



# Panache

## The Story of Three Morgans Competing and Winning at the World Pairs Driving Championships, Part II

by ANN MUNCH

LARRY POULIN and Clarence Russell, with three Morgan Horses, went to England to test the proposition that a good little horse can do as well as a good big horse at the World Pair Driving Championships at Sandringham. On August 29th the competition was declared open by HRH Prince Philip, and on the following day it began with Presentation and the Dressage test.

Just before it was time for the pair of Morgans, Margaret Gardiner's Kennebec Count and Kennebec Russel, to leave for the Presentation ring, U.S.E.T. member Sharon Chesson's

crew joined Poulin's in swarming over the gear and giving it final polish. As Prince Philip said, on another occasion, Presentation is really a competition of the grooms.

The effort was worth it. Poulin and groom Ken Sypher Jr. were resplendent in livery, loaned by Deirdre Pirie, and the chestnut coats and flaxen manes of Count and Russel glowed. They received only three penalties in Presentation. One gamble paid off. Poulin and Russell hoped that taking Russell's Gentlemen Phaeton, circa 1915 – a smart affair with red wheels and a black box, made by Harry

Hooker of Connecticut, would give them an edge. American horses with an antique American vehicle made them unique.

Poulin's Dressage test was after 5:00 in the afternoon. The evening light was long and golden. Driving events draw more of the general public in England than they do in America, but at that late hour there weren't many spectators. However, the American Morgan fans created a small crowd by themselves. Poulin's Dressage test had none of the little bubbles that marred it at the Chrysler-Myopia driving event in June when he was selected for





the U.S.E.T. His score was a low 39 in Dressage. His combined Presentation and Dressage scores tied him for first place at the end of the first day, with Meineke of the Federal Republic of Germany, the eventual Gold Medal winner, and Welde of Austria.

The first day the combined scores for Presentation and Dressage put the U.S. Team in first place! Poulin had done well in Presentation and the other two team members had done better. Then Poulin's excellent score in Dressage, plus Chesson's tying for 7th place (bad hand and all) put our team over the top.

Commenting on the quality of dressage as represented at Sandringham, Poulin said, "The dressage was a real disappointment, I didn't see any good tests . . . I think in this country we've got them in terms of dressage." Later, the evening of the closing ceremonies, Larry and Michal Poulin were guests, as also was HRH Prince Philip, at a dinner given by the American Carriage Association. Poulin learned in the course of the conversation with a French dressage judge seated at their table, that "One of the reasons I got marked down on dressage was because the working trot was a little quick. I pointed out (to the judge) that it looked that way because of the breed. The breed has a tendency to look as though they are going quicker than they really are because of the way they move. Our horses have to move their joints more (due to shorter legs) than bigger horses going the same speed . . . I don't think (the judge) agreed with me."

Poulin continued, "The thing to do next time . . . is to slow the horses down. You have to think more collected trot, than working trot. When (European judges) say collected, you have to think what they call dancing. More spring, more dance, not so

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*Larry Poulin with Kennebec Count and Kennebec Russel put to Larry Russell's Gentlemen's Phaeton, circa 1915 - American horses with an antique American vehicle. Photo by James Munch.*



quick; that's what they're looking for."

The American Morgan people at the event were concerned about the marathon coming up the next day. 'Accepted' wisdom is that Morgans and other small horses don't have the brute strength to cover the twelve miles of road and tracks, most of it at a fast trot, with the bursts of energy required at the end to successfully negotiate the eight hazards; sixteen miles in all. That kind of work, the thinking goes, is best done by the massive European warmbloods. And it is a fact that although Poulin won the marathon at Myopia, Count and the third Morgan used in the event, Clarence Russell's Teckla Brandy Time, were stressed by the exertion.

Concerns aside, watching pairs negotiate hazards at speed is exciting for

those spectacular sails bothered his horses? "The horses didn't really see the sails. We never saw the sails. We went in so fast – came down and hit that bump. The horses were waiting for a turn, 'Where do I go next!?' They're not watching the sails because they're going so forward so fast. They didn't have time to see them."

Poulin, with Clarence Russell as groom, came in 13th in the marathon, out of 47 entries, a placing which establishes that Morgans are strong enough to do the job. U.S.E.T. member Cheston and his Appaloosas were 18th, and Chesson and her Holsteiners were further down the list. Poulin's individual ranking for Presentation, Dressage and the Marathon was a promising 6th, and the U.S. Team, 5th in the team rankings.



Many hands make light work – the helpers and followers make the necessary polishings and adjustments. Photo by James Munch.

the spectator, and exciting for the competitor running them. Poulin said, "The challenge of going into a hazard is a thrill. Your heart starts pumping. You know there are seven gates (within a particular hazard) and you know you have got to get there as fast as you can. It's a challenge, completely absorbing. Your blood is racing, really racing."

Hazard 7, "Loyd's Leap", required a plunge across a ditch and into a maze marked by brightly colored small boat sails, artfully rigged to flap and crackle in the constant wind. Did Poulin think

We asked Poulin, after he and the horses had returned to the United States, to comment on the marathon. He was critical of himself. "As far as the marathon goes there's a lot of work to be done. We made all our times (on the set distances at set speeds on the road and tracks) except for the walk." Five days prior to the marathon Ken Sypher, Jr. had measured with a wheel one half kilometer along a road. Poulin then pushed Count and Brandy to walk that distance at the required speed of four minutes, sixteen seconds; they failed

by a few seconds. Poulin emphasized, "You cannot give up one penalty anywhere, and on the walk (on the marathon) we got three penalties (for being slow)."

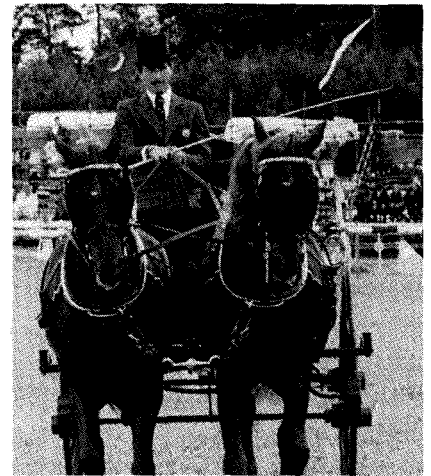
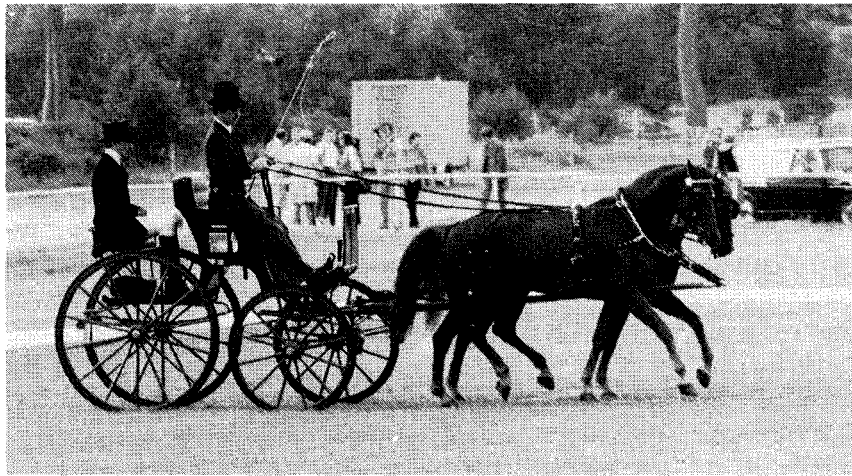
"Then the hazards – the coming in and coming out – that hurt us. We did the gates (within the hazards) as fast as anyone, but getting out was slow . . . It was a matter of the training of the horses. Especially the Hungarians and the Poles. When they told their horses to get out, those horses got out. When I told my horses to get out, they more or less said, 'Ok, I'm trying.' My horses were not thinking, 'Hey, it's time to gallop, it's time to get out of here.' We were weak there."

Poulin feels his greatest handicap was inexperience. "I never thought (the competition) would be as stiff as it was. I thought the competitors would be a little greener . . . They've all competed against each other. They all had a good idea of who was who, who to beat, what to watch out for. When we arrived over there, we had no idea." He added, "I had no idea they would be so quick in the hazards." An essential bit of training knowledge to tuck away for the next time.

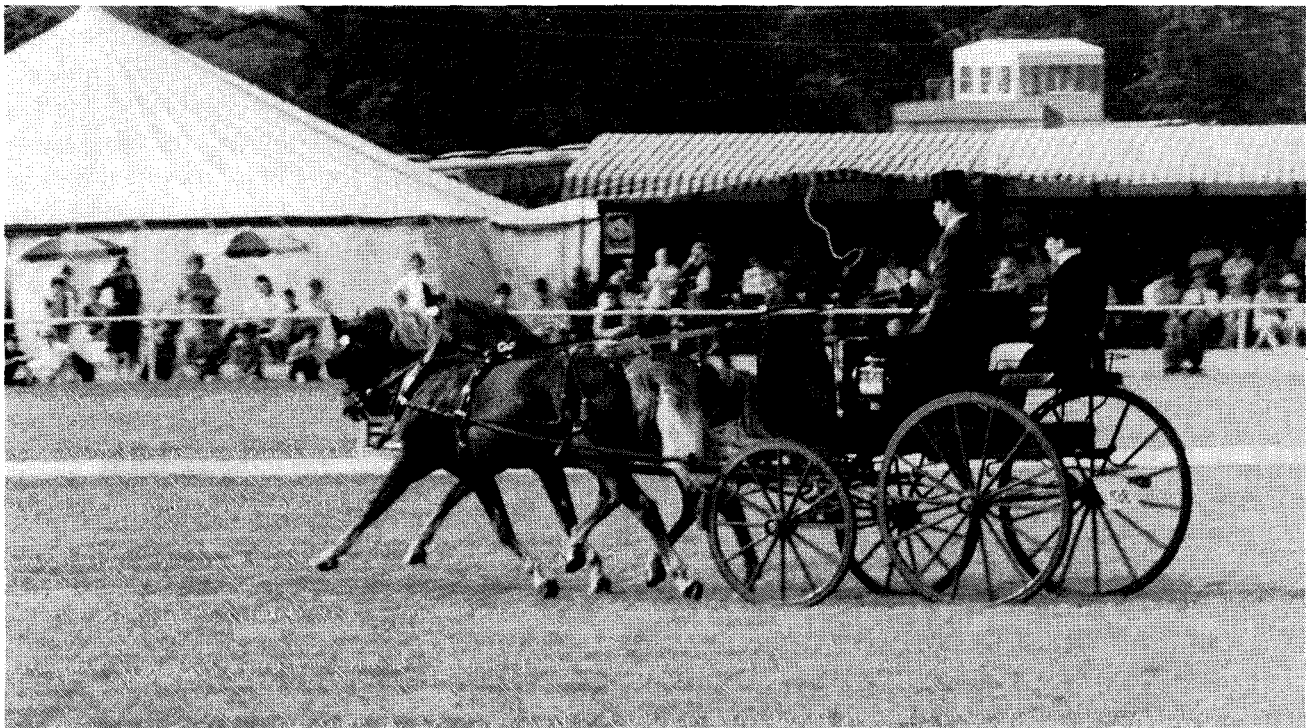
What about the groom in the hazard, what is his role? "The groom plays such an important part, almost as much as the driver. He tells you where to go. You are watching the horses – in a hazard things are smaller, you can't see much, you've got horses jumping around – he makes sure you don't miss any gates. He makes sure your hind wheels get by. He makes sure you're on time. You have to have a good groom."

A good groom can do something else. "Remember the old fire engines and how the guy on the back has to steer? Same thing. Once I got my front wheel around a post. Clarence jumped on the back of the (war wagon) and lifted it over without his getting down. (A groom dismounting incurs penalties.) Like a pogo stick. Boom, and over, he got that wheel over." It should be mentioned here that Poulin was driving an English made competition vehicle loaned by Philip Dubois, a

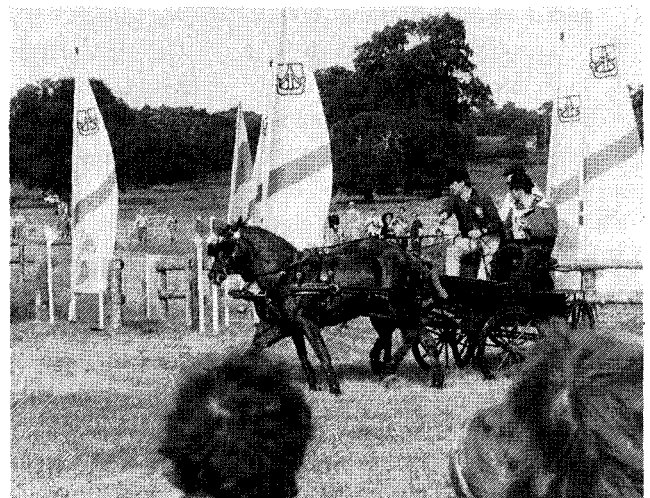




Above, above right and below: The first day combined scores for Presentation and Dressage put the U.S. team in first place. Poulin's excellent score in Dressage, plus Chesson's tying for seventh place put the U.S. team over the top. Photo by James Munch.



Below: "Loyd's Leap" was a hazard requiring a plunge across a ditch and into a maze of small sailboat sails. Photos by James Munch.





narrow, low-slung number that Poulin said was like handling a sports car.

The groom also keeps meticulous timings in his head. As a result Russell and Poulin knew their time on the marathon was slower than they'd hoped. Poulin commented, "When we were coming down to the finish line Clarence said to me, "We've done the best we could. If they beat us, they deserve it. We gave it our best shot." Poulin concluded, "The horses performed super. Count had a super day. He was right there. Usually when he gets tired he canters, but that day he never cantered. The conditioning was there, he was a lot fitter than at

feature story about Poulin and the Morgans for *LIFE* magazine. A flurry of pictures were taken while the crew unharnessed the horses, unwrapped their legs, brought up water for sponging. The horses were sweating, but not exhausted; as soon as he was unharnessed Count lowered his head to check out the grass. The vet was satisfied with their recovery time in the allotted ten minutes.

The led horses started the hike back to the stabling when decorum finally broke down. The crew expressed the relief we all felt at the successful completion of the marathon by pushing the competition vehicle at a run past

Waiting for his turn, late in the day, Poulin and Count and Russel were in the warm-up ring. Prince Philip, an active competitor in four-in-hands, came up in his jeep, jumped out and came over to ask Poulin if those were the Morgan horses? He was interested to know what type they were, their personalities, and if they were like the Morgan horses used in the show ring in England? Poulin, after removing his hat, replied they are the older type of Morgan, like those used by the U.S. Cavalry in the past, and that they are the larger using Morgan rather than the park type. Poulin remarked that the Prince is "super easy. He makes



Above: Clarence Russell, serving as Poulin's groom, relieves a wheel caught on a hazard post. Photo by Michal Poulin. Left: Poulin was driving an English made competition vehicle loaned by Philip DuBois. Poulin said the vehicle handled like a sports car. Photo by James Munch.

Myopia. And Brandy was always there."

Poulin's crew was waiting at the finish line set beneath a spreading shade tree in the Queen's park. So was Michal Poulin and their children, Hana and Orion, and Michal's mother, Pat Morrison, plus the New England cheering section, Hope Jenkin Jones of Connecticut, Ollie Sewall, Arlene Pizzi, ourselves, and Pricilla Gray and Richard Moon from Maine. Publisher Cornelia Bessie was there to arrange a

the walking horses with Poulin in the driver's seat reining imaginary steeds.

September 1st, the day of the last test, the Obstacles, was cold, windy, and just this side of raining. The order of going was determined by the individual cumulative scores; the highest ranking competitor going last. Sharon Chesson drove early in the day and gained 30 penalties for dislodging three balls from the cones marking the obstacles. Cheston made a clean round.

you feel comfortable."

Which reminds me that the day before Dressage my husband was sitting with the Chessons at a harness polishing party when the Prince came walking down the row of stalls, stopping to talk with people. He sat down and chatted a bit with the Chesson group. I heard it was very pleasant. Myself, ever busy collecting all the facts for *THE MORGAN HORSE*, was sitting on a straw bale in Poulin's tack stall rubbing on the chain links





Above: Hazard #8, coming out through the logs after the final gate. Photo by Priscilla Gray. Below: Taking the plunge into a water hazard. Photo by Ann Munch.



Right: Margaret Gardiner rides with Larry Poulin. Photo by James Munch.

decorating Margaret Gardiner's parade harness. I didn't see or hear a thing.

When Poulin, with Ken Sypher, Jr. as groom, did his Obstacle test with Count and Russel, he knocked off one ball, incurring ten penalties. As twelve other pairs had perfect rounds, this moved his individual ranking for the entire championship down to 8th. Cheston's final ranking was 21st, and Chesson 35th. The combined scores of the three American pairs earned the U.S. team the rank of 6th.

Poulin was of course disappointed. You don't go to all that effort if you

don't intend to win. And, after the marathon, a team medal had looked possible. Looking at it realistically, however, it is a tremendous achievement that in our first venture abroad with pairs, all three team members completed the competition. If anyone thinks that's easy, consider that the entire team from Hungary, a nation that specializes in competitive driving, was eliminated from the championships. And as far as Poulin's team is concerned, Morgan people can take real pride in the fact that the first-time Morgans competed in international driving, they came in 8th against the best in the world.

Describing how he felt after the Obstacle test Poulin said, "I was glad it was over. The horses were sound, they were fine. That was the main thing." It wasn't quite over, of course. There was the final parade of all the competitors into the arena for the prize giving. As Poulin drove around the arena with his teammates, he and his passenger, Margaret Gardiner, perhaps were reflecting on their joint accomplishment – a feat to be proud of.

Prince Philip, in his closing remarks said, "This concludes the first Pair Driving Championships, and I'm sure it won't be the last." And we can be just as sure that this is only the beginning of Morgans competing in the world of international driving. 