



During the stadium jumping phase, D'J'J' Ebony Gold was scored on his ability to jump a course of obstacles measuring 3 feet 2 inches. (Photo by Susan Sexton)

Morgans Excel in Stallion Performance Test

by JOY G. PLATZ

IT WAS THE MORNING OF the 1991 100-Day Stallion Performance Test at November Hill Farm in Keswick, Virginia. The breeders and owners of the 15 stallions undergoing the testing program milled about in the farm's lounge, sipping steaming cups of coffee to dull the late November chill. Soon afterward, the riders for the grueling cross-country event and 1,000-meter gallop sauntered in, chatting among themselves about the horses they would ride.

One young horseman was heard questioning a fellow rider about the Morgan stallion he was to pilot over the demanding 4,000-meter course. "Not to worry,"

was the other rider's reply. "Just ride your best, Morgans trust you."

Two years ago, Fox Trim Classic became the first Morgan to be enrolled in the European-style 100-day stallion test, earning the respect of many people involved in European warmblood breeding programs and sport horses. Owned by Drs. Wallace and Christina Jones of Blue Fox Morgans in Sangudo, Alberta, Canada, Classic impressed the November Hill staff with his pleasant disposition and aptitude for the sport horse disciplines. He finished the test with a final overall score of an impressive 91.9. (The passing score for many of the warmblood registries is 70.)

In 1991, two Morgan stallions took part in the program and proved whatever one Morgan can do well, two can do even better.

The stallion that the cross-country course rider asked about was Moorewoods Excalibur, owned by Kenneth Moore and his wife, Gwynn Owens, of Moorewood Morgans in Ruther Glen, Virginia. The elegant ten-year-old dark chestnut stallion had already proved his correct conformation by placing in-hand at the Grand National Morgan Horse Show as a four-year-old. He was then trained as a park horse before Owens started driving him in carriage events and competing with him in dressage



ABOVE: DJJJ Ebony Gold finished fourth overall in the 100-day performance test. BELOW: Moorewoods Excalibur was the oldest and smallest stallion tested, but still finished eleventh overall. (Photos by Susan Sexton)

shows. By Star Studied out of the Funquest Agizon daughter, Funquest Bendy, 'Timothy' (as he is better known) was the oldest and the smallest (15.3 $\frac{3}{4}$ hands) horse in the program.

The other Morgan stallion was DJJJ Ebony Gold, who is owned by Deborah Griffin of D'Gryphon Morgans in Germantown, Maryland. He is by Prince Cobra and out of Rosena Bird by Apollo Bird. Just six years old, Ebony Gold entered the testing program after a season

of training with dressage professional Linda Luster. At just 16 hands, Ebony Gold was the second smallest horse to be tested.

Both Morgans had presented themselves well throughout the previous two days that featured free jumping, basic gaits, dressage horses in training, basic gaits in groups, and stadium jumping—the culmination of three months of intensive training. Judging this phase was a panel of internationally respected

horsemen which included Herr Manfred Lopp, head trainer of the German State Testing Center, and Dr. Ulrich Fritze, German veterinarian and licensed conformation inspector. Guest rider Steve Kanikkeberg, a Grand Prix dressage rider and contender for the 1992 United States dressage team, judged the horses in the rideability phase. United States Olympic show jumping champion Rodney Jenkins scored the free jumping tests.

Now, on the final and determining day, the horses would be evaluated by the way they attacked the fences, their bravery, and their willingness in the cross-country event, and their speed at the final gallop.

Owners and spectators climbed the long hill to the best vantage point at the mid-section of the rolling cross-country course with the ditches, banks, spreads, logs, and water that would be encountered by the stallions as they galloped up and down the hills of the 4,000-meter (2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile) route. Then, pausing only to shorten stirrups, the riders would press their mounts to a 1,000-meter gallop on the oval track at the base of the hill.

Interest in each horse was high. Hanoverians, Dutch warmbloods, and Oldenburgs were represented, and comments were heard on each breed's distinctive characteristics and way of going. Then came Timothy, guided by the rider who was assured Morgans are very trustworthy. The ten-year-old stallion's eyes were alight as the grand horse took each fence in perfect form. Cheers went up as the Morgan's time was announced—he had done the course in the best time of the day.

By now the word "Morgan" could be heard throughout the group on the hill, and when Ebony Gold galloped onto the course, interest was intent. Like Timothy, Ebony Gold took his fences boldly and happily. But it was his speed on the gallop that had the crowd yelling and clapping. The Morgans had topped both of the day's events over all the European warmbloods in contention.

As the spectators wandered back into the indoor arena where the final presentations would be made following the in-

tricate computerized scoring, there was much talk of the bravery and ability of the two "little" horses—the Morgans.

In its early days, the European testing program was a way of establishing a standard for breeding cattle. It was later adapted to rate horses. The warmbloods are graded in two phases—50 percent on conformation and 50 percent on movement, with movement taking precedence over conformation. Every warmblood has different grade levels; the Hanoverians have the steepest tests since there are so many of them. The testing is a system to classify mares and stallions for breeding and performance potential.

Though Morgans are smaller in frame and stature than warmbloods, they have the potential to be ideal horses for any of the classical sports. Gerd Zuther, a 20-year veteran of Germany's stallion testing program and November Hill's manager, feels the Morgans that have taken part in the program are close to the ideal type he looks for in warmblood stallions. Only three stallions, two of them Morgans, were rated in excellent condition at the start of the test. Zuther further stated that Ebony Gold had the cleanest leg structure he had seen in his 20 years of breeding sport horses. The grooms voted the Morgans, of all the horses in the program, the easiest to handle and first in stable manners.

Ebony Gold's owner, Deborah Griffin, feels strongly that Morgans can do as well as warmbloods, especially at the intermediate level. "That is where most of the sport horse riders are, and they want a horse that is sound, is willing, and has a pleasant disposition. Morgans provide all of that . . . and more," she says. "Each stallion's eagerness was obvious to everyone who watched the cross-country and gallop phases of the test. After the horses were back in their stalls, the ones that had their heads out the doors were the Morgans, revelling in the attention given to them."

"Appropriate bloodlines are the key to the Morgan as a sport horse," says Owens. "We are proud that we not only own Timothy, but that we bred him. He

Components of the 100-Day Stallion Test

The 100-Day Stallion Test is given yearly, alternating between California (by the International Sport Horse Registry) and Virginia (through the American Hanoverian Association). The majority of the test is made up of a preliminary training session with the last four days consisting of a final "competition." Each stallion must work through the training session and prove able to progress.

The final, four-day competition consists of five rigorous tests:

1. Rideability: Three riders work the stallion for five minutes each then score him on "rideability."
2. Dressage: The stallion is scored on his performance of First level dressage movements.

validates our breeding program. He has a double cross back to Gypsy King while his sire, Star Studded, is a Congo and Archie O grandson. All these lines are known for their strength, endurance, and soundness."

Ebony Gold was bred by Wistrom Morgan Farm of Sperry, Kansas, a farm noted for its sound, working Morgans. He is heavily line-bred, reflecting nine crosses to Flyhawk and eight crosses to Go Hawk within eight generations. Both lines are noted for size, athletic ability, and soundness.

Scoring for the 100-day stallion performance test is complicated. Horses are rated throughout the three-month period by different riders and trainers on willingness, soundness, athletic ability, and performance. A warmblood stallion must have credentials before his semen can be shipped to Europe, and any score above 70 accredits that stallion. With performance testing, each generation should offer a little more genetically to the breed. It is working for warmbloods as well as for beef and dairy cattle.

A grade is given to each horse's overall performance, then marks are evaluated

3. Free Jumping: The stallion is put through a "jumping shoot" (usually a small crossbar leading into a larger oxer) where he is scored on his ability to jump freely, without a rider on his back.

4. Stadium Jumping: The stallion is shown under saddle and is scored on his ability to jump a course of obstacles measuring 3 feet 2 inches.

5. Endurance: The stallion is required to travel at a rate of 450 meters per minute over a 4,000-meter course consisting of ten obstacles. He is then galloped on a track at top speed for 1,000 meters, during which his strides are counted over a stretch of 100 meters in order to determine his length of stride.

for rideability and jumping. The age of the horse is figured into the overall placing—the older the horse, the more severe the penalty. While this is not a competitive test, results are given in order of each horse's score.

Timothy, in spite of being penalized for his age, received an overall score of 82.22, 80.44 in rideability, and 77.48 in jumping, putting him in eleventh place of the 15 stallions participating in the program.

Ebony Gold finished in an excellent fourth place with an overall score of 106.36, a rideability total of 101.37, and a jumping score of 113.84.

In closing, Zuther remarked, "The Morgan owners, who have no reason except personal ones to have their horses tested as their breed does not demand it, are to be commended. The remarkable outcome was that both stallions completed the test with flying colors, leaving some excellent warmbloods behind."



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