

Morgan Dressage association

Dedicated to promoting and supporting Morgan Horses in Dressage.



AN INTERESTING JOURNEY TO THE USDF BRONZE MEDAL

By Birgit Villeminey

Growing up in Europe I only rode Warmbloods, but when I was introduced to the first Morgans in Germany I knew that was what I wanted. Not long after my first encounter with the breed, my husband Jean-Paul, got a job offer in the Detroit area and we moved to the United States. “Crissy”, a green three-year-old mare, came into my life two months later. She was a present for our first anniversary. Her kindness, willing attitude, and trainability sold me completely on Morgans.



On the way to a Bronze—Sunup Nightshade (“Saumur”)

When it was clear that I had to retire Crissy due to severe OA/ringbone, I started looking for another Morgan Sport Horse prospect. Unfortunately, at the time it was pretty slim pickings – most of the Morgans in our area were either Park or Western horses. And yes, it had to be a Morgan. So, when I saw the ad for a 16-hand gelding “with sport horse potential” we checked him out immediately.

The first time I looked into Sunup Nightshade (Saumur’s) eyes, I saw something that touched me. Yes, it sounds a bit cheesy, but it’s the truth. And when I got on him, I immediately felt as if I belonged. Never mind that he jigged, was hard to steer, came with a huge bit, and emphatic warnings about not riding him out alone. I learned that he had been sent to several professional trainers and even twice to the Amish, but as that didn’t work the owners decided that Saumur had to be a Sport Horse (I found out later that he, Saumur, was labeled “not-trainable” and “dangerous”)! It didn’t matter – my mind was made up. Although, when he was delivered by his previous owners with two chains over his nose and a person on each side of him I should have gotten a clue.

Once settled in at our place, I discovered that Saumur spooked easily, and could turn on a dime and bolt at almost the same time. At that time, I was

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News and Reminders:

- *If you haven’t done so, visit the MDA’s new and improved website! And tell your friends about it too!*
- *The MDA Classifieds are back—see Page 14 for that special “something” or “someone” you just can’t live without!*
- *Find us on Facebook!* 
- *Don’t forget you can get your newsletter the “green” way via email. Saves stamps, paper and you get your newsletter faster! Just contact one of the newsletter committee to sign up.*

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Spotlight on the Members



Diamonds HW Statesman and Kerry Farwell

*Teddy (Diamonds HW Statesman; Chief of State x Statesmans Woodlark) was purchased as a coming 4-year-old from Lynne Shpak as a dressage prospect and for my 60th birthday. As **Teddy** and I progressed in dressage I asked event trainer, Alison Eastman Lawler, to teach him to jump for a change of pace. He loved to jump, proving to be brave and bold. After some cross country schooling Alison took him to a local horse trial and won! Then sanctioned events here in New England where he won and placed. Last spring my 15-year-old granddaughter, Haley, decided it was time to retire her 24-year-old Morgan mare from competition and brought **Teddy** back to eventing. Their schedule began with 2 first places at Beginner Novice, a move up to Novice placing second, seventh and getting two more wins for the season. Haley and **Teddy** developed a great partnership— he with his brave and enthusiastic jumping—she guiding him through relaxed, round and accurate dressage tests, usually scoring in the mid 20's. At year's end our Morgan qualified for the USEA Championships in the company of the Big Boys! We are so proud of them both.*

Mom—Kerry Farwell; Grandma—Mary Anne Lanning

I came to dressage almost accidentally, as perhaps other Morgan owners do.

*My daughter showed hunter/western through her teenage years and when she left the nest it was my turn to learn to ride. I bought **SGP Raizin Kane** as a western prospect, but he was far more a dressage prospect. He began his training with Lynne Salewski and I began my passion for dressage riding. While we both may have found our niche in dressage, **Raizin** loves the show arena and I have chronic stage fright. I thoroughly enjoy watching him be shown and Lynne does a great job. He was Morgan Open World Champion at Training and First Level and is now showing at Third Level while patiently teaching me at home.*



Dextrous Super Supreme and Chris Lange

*Morgans are a definite weakness for me, and I have acquired several more. Like children, each is unique and much loved. **Dextrous Super Supreme**, aka **Dex**, is my partner that I ride almost every day and lesson with as much as possible. We are a First Level pair and have a great time. My up-and-comer is **Ensbrook Seize the Day**, who, as with **Raizin**, is in training with Lynne. We clinic with Henrik Johansen and locally I'm a great fan of lessons with Sue Connors who is mentored by James Shaw (Tai Chi for Riding). I am thrilled to have this passion in my life and hope to never stop learning.*

*Looking for something to visit over the fence about? Have an interesting story you want to share?
A little (or big) brag? Well here is your chance!*

Send us a short (two or three paragraphs) tale about your self and your Morgan horse (with a picture, of course!) and we will be happy to share your story with the rest of the MDA Membership on our "Spotlight on the Members" page. Come on, don't be shy...we would love to hear from you!

Send your story and photos to sally@montanasky.us



Straight from the Horse's Mouth—The Art and Science of Bits and Biting

By Bernadette Stang

At the simplest level, a bit is designed to transmit communication of the rider's wishes to the horse through the reins. The basic principle is one of training to pressure and release; the horse learns to respond to a change in pressure from the bit and the release of that pressure with the correct response.

Most bits are categorized as either snaffles or leverage bits. Snaffle bits, whether a jointed or solid mouthpiece, are considered a "direct pull" bit as it allows a direct signal from the rider's hands to the horse's mouth. In general, loose ring snaffles provide maximum signal from the rider's hands to the bit as the rings rotate slightly in response to increased rein pressure. A leverage bit, such a curb, gives a mechanical advantage to the rider through shanks (the part of the bit below the mouthpiece). The ratio of the length of the shanks below the mouthpiece to the length of the shanks above the mouthpiece (sometimes called the "purchase") determines the severity of the leverage bit. Therefore, a bit with 4 ½ inch shanks and 1 ½ inch purchase would have a 3:1 ratio; where every one pound pressure on the reins translates to three pounds pressure at the bit. In both bit types, the smaller the diameter of a bit, the more severe it is to the horse's mouth.

A bit is designed to lie across the bars of the mouth, in the lower interdental space (between the canine tooth and the edge of the premolar) and across the tongue. The size and

shape of a horse's oral cavity is very individual, and strongly affects how the bit will work. Research has shown that the height of a horse or the size of the head is not an accurate method to determine the size of its mouth in relation to correct fitting of a bit. In addition, as a horse ages the slope and condition of his teeth change and therefore an older horse may have less room for a bit than a younger horse, or need his bit changed as he grows older and his mouth changes.

When a horse accepts a bit, he relaxes his tongue allowing the bit to sink into the tongue and therefore not push into the sensitive hard pallet (roof of the mouth). Al-

Want to see the bit in action? Videos are available at: <http://cvm.msu.edu/research/research-centers/mcphail-equine-performance-center/publications/usdf-connection-1>

(scroll down to "May 2006 - Biting Actions and Reactions Part 2 of a Study on the Science of Biting--video clips)

though bits and bridles can exert pressure on a variety of points in the horse's mouth, the most sensitive and responsive parts are the tongue and hard palate. However, depending upon the bit and/or bridle used and the skill of the rider, the bars of the mouth, lips and chin may also be involved. Under the most desirable of circumstances, these pressure points are used secondarily to weight, seat and leg aids in subtle communication with the horse. In the worst case sce-

nario, harsh bits and misuse can result in severe tongue injuries and trauma to the bars of the horse's mouth, lips and palate.

One misconception is that the higher the port of a bit (the inverted u-bend in the mouthpiece) the more severe the action of the bit. In reality, a port needs to be at least 2 inches or more to be high enough to come in contact with the hard pallet. So in actual practice, a higher port helps to avoid injury to the tongue as it allows for less bit pressure on the tongue. In comparison, a straight, solid mouthpiece can potentially cause more damage to the tongue, which takes the brunt of the force of the bit.

The effect of single-jointed bits has often been attributed to interaction with the hard pallet as well, as it has been assumed that a "nutcracker-like" action causes the joint of the bit to be pushed up into contact with the roof of the mouth when pressure is applied to the reins. However, studies have shown that the indentation of the bit into the relaxed tongue in response to bit pressure can largely offset this effect as the mouthpiece tends to press more deeply into the tongue causing the joint to actually move away from the palate. The use of an extra link in a snaffle tends to transfer pressure from the bars of the mouth to the tongue (Figures 1 and 2) and as the length of the central link increase, the effect on the tongue increases.

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Trainer's Tips

By Sally Anderson

In "Trainer's Tips" we will have three Morgan trainers give the reader different techniques on how to introduce a movement to a young horse, discuss problems that might happen when you execute the movement, and then give you helpful tips on how to fix the problem.



The three trainers that we will be highlighting this issue are:

- **Dee Loveless** – Dee is an USDF Silver Medalist and an "R" dressage judge. She trains out of Whippet Run Farm, and her current Morgan mount is PVF Power Factor.
- **Debra M'Gonigle** – Debra trains at Mohawk Farms and was the USDF All Breeds Fourth Level winner with her Morgan, Forsite Zephyr. Her other Morgan, Forsite Rhythm and Blues, came in second place at Prix St. Georges .
- **Sally Anderson** – Sally is an USDF Gold Medalist and trains at EMR Morgan Farm. She is currently not showing, but has high hopes for her up and coming Morgan, Flower of Alliance.



These three trainers will be discussing the in's and out's of leg yields.

1. When should you introduce leg yields to your horse?

M'Gonigle: "We start teaching the touch hand or whip and voice aids to our young horses as soon as we begin handling them as foals. Gently touching/pushing the belly to move them over, side to side."

Loveless: "As soon as the horse has mastered walk/trot/canter quietly"

Anderson: "The leg yield can be introduced from the ground on a three-year-old as soon as they have accepted the saddle and bit. From the ground, walk beside the horse, keeping the outside rein taut, while the other hand keeps the bend, and at the same time bump the horse's side at the girth."

2. What are some common problems that occur when teaching a

horse and/or rider how to do a leg yield and how do you fix them?

M'Gonigle: "Mostly as over-reaction to the requests/aids when a horse begins. But as my mentor, friend and teacher, Karl Mikoka, who rode and trained at the Spanish Riding School, always said 'Better a reaction of any kind to an aid/request than no reaction at all'. You can always reward a horse and lighten up your requests during and after you analyze the horse's response. However, a horse with a little or no desire to comply is more difficult to teach because it learns that you will become harder or more aggressive to the desired response, and then the horse is teaching you."

Loveless: "In the process of learning the leg yield the trainer may find that the horse: resists the rein aids by lifting its head, tilting head,

stiffening in neck/jaw; moves its shoulders over, but the haunches lag behind; stops going forward. In each case you should just go a few steps straight forward, fix the problem and then resume asking for the leg yield."

Anderson: "The two main problems that I see in teaching both horses and riders leg yields are having the horse slow down or the trail the haunches. The solution for these problems is having the horse straighten and move forward with impulsion before asking again for the leg yield."

3. How do leg yields benefit a horse?

M'Gonigle: "Where does it end? The answer to this question would be all the time, in everything you

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(Membership year runs January 1 - December 31)

2011

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Questions? e-mail: members@morgandressage.org.