



~ THIS JUST IN ~

# MORGANS REPRESENT USA IN EUROPEAN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

By Stephen Kinney

**A**s big news goes, it arrived with a relatively modest announcement.

Two drivers of Morgan horses have been selected to represent the United States at the Combined Driving World Championship for Singles in Izsak, Hungary, September 24-28.

To put this in perspective, two of three horses competing on behalf of America at a major international competition are Morgans. This is a big deal for our breed!

As Morgan driving authority Jeff Morse states, "In the

equine press the focus has traditionally been on the drivers and riders selected to represent their countries in world equestrian competitions. In 2014, two out of the three horses driven by drivers selected to represent the United States at a World Singles Combined Driving competition are Morgans. This is not the first time the Morgan breed has been this dominant. It's time more emphasis shifts to the horses involved. It's time the world recognizes the Morgan horse is consistently exceptional at this job."

Indeed!

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**ABOVE:** Jacob Arnold and Hotspur's Red Rowl competing in Piber, Austria. (Photo © Madeleine Augustsson)



Donna Crookston and RG Cowboys Black Cadillac. (Photo © Pics of You)

Here's the short version: Jacob Arnold of Snow Camp, North Carolina, will be driving John Merritt and Karen Chandor's Hotspur's Red Rowl (Book's End Trademark x L&A-Knapp Ule Easter Onyx), a 2004 gelding. And Donna Crookston of Saltsburg, Pennsylvania, will be presenting her own RG Cowboys Black Cadillac (Teton Black Beauty x Kahlua's Onyx Star), a 1996 gelding.

**H**idden in this announcement is a Cinderella story. Jacob Arnold has not been the driver of Hotspur's Red Rowl (Rowley) until very recently. And Jacob is a 21-year-old wunderkind of the combined driving world and a current apprentice of top rated four-in-hand reinsman Chester Weber.

Cheryl Pratt-Rivers has been Rowley's longtime trainer and driver. Competing in Europe this summer, however, fate intervened in the form of an accident that sidelined Pratt-Rivers. As she explains "...in the cones, I managed to drive poorly and flipped the carriage over. None of it was the horse's fault. It was me trying to go a lot faster than I needed to. I went too fast and turned too tightly and flipped the carriage over."

Cheryl has been home in the U.S. recovering from a fractured pelvis (as well as a broken ankle sustained while riding a motor scooter). Her prognosis is good, she says and she hopes to be back carriage driving by November.

In the meantime, Cheryl, Rowley's owners John Merritt and Karen Chandor, along with coaches Michael Freund and Thorsten

Zaremowicz and chef d'équipe Chester Weber, made the decision to tap Jacob Arnold to continue the quest toward world championship competition.

"Jacob was in contention and he was in Europe and Thorsten and I came up with a plan to ask Jacob," Cheryl says. "He's very responsible for his age. He's very skilled for his age. Jacob has worked hard to be where he is. I have a lot of respect for him.

"He's getting an opportunity to drive a great horse," she adds.

"It was very selfless of Cheryl to hand over the reins. It cannot be the easiest thing to do, but she has been very, very supportive," comments Jacob.

Jacob, who grew up with Morgans at his parents' farm in North Carolina, accepted the invitation from "team Rowley" and two days later was in a preparatory competition at Piber, Austria (home to the Lipizzaner Stud Farm) where he won—yes won—the marathon portion and finished fourth overall in a group of 30 plus drivers. It was Jacob's first time driving Rowley!

(Jacob's dad, Mike Arnold, adds here that this is the first time in 20 years that an American single has won a marathon at an FEI event in Europe. When it happened last it was with a Morgan driven by Bill Orth.)

Everyone involved gives Rowley high marks in the marathon portion of competition. Says Jacob, "He's definitely a very special horse in the marathon. I've personally never felt anything like this horse. He's very quick and agile at speed and turns, and keeping



Another view of Jacob and Rowley at Piber. (Photo © Sonja Bauer)

balanced and correct in his bend. It's all very automatic."

Cheryl tells the story from another point of view, "A friend of mine was there in Austria and she said that the announcer got excited because Rowley looked to be the smallest horse in the marathon and he started calling him the 'American Morgan Super Schnell' (*schnell* is a German word you use when you want something done quickly). The biggest reason for Rowley to be selected for the American team is his ability in the marathon.

"I drove him in three qualifying events in Florida and he won the marathon in all three of them. He's won, hands down, more obstacles than any other Morgan horse," Cheryl states categorically.

**W**hile Jacob may be a newcomer on the world stage, his teammate Donna Crookston has been there, done that. On the day of this writing she was at JFK Airport getting RG Cowboys Black Cadillac (Cowboy) in a box and loaded on a plane for Hungary. It is her fourth world championship, having competed in Poland in 2008, in Italy in 2010 and in Portugal in 2012.

"I did not want to attend as an individual and elected to stay home this summer. I told them if they needed me for the team I would be delighted to go," Donna remarks. "My horse has been to the worlds three times and we didn't need an individual competition. If we could help the team, that's what I wanted to do."

Donna is clear about the strengths she and Cowboy bring to the competition. "His best phase is the cones, I feel. He's just a super cones horse. He's like driving a Maserati through the cones.

He's what I call very driveable. He's the same in both directions. A lot of horses are one sided. He goes equally well to the left as to the right. He can slow down quickly and make a tight turn."

Given her vast experience, Donna has an interesting perspective on how "America's breed" is perceived in Europe. "I think they're kind of mesmerized by Morgans. They don't understand that they came up from Cavalry breeding. I know when I was in Portugal a group of people specifically looked me up and were very interested in looking at Cowboy. There are Morgans that are better movers than other ones, but I think what impresses them with our Morgans is the stamina that they have. I think when it comes to the vet check and the recovery, it seems like we're driving a much heartier breed. We don't get the high temperatures. Most of the Morgans are very quiet and not temperamental. They don't get up and anxious and nervous."

**A**s *The Morgan Horse* was going to press with the October issue, these breed ambassadors were competing in Hungary against 75 teams from as many as 15 nations.

While this is a big moment for the breed, it is not the Morgan's first volley into European and world championship company. Already the number one carriage driving horse in the United States, this competition gives the breed even more exposure on the international scene.

And, by the way, Cheryl Pratt-Rivers will be in the audience, cheering on the horse she has trained for more than six years. ■