

Morgan Dressage association

Dedicated to promoting and supporting Morgan Horses in Dressage.



GRAND PRIX MORGANS— BIG BEND DOC DAVIS AND MONA SANSOUCY- GAUDET : THEY WERE THE FIRST

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By Marthe Reynolds

(Editor's note: With the passing of the years, it is sometimes difficult to remember those who forged the trail that the rest of us try to follow. Big Bend Doc Davis and Mona Sansoucy-Gaudet competed in a time when the dressage world did not look so kindly on the non-traditional breeds such as Morgans—but Mona and Davey excelled in the sport despite the bias. Theirs was a partnership that was unique and proved that Morgans could (and still do) have the ability to be competitive at the highest levels of dressage. The future will certainly give us other Morgans that reach the top level of Grand Prix, but Mona and Davey will always be the first.)



Big Bend Doc Davis and Mona Sansoucy-Gaudet

MR: Hi, Mona, it's so good to finally talk to you. I've been a fan and this interview is just my ruse to speak with you!

MG: (laughs).

MR: Is your name French, or French Canadian?


MG: It is French Canadian, actually.

MR: Ok, let's jump in. When did you actually purchase Big Bend Doc Davis? How old was he? What was he like as a youngster?

MG: My family bought him in the spring of 1975. Davey was a weanling; he'd been weaned at four months. Connie Barton was the owner of Big Bend Farm. Davey was the second offspring of her mare Big Bend Connie F that was sired by Green Mt. Doc Bird. The first foal had to be euthanized. I was a Junior in

(continued on Page 2)

News and Reminders:

- Check out [Page 12](#) for **new Classified** listings—they are growing!
- Find us on Facebook! 
- It is **past time to renew your MDA Membership** for 2012—but never too late! Be sure and fill out the application on [Page 14](#) and mail it in **today!**
- Want to keep dressage in our breed shows? Show the show managers and organizers you support your sport either as a competitor or a spectator ([Page 11](#)).
- MDA saddle patches, magnets and key chains are still available. See [Page 6](#) for more information.

Inside this issue:

Grand Prix Morgans—Big Bend Doc Davis	1
MDA Member Spotlight	4
Cross-training the Dressage Horse	5
Work In-Hand	7
Shows and Events	11
Classifieds	12

Big Bend Doc Davis *(continued from Page 1)*

High School at the time in Thompson, CT. I had never seen a Morgan move like Davey. I thought immediately, "What a great dressage horse!" But I did not even know what dressage was. It was just a thought that popped into my mind! He floated across the pasture in perfect balance.

Davey was good-tempered, which is why he remained a stallion. His sire was exactly the same temperament.

We learned dressage together. I first rode him saddle seat until Davey was a four-year-old. We won everything, but I became bored with the discipline and knew we needed to do something else. I had ridden Davey's sire (Green Mt. Doc Bird) in lower-level dressage tests at the New England show, then called the Eastern National in Northampton. I thought we were doing dressage!

I contacted Lee Ferguson of Broadwall Farms, owner of Parade (invited with his son Broadwall Drum Major to tour with the Lipizzan Stallions in 1964) at the end of Davey's fourth year. I had borrowed Lee's tack for dressage classes in the past when I rode Doc Bird at the Eastern National. I called Lee to come see Davey; Lee was amazed by him and confirmed my instinct that Davey had great potential as a dressage horse. She invited me to a meeting of the Rhode Island Dressage Association to watch her films of German dressage riders. When I saw the films I knew that that this sport, dressage, was our calling.

MR: Who did you ride with, back when dressage was just beginning in the U.S.?

MG: Davey and I began training with Dr. H.L.M. Van Schaik in December of 1979. Dr. Van Schaik loved Davey, told me I would never have another horse like him, and said I had best learn how to ride him! We only worked together two or three times per year, so most of our dressage training was done on my own.

Lee Ferguson of Broadwall Farms was my mentor; she arranged for me to accompany her first to England, and then to Germany, to ride dressage over there. She made it possible for me to do; I think she was living vicariously through me. I went to Europe to educate myself. When I was riding saddle seat,

I thought I was a good rider. Dressage presented me with a brand new set of challenges.

Michael Poulin, Lee Ferguson, Volker Brommann were some of my instructors. Brommann liked Davey, but the horse was "still a Morgan."

MR: How did riding in England, and then in Germany, compared to riding dressage in the U.S. in the 80's?

MG: I spent three hours a day in Germany on the lunge without either reins or stirrups! I learned to use my seat aids, and not my hands, to control their big horses. It provided me with a level of education that was just not available in the U.S.

MR: What was Davey's personality like? What upper level movements were his fortes? What movements, if any, gave him his biggest challenge?

MG: I loved competing, so did Davey. He was a ham! He was silly in the warm-up, but once we went through the gate he was totally focused. His canter was decent, but we had to work at it. Changes were the most difficult to teach and learn. Both of us were quick studies, so when we were able to get outside help in the early 80's we learned fast.

"He does everything, but he does it like a Morgan." I got those comments when showing, but I worked on Davey's scope in his movement to make it competitive with the larger horses we competed against.

MR: What were your thoughts that day in 1988 when you placed second and fourth in the Grand Prix Kur at the New England Dressage Association (NEDA) Freestyle Classic? Did you realize you had trained the first Morgan to compete in Open Competition at Grand Prix?

MG: I wanted to train him to Grand Prix; whether he was the first Morgan to get there never really occurred to me. The announcer came on and said Davey was the only American-bred horse at the show. That was when I first realized what we were about to do. (Writer's note: Davey performed the Grand Prix Kur with an injured suspensory ligament. Unbeknownst to Mona, the ligament was damaged during their warm-up, but even injured Davey and Mona still took home second place. Davey was retired from competition after the Freestyle Classic at NEDA in 1988.)

(continued on Page 3)

Big Bend Doc Davis *(continued from Page 2)*

MR: How is dressage different today in the U.S. compared to dressage in the early 80's? Has it gotten more technically proficient, closer to the classical 'ideal', or have we moved farther away?

MG: The quality of the horses is incomparable, and many more people are riding dressage. There are a lot more good riders here now, but still very few 'great' riders. Instructor-wise, there are people who should not be teaching (here in the U.S.). Instructors who ride First or Second Level are teaching others Training Level, at best. The USDF has tried to implement a certification training program for instructors, but people need to educate themselves. If you don't know, don't fake it. Say you don't know and go find out the answers. If you don't know how to ride, you can't teach. If you can't take instruction, you shouldn't be riding. If you think you know how to ride, get on another horse and see what you don't know! Look at every opportunity on the back of a horse as an opportunity to learn something.

MR: What, if any, impediments remain to riding Morgans in dressage in Open competition? Is it in the Morgan physicality? Judge bias? Or are we on a level plane with Warmbloods?

MG: A good moving, well-trained horse should put you on an equal playing field with the Warmbloods. Some Morgans do have physical impediments, like any other breed. Fortunately there are those folks out there who have made great strides in breeding 'Sport-type' Morgans. I don't know about judge bias since I am no longer competing. However, it is my hope that those who are out there judging today are more educated and open-minded than judges of 20 years ago.

MR: With whom would you like to, or have liked to, train?

MG: Dr. Reiner Klimke; I've always idolized him. Herbert Rehbein; he and his wife owned Donnerhall. I love watching horses that love their work. It is a gifted rider/trainer that allows the horse to enjoy his work.

MR: Who are, or have been, some of your dressage students, either human or equine?

MG: My current clients don't compete; they ride dressage to become better riders and improve their relationship and effectiveness with their horses.

MR: Which of Davey's offspring have you had the opportunity to train?

MG: Over the years I've owned quite a few offspring of Davey's, none as good as Davey. I don't own a horse at this point, for the first time in my life!

Uncommon Valor (Big Bend Doc Davis x RTF Norma Jean), Davey's youngest remaining son, was my last horse; the last connection to Davey and to my family. I've had him since he was born. I gave him away just two months ago. His dam I co-owned for a short period with Beth Benard of Canequin Morgans. She has the mare now.



MR: Is there a Morgan today, competing in dressage or on the ground, that could lure you back into showing? If so, which one?

MG: Davey had talent and heart; with his blown out suspensory he continued the NEDA Freestyle and we placed second. We had a very special bond. I could 'think' our half-passes in tests. I had a premonition of his final colic the day before it happened. He is a pretty hard act to follow.

I did ride another Morgan stallion, Far Wells Brooks, who was 16 hands. I rode him to Third Level and sold him. That was the worst mistake of my life! I have half-heartedly tried to find another Morgan over the years, one that would inspire me again. I never found that horse, unfortunately. My life is undergoing big changes now...we'll see where I land and what the future presents to me!

MR: Well, thanks so much, Mona, for talking with the Morgan Dressage Association. I know you are on Facebook, and the MDA will be happy to know that you are available for clinics and as an instructor. It has been wonderful getting to know you in this way.

MG: Thank you, and goodbye!