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Paradise Morgans

By Felice Vincelette

Longtime Morgan horse breeders Chris and Janet Morris moved their operation, Paradise Morgans, from Massachusetts to Kentucky in 2003. When their Morgan mare, *Pastorale*, was stricken with a terminal disease, they relocated to take advantage of the superior resources in the Lexington area for intensive horse care, which they exalt as among the best in the world.

For the Morrises, the decision to move from suburban Boston to the Bluegrass was an easy one. As Chris recalls: "Our senior stallion, *UVM Springfield*, was already standing in Kentucky, and his average sperm count, already prodigious, had doubled after he arrived in the Bluegrass. Whether it's the grass, the water, or something else about the area, it was clear to us that Kentucky agreed with our Morgans. *Pastorale* lived until 2005, producing an embryo foal before she died, and is buried on our farm."

In an interview with *EQUINE INTERNATIONAL* breeds columnist Felice Vincelette, Chris and Janet Morris shared their experiences breeding Morgans:

Q: What are the main features of your Morgan breeding and training operation in Kentucky?

A: For Paradise Morgans, we initially bought an existing 173-acre farm with 22 stalls and 13 paddocks with 100 of the acres under four-board fence, the rest in meadow and hay, on a dead-end road in Versailles [a suburb of Lexington], one of the most peaceful and beautiful areas of the

Bluegrass. As our goals sharpened, we added the Paradise Equine treatment center, focusing on extensive care and services. We then added a group of Thoroughbred mares to our breeding program, while keeping the Morgan breeding program separate.

Paradise Equine, a logical extension of our interests in optimizing horse breeding, reproductive and recuperative care, required reconfiguring the farm, adding a 20-stall barn and treatment center. Both entities co-exist and interoperate seamlessly, depending on horse needs. We recently leased an annex with an additional 28 stalls on 55 acres, including a number of small colt and stallion paddocks, and a training barn with 30 stalls.

Q: Please describe your current Morgan roster.

A: Although the Paradise Morgan population fluctuates due to sales and foaling, we usually stand five to nine stallions, of which six are currently farm-owned, and manage a broodmare band of 15 to 25 mares, of which a dozen are our own and the others client mares. Our stallion roster

Banner on the Breeds

features our 22-year-old senior stallion and performance horse sire, UVM Springfield, and a number of his champion sport and show horse get.

Our roster for 2009 includes sport horse stallions such as multi-regional champion reiner Nantucket, green reining champions Privilege and Springfield Rifle, and show horse sires such as Summity, multi-titled World Champion Park Saddle and Harness stallion Spiceolife Present Tense, and multi-titled World Champion Arboria Noble Victor.

This means, of course, that sucklings, weanlings, yearlings and horses of training age are always part of our picture. We offer the "Paradise Select" program, where a client who wants to breed a Morgan can contract for a mating of one of the on-farm mares to an on-farm stallion, and take home the resulting foal when it is weaned. This allows someone to obtain rare and costly bloodlines, to create a "designer" or "bespoke" foal, commanding mating combinations of some of our finest world champions without having to own those horses or be responsible for the mare's prenatal care.

Normally the horse population of all three farms will total between 60 and 85 horses, not counting layups. Our reining horse prospects are trained by Sande Performance Horses in Warren, Oregon, so there may be six or seven reiners out with Doug Sande at any given time.

Q: In which disciplines that will be part of the Alltech Games do your Morgans and their offspring compete?

A: Our Morgan sires have foals all over the country and across the competition spectrum. Most relevant to the Alltech Games, and our personal passion, are our reining horses. Although Paradise-bred sporthorses compete in disciplines such as CDE, hunter and dressage (for instance Monarchos, owned by Linda Hampson of New Hampshire, who won the Maine Morgan 2008 Sport Horse Cup), breeding Morgan reining horses is one of our main breeding and training focuses. Our champion reiners, trained by National Reining Horse Association judge and competitor Doug Sande, include Nantucket and Spring Diva (both of

whom have numerous junior and open reining titles) and Privilege (a green reining champion). Spring Diva is also a Morgan Grand National Champion four-year-old snaffle bit/hackamore reiner.

Q: What are your sporthorse breeding goals?

A: Because the Morgan was the only horse ever bred by the U.S. government and therefore was bred to a government specification, we choose breeding stock for our Morgan reining program that is very close to the old U.S. specification for the fearless and sturdy cavalry and police mount that had to do everything from war fighting to dressage. Since Morgan blood is foundation blood for the American Quarter Horse, as well as for the American Standardbred and all derivatives, we don't crossbreed our Morgans. The crossbreeding of Morgans has already resulted in transferring Morgan agility, intelligence, stamina, and soundness to nearly every American breed. For example, when the King Ranch began breeding the American Quarter Horse, they bought 200 Morgan mares from the U.S. Government Horse Farm to do it.

Although we allow our stallions to breed mares of different breeds, when mare owners want more agility, fearlessness and strength, we emphasize breeding pure Morgan reining and dressage prospects. Since reining and dressage training goals are so similar, trainers who come to us for prospects want many similar characteristics. Size is often the differentiating factor (smaller for reining, larger for dressage). Distance from the hock to the ground is important, as is a short cannon bone which is the same length in front as it is in back. But in general our goal is to breed a Morgan at whom anyone can look and recognize universally accepted criteria for athleticism and beauty.

For more information: 859-879-6108

A crop of 2009 foals relaxing at Paradise Morgans in Kentucky. Facing page, trainer Doug Sande puts Morgan reiner Nantucket through his paces. (Chris Morris photos)

