoorwill Capella, two years old, and Whippoorwill Salus, 27 years old.

and taking private lessons. I have learned from the old draft horse teamsters, the well-respected dressage trainers, the money winning cowhorse trainers, and many in between. My focus is on keeping an open mind, storing up all the tools I find useful in my training toolbox and then applying those tools as needed along the path of training and bringing a horse along under saddle.”

Limiting their breeding to one or two foals a year, the Pietenpols are careful to take things slowly and do things correctly, so that neither horses nor handlers get overwhelmed. The young horses are handled consistently from the time they are babies. For at least the first month of their life they come into a stall at night, and this routine allows for consistent handling. Explaining the role of tie stalls, Jane says, “Later on they get used to a tie stall. I love tie stalls. Mom goes in one side and they learn, ‘Oh, we go in this stall next to her, and it’s okay.’ Then slowly we’ll learn to tie in the tie stall, and that really develops patience.” Afterwards, she likes to take the weanlings and yearlings on walks. When they are two, the horses are saddled and learn some ground work; they are started in long lines in the fall. “And that’s something I can work on in the winter,” Jane notes. “I can drive them up and down the driveway. If they get kind of sassy, I’ll drive them down into the deep snow and [say] ‘okay, now you can come back out again.’ Every year I’m doing a little more with them, and a little more. We might ride them when they’re three-year-olds or four-year-olds. It depends on how the schedule goes.” She notes the seasonal nature of the schedule: “In the summer the young horses mainly are turned out on pasture and we’re working the using horses and riding them a

lot, and then in the winter I can go back to the young ones and do some long-lining with them.”

The finishing process is individualized as well, and it proceeds without specific timelines. “Some of them are more sensitive than others,” Jane explains. “They’ll need more time, they’ll need more ponying. The ponying—on a trail ride or a cooling out ride—that’s excellent for them. Long trotting builds muscles and freshens their minds.” Since the horses grow up alongside the cattle, the Pietenpols have the opportunity to see how they respond to the cows. “If they are really interested and track them, we know they are something that’s probably going to be more cowy that we can use. We like cowy horses.”

When asked why she likes the Morgans for cow work and other working Western disciplines, Jane harkens back to the qualities that first appealed to her in Jacque’s Mr Montaque: “They so want a job and they so want to do things and be your partner. That really led me to the breed—that they want to be your best friend. [They] are so intuitive, and they really want to be with you.” The other Morgan quality she values is their true versatility. For their own purposes, though, the Pietenpols are drawn to the cowy horses who are natural athletes. “The handy horses you can see as babies,” she remarks. “They naturally switch leads; they’re quick and just full of themselves and a little sensitive about things. We like those a lot. They really make a nice competitive-type horse.”

In addition to equine athleticism, the Pietenpols value durability, and this is what they have found in the foundation Morgans they breed. The Mossrose website explains that their first



The same group two years later. Left to right: Mossrose Blazin Cross, five years old, Whippoorwill Capella, four years old, Mossrose Dandy Jewel, three years old, and Whippoorwill Salus, 29 years old.

priorities as breeders are “a sound mind and excellent feet and legs,” and that they are “constantly working toward turning out solid, sturdy horses with a willing disposition, timeless Morgan beauty, and athletic ability.” In the foundation horses she particularly values their durability and their hardiness. Jane notes their sanity and soundness, as well. In their search for these qualities, the Pietenpols found two gold mines, two anchors for their breeding program: Californio and Mary Jean Vasiloff of Whippoorwill Morgans. In the lines of Californio, they found the equine athletes, and in Ms. Vasiloff they found a mentor. Jane recalls, “I was always interested in Western horses and reining type horses . . . Then I met John and he ropes, and he needs a cowy horse, and that led into us looking around more. We went all over the United States looking for horses to try and [trying to] find three good gaits, then cowy, and balanced. . . And I would go back through old magazines and see what was winning, what had been a cutting horse, what lines were known for that, and that’s where we came up with Californio. I saw Mary Jean had a daughter of his, so we went out to see her horses, and it was so amazing to see four generations and see so many horses. We were so taken with that. These horses had won in all sorts of divisions, which is exactly what I’m drawn to. And she had a lot by Whippoorwill Duke, who is by Squire Burger, who was a champion rope horse, and I thought, ‘Wow! This is amazing.’ So we got into those bloodlines.” Jane stresses how important pedigree is to her and to her breeding program: “To just be a good looking horse in a picture isn’t enough. Pedigree is probably what I look at first. I’ve done a lot of studying.” She adds, “Something

I’d recommend to anyone who wants to breed—to get a good mentor.” That adviser was Mary Jean Vasiloff, who played an important role in the refining of what Mossrose is today: “I always had a vision for Mossrose Morgans, but that became more detailed when Mary Jean Vasiloff took me under her wing as my mentor. She taught me the finer details of conformation, way of going, pedigree discernment, and all the points surrounding breeding. She also became a special friend.”

And it was through Mary Jean that Jane and John found their foundation stallion, the winning reiner Whippoorwill Newmoon. By Blackwood Correll, out of Whippoorwill Kathleen (a Whippoorwill Duke daughter), Newmoon, now 27, came to Mossrose by an interesting path. Jane recalls their history: “We went to Universal Morgans in Indiana, and they had Newmoon and Gold Cross Suncatcher at the time, and we liked Newmoon. We had bought a stud colt from Mary Jean, and we had him six years and he had some really lovely babies and he was really built the way we liked, but he wasn’t athletic enough and didn’t have the speed, and just had zero interest in cows. My husband got him started in roping and took him to a roping event, and he was looking the other direction at something else instead of at the cow, and my husband got off and said, ‘Sell that horse.’” Soon after that Ms. Vasiloff asked if they had any interest in leasing Newmoon. Their response: “You bet we do!”

Jane’s tone changes, softens noticeably, when she describes the stallion who has lived with them since that time. Asked about his demeanor, she responds, “Easy, he’s really easy to be around. We always say he is perfect for us. He is perfect for us because of his

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**ABOVE:** Mossrose Top Of The World changing out cattle at a ranch rodeo. **INSETS (LEFT TO RIGHT):** Mossrose Top Of The World and Jane team penning; Mossrose Top Of The World and John gathering cattle; Mossrose Top Of The World cutting practice.

conformation. He has excellent conformation, and he has held up, not been lame, not been sick, and he’s 27 and was a reining horse, so by all rights he could be lame, but he’s not.” His disposition, too, is “very easy. He’s willing to please and he is always going to be considerate of us, and we love that. We love his athletic ability; we love that he is cowy, and we love that he can run around and swap leads, and can trot with suspension and extension, and all the cool stuff you want to see in a dressage horse.”

He passes these traits on to his offspring. “He has not produced a bad horse. They are always quality, very fine quality. You can see the quality in the way they move and they might not all be cow horses, they might not all be dressage-type horses, but they’re all quality in some sort of discipline.” Jane’s descriptors, coupled with her tone, say so much about this horse. “Stunning” and “elegant” are words I hear repeated throughout our conversation: “I think

it’s an elegance, he has an elegance. We have a couple of mares that are coarser. They bring in some cowy lines, and some power and some strength and some ability, but he’ll add some elegance that we really like a lot.”

As she discusses the mares that they have crossed with Newmoon, Jane remembers comments I had made earlier about Red Rose Stardancer (Triple S Bald Eagle x Montana Dancer). She provides an example of the dynamic she has just described: “Stardancer—she’s one of our big horses. She’s big—big, big all over.” Despite her size, though, Stardancer is athletic and quick, and her size gives her power. She’s also sensitive and cowy, “really an amazing horse.” Bred to Newmoon the past two years, she has produced two fillies, Mossrose Gladly Dancer and Mossrose Moondancer. Like their dam, the fillies are athletic, quick, neat horses, who have inherited some of that elegance from their sire.

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Mossrose Top Of The World and John, mounted shooting.



**ABOVE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT):** Mossrose Avalon and owner Susan Cook’s daughter Jill; Mossrose Tanzanite and a of trio kids; Mossrose Dandy Jewel; Mossrose Tanzanite and Carol Martinoli; Mossrose Triumphant champion Morgan at Royal Counties Show in England.

“We always looked for proven, athletic horses,” Jane adds as she discusses their breeding philosophy. “Anybody can breed a pasture full of generic horses,” but Mossrose’s goal is to breed “something special that is going to be competitive. That is important to us. I want to be excited by them.” Again, she repeats what has become a sort of mantra for her; they breed horses who are “sane, sound, athletic and cowy.” To breed such horses the Pietenpols have used mares of Triple S and Whippoorwill breeding, and they always look for mares sired by proven, successful stallions. In addition to Stardancer, Whippoorwill Salus (California x Whippoorwill Pazazz), Mossrose Ysabella (Montana Harvest x Whippoorwill Salus), and Mossrose Fiesta Gold (Whippoorwill Newmoon x Whippoorwill Goldusty, a Triple S Goldust Correll daughter) are good examples of these mares.

As we discuss future plans, Jane adds that they are keeping a son of Newmoon, even though they don’t keep too many of the boys: “I believe in keeping a strong broodmare band and switching out some stallions. I also feel a responsibility to Newmoon to keep a son. We want to stay down in numbers, and we don’t want two or three stallions, and we’ll need something to cross on our Newmoon daughters.” Perhaps they will freeze semen and promote him, or perhaps, she muses, they might have another colt come along that they like even better. In any case, they will fulfill their responsibility to Newmoon.

Such talk of breeding and the future and the need to keep their stock at a manageable number inevitably leads to talk of sales. Most of their sales are generated through their website, and

marketing begins on a general level: “We have the foundation horses, so the foundation, versatile horse is what I tend to market. You want a foundation, versatile Morgan horse; we have got them.” But they also market the individuals. “When I do a video,” Jane explains, “I almost think of it as a movie trailer. . . I make it more to capture the feelings and capture the attention, and from there, if that horse draws you in and you’re interested, I’ll do specific videos . . . but I’ll try to showcase everything about the horse. I’ll hear, ‘Oh, dressage people want this type of horse, one that works off its hind quarters.’ You know, the Western people want that too. We all want an athletic horse that works off its hind quarters—light and athletic. It’s not a one-discipline thing, in my opinion, for a top-level horse.”

When the Pietenpols sell horses, they are also building relationships. “I’ve found out that the horse business is about relationships with people more than anything else,” says Jane. “It’s about the relationship and the people, and most everyone I sell to sends me pictures, sends me letters. If they have a question, they’ll ask me. Almost always [the horses] have a life-long home.” These relationships start early in the process. It is about trying to find the right home, and in order to do this, Jane and John ask lots of questions. “If the people aren’t happy with their horse, then the horse isn’t going to have a happy life, so that’s what I’m trying to find. I ask enough questions of people. I want them both to work out, so we try to be as honest as we can about our horses. Sometimes it takes a little longer, but we find a person eventually.” Mossrose Avalon (Whippoorwill Daybreak x Gold Cross Miss



**ABOVE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT):** Mossrose Opening Verse jumping (Photo © Terry Young); Mossrose Way Cool Correll; Mossrose Blazin Cross and new owner Bill Olson; Whippoorwill Salus and Shauna Vasiloff; John and Red Rose Stardancer ponying Mossrose Avalon.

Flicka) provides an example of the success of this process. Jane describes the eight-year-old gelding as one of the best dressage horses they have produced, and his owners were returning to Mossrose to look at another horse the week that I spoke with Jane.

Jane explains, “We want to propagate the breed and we want to offer quality horses that change lives.” She continues with urgency in her voice: “I really have a passion for the breed, and I’m so worried about it surviving. When I talk to someone and they don’t even know what a Morgan is, it just breaks my heart. What an amazing breed. They are the best breed there is, and people don’t even know about them. How can that be?” The Pietenpols are certainly working to spread the gospel of the Morgan horse, and they have done so internationally. Rosita Hamar of Shropshire, England purchased the buckskin stallion Mossrose Triumphant (Sunup Neptune x Jacque’s Lor-don-lin) in 2003. At the time, Ms. Hamar was the largest breeder of sport horses in England, and Triumphant became an integral part of her breeding program and has offspring in almost every European country. Triumphant sires horses that, in the words of Ms. Hamar, “can jump the moon.” Just this summer, the Pietenpols sold another horse to Europe. In August, Mossrose Windfall (Triple S Chinook x Whippoorwill Salus) arrived at her new home in Hungary, where she will be part of a Morgan breeding program. She will help to perpetuate the breed in a country where there are very few Morgans, but Jane admits to mixed emotions when she thinks about her sale: “It’s neat to do, and yet you are losing the bloodlines here.” Still, she is grateful for the opportunity.

Another avenue of promotion continues on a more local level. Jane also has a passion for photography, and recently Mossrose has played host to some camera clubs, giving them opportunities to photograph the horses and the farm and providing Jane with an opportunity to tell their guests about the Morgan horse and its history. “I’ve always thought the Morgan was a kind of artist’s horse too,” she adds. Soon it becomes clear that these events have an even broader purpose: “It’s so scary to see the older people who say, ‘Oh, my grandparents had a farm.’ And now where are they living? In the big city. It’s about people losing touch with their roots and being aware of animals and getting the chance to be around them.”

Perhaps the greatest efforts at promotion come from the horses themselves as Jane and John compete in ranch rodeos, team sorting, and mounted shooting, events largely populated by stock horse breeds. Jane makes special note of the success that John has had with “Chief,”—Mossrose Top Of The World (Worlds Edge Goldhawk x Carmida Mist), who, among other honors, was named the NMRHA Non-Pro Champion in Ranch Horse Versatility in 2008 and won the NMRHA World Champion Morgan Cowhorse in 2009. Chief is “very competitive,” Jane notes. “You need to have a well-trained, well-presented horse if you’re going to be competitive, to gain respect for the breed. Well, our horse does do that, so we’ve gotten some good compliments and some people who are interested in that.” She continues, “I think our horse outshines other breeds that we run into in terms of their durability. When my husband goes to a ranch rodeo, we’ll have people call us afterwards and say, ‘Do you have any horses for sale? I really like



Mossrose Xtravagance and colt at Krila Morgans in Alberta, Canada.

your gelding.” She then laments, “And we’ll say. . . ‘You know he’s a Morgan, right?’ And they’ll say, ‘Oh, no, sorry.’” The difficulty is multi-dimensional. Morgans, she explains, are more expensive horses, and there aren’t many trained, finished Morgans available. “My husband’s from the Quarter Horse world,” she continues, “and that’s his biggest complaint—there’s not many trained ones for sale. We would love to buy a Morgan rope horse. Well, you’re not going to find one. I think I’ve seen one in 20 years. That part is pretty tough. People like the horses and always think they are beautiful and sensible, but there are not a lot of them competing.” She soon adds, though, that they did recently sell a filly to a woman in Dallas who has Paints and Quarter Horses. “She called and said, ‘I don’t even know what to ask you, but I’d like a Morgan.’”

As it does when she speaks of Newmoon, Jane’s voice softens when the conversation turns to Chief. “He’s unstoppable,” she coos. “He has a story.” Chief embodies all the qualities that the Pietenpols have bred for: endurance, athleticism, and a desire to please. And he seems, indeed, to be “the horse that chooses you,” for he seems to have chosen John and Jane. In 2000 a woman interested in concentrating Bulrush blood contacted the Pietenpols. She was interested in breeding Jane and John’s mare Carmida Mist to Worlds Edge Goldhawk. They reached a lease agreement, and the

mare stayed at Mossrose. In 2001 the mare delivered a chestnut colt. “She told me—quite a bit later—that she wanted a palomino filly,” Jane recalls. “I sent her different letters, and I would never hear from her.” In fact, they never heard from her again, and the Pietenpols took ownership of the little chestnut that they never planned to own. They had some people come and look at him, but they never worked out a sale. John had sold his rope horses a while before and was interested in getting back to roping; Jane suggested that he ride Chief. Their partnership was a great one. Jane recalls, “He just did great things with him. He ended up just being a really neat horse.” Chief, the first Morgan that John had worked, impressed him with his durability and endurance, and Chief became John’s main competition horse. One year at the NMRHA Extravaganza in Nebraska, the cattle got out. John and Chief were “out in the hayfields and cornfields looking for these cattle. And he ended up roping them and dragging them back, and [John remarked], ‘There’s no Quarter Horse that could have held up to that all day long and then come back to find the judge saying, your class is up; you’ve got to get in there and show.’” But Chief was more than up to the challenge. He went into the pen and won a world championship title. Her voice filled with pride, Jane remarks, “But that’s what a Morgan can do.” ■



Three Whippoorwil Newmoon offspring, left to right, Mossrose Fiesta Gold, yearling, Mossrose Golden Ridge, weanling, Mossrose Glady Dancer, weanling.