

EQUINE AND CANINE NEWS

YOUR LOCAL CONNECTION TO EVERYTHING EQUINE AND CANINE



WINTER 2012

FEATURES · EVENT CALENDAR · LOCAL ADVERTISERS
CLASSIFIEDS · REAL ESTATE



RUSSELL MORGAN

By: Lucy Walker Grace

Each morning, when Russell Morgan boarded the bus for school, he made sure to sit on the left-hand side. In the afternoon, on the way home, he chose the right-hand side. Occasionally, he had to sit up front, by the driver, but only when he got into a scrape.

The reason he did this was simple. Morgan wanted to see the horses at the stable they passed each day and his seat choice gave him the best possible view.

His parents had no idea of his budding passion until one day, during a doctor visit (usually a highly traumatic event) the doctor suggested Morgan's mother get him riding lessons. The youngster was ambidextrous, and could not seem

to choose which hand he wanted to use for writing and other activities. He was also unusually active and the doctor thought learning to ride might help him choose a hand and learn to focus all that energy. Suddenly, a visit to the doctor turned into something wonderful. Morgan excitedly began to tell his mother he knew just where he could take riding lessons - he even knew the phone number, which was displayed prominently on a sign in front of the establishment. No doubt, the doctor was pleased that his suggestion was received with such enthusiasm and while Morgan's mother was a little surprised at her son's previously unknown passion, she arranged for him to take his first lesson. For Morgan, at least, that first ride was a huge success. He was put on a horse and given the most basic of instructions: how to make the animal go forward, how to stop, and how to steer.

Morgan happily gave the horse a kick and his mount immediately ran off. The fearless little boy was delighted. He'd never had so much fun in his whole life.

Those first lessons took place in



Russell Morgan on Boccacio owned By Jen Stewart

Pensacola, Florida, but Morgan's dad was in the military, so his family did a good deal of moving up and down both coasts. The family did not have an excess of spare cash so Morgan's mother cleaned stalls to get her son his lessons. She enjoyed the exercise and his father admired how fit the work kept her. Then, as he got older, Morgan began working himself, doing whatever he could so that he could ride. Morgan cleaned stalls, groomed, set jumps; anything that needed doing, he was right there. By the time he was in his teens, living in Lake Arrowhead, Morgan knew he wanted to spend his life with horses.

Morgan began riding with Gretchen Clark, who had a barn in Redlands. He had discovered jumping and he absolutely loved it. "I'd ride anything," he said. "If the horse was rank, it just meant fewer people would be willing

to get on him. I also did not care how hard I had to work. I'd do anything to ride." Clark went to many of the local shows throughout Southern California and the Central Coast and Morgan went with her, sometimes getting to compete in exchange for all the hours of hard work he put in. He enjoyed every minute of it.

After high school, Morgan went off to Johnson and Wales University in Rhode Island. "They have a great equine studies program there," he said, "And I had some amazing instructors. We really learned everything about the equine industry." Learning was not difficult for Morgan, but sitting in a classroom or reading a book most certainly was. "When I was a teenager, I'd rather dig a hole for eight hours than read for four," he laughed.

Still, Morgan finished his first year of college and then found a dream job for the summer, riding in the Hamptons with two-time Olympic gold medalist Joe Fargas. "He was so great," said Morgan. "It was from Joe Fargas that I learned to pay attention to detail, right

I don't have only one program for my horses. I figure each horse out, and decide what he needs to perform his best

down to being sure I had my leather in its keeper." At the end of the summer, Morgan did not want to return to school. His parents, however, were adamant that he get an education. "They did not have the opportunity to go to college, and it was important

to them that I did. Still, it wasn't my parents I listened to but to the horse trainer, Joe Fargas, who also insisted I return to school."

At the end of the next school year, Morgan knew he'd be returning home to California. He decided that more than anything else, he wanted a job with legendary Grand Prix rider Hap Hansen. So, with his usual energy and unbridled enthusiasm, Morgan went to work. "I kept bugging him," he laughed. "I was a little naive and I guess I didn't realize just how big he was." But the naivete paid off. He got hired, and though his official jobs were driving trucks and grooming, Morgan, as always, found his way into the saddle. "Hap was a true gentleman and an amazing horseman," said Morgan, the admiration in his voice obvious. "He gave me lessons and if I found a horse to ride at some other facility, he'd go there to watch me." In fact, Morgan was extremely good at finding mounts, and ended up doing some showing while with Morgan at Indio. "I was given one horse to ride, but the woman could only afford to keep the horse at the show for a limited time. So Hap paid the fees to allow let me keep the horse there longer. I also talked my way into riding one of the horses I was grooming and when I needed a jacket to wear in the show ring, Hap lent me one of his." No doubt Morgan's obvious enthusiasm and willingness to work (as well as his talent) inspired people to give him

horses to ride and jackets to wear. His positive energy was, and is, infectious.

After his time with Hansen, Morgan went to Europe.

Predictably, he had a wonderful time and learned a great deal. "It was really different in Europe," said Morgan, who worked with, among others, Bruce Goodin, who rode in the Olympics that year for New Zealand, and Jan Tops, who ran



a well-known sales barn. "Horses are a true business over there and equestrian events are extremely popular. Stadiums are filled with fans during the major competitions and if you go to a pub, someone always knows who won. It is more like baseball or football here in the states."

He noted that after the shows, people would get together to eat and talk, in a way similar to American "tailgating." "I had a blast there," said Morgan, who also noted that while he missed everything at home while in Europe, he also missed much about Europe when he came back. After his return, Morgan spent some time riding at Indio and then became assistant to Cindy Merritt. "She was great with young horses and she was amazing with adult amateurs," said Morgan. "She knew

just how to give them the confidence they needed and still keep them safe. I learned so much from her."

After his time with Merritt, Morgan worked with Mary Tyng who gave him the polish he needed for the hunter ring. Now Morgan knew he was ready to go out on his own. It was quite an adventure, as Morgan found himself riding everything from a barnful of rank stallions to a wonderful Grand Prix horse. The latter was a real treat. "Rancho Del Puma bought her and gave her to me to ride. She was my first Grand Prix mount and she was an awesome horse. Unfortunately, after our third competition, someone made them an offer they couldn't refuse and

Continued on page 16



Russell Morgan on HF CO-Costar, Owned by Healy farms

Russell Morgan

Hunter/Jumper Trainer

*Located at
Spirit Equestrian Center*

Currently Accepting New Clients

Russell Morgan
818-640-1310
jenstewart@earthlink.net



D Ranch

peruvian horses



DR El Jefe+, performing la garrocha and winning the Freestyle Reining class in Las Vegas.

Every ranch talks about Champion bloodlines and blue ribbons. We have our fair share, but what makes D Ranch special is the combination needed to make a fantastic mount: great horses, gentle handling and amazing training. We believe that horse and rider should be a true partnership.



Paloma DR riding to victory for another Champion of Champions title

D Ranch

Home of strong, smooth, impeccably trained Peruvian Horses. Contact us to visit our ranch in the beautiful Santa Ynez Valley!

Maidy Dreyfuss, owner • Tony Botello, trainer/mgr.
1132 Fredensborg Cyn. Rd. • Solvang, CA 93463
805/688-0877 • pasoranch@aol.com • dranch.com

Continued from page 16

she was sold. I still miss that horse," said Morgan.

Morgan, however, found solace in riding some talented, young jumpers for Jane Healy. "Jane bred a lot of nice horses and sold a couple, but gave some to me to ride. I won the Zone 10 five-year-old jumper championship two years in a row on her horses. They are continuing to develop nicely and are moving up the ranks." One of the horses had a setback when he spooked and injured himself during training. The vet ordered stall rest, always difficult with a high-spirited young horse. Morgan, who understands horses so well he must be part horse himself, set about making sure the animal got his healing time without going crazy. "I put him in the front stall, near the office," he explained, "and I made sure to give him a lot of attention. I stopped and petted him each time I walked by, and I'd play with his tongue, something he really likes. I also put him on Gastro-Guard, to protect against ulcers." Morgan's "therapy" obviously worked, because the horse healed well and even with the lay-up, managed to finish respectably well in his seven-year-old jumpers class. With more time back, he should do even better.

Morgan is currently doing most of his training at Spirit Equestrian Center in Somis. He is understandably enthusiastic about the facility, which is absolutely magnificent in every way, from the stabling provided,

to the arena footing, to the concern everyone at Spirit shows for both the owners and the horses. Morgan, who notes that flexibility is his greatest asset, explained, "I don't have only one program for my horses. I figure each horse out, and decide what he needs to perform his best. Many trainers have one way of doing things, and the horse has to fit that method. I fit my methods to the horse." Morgan's flexibility extends to his work with his human pupils, as well. He is a "people person" as well as a "horse person" and enjoys teaching both children and adults. Morgan's own positive, enthusiastic nature cannot help but rub off onto anyone around him and his extensive background has given him excellent teaching skills. It is a great combination.

Students wishing to take lessons from Morgan can keep their horses at Spirit or if they already have a place that their equine partners call home, they can haul in for lessons. Not only is Spirit a wonderful place to ride, it gives the horse the opportunity to work away from home on a regular basis, which is a huge advantage for anyone planning to show. Morgan also has a lesson horse for students who do have a mount of their own.

Morgan has come a long way since he was the little boy who memorized a riding stable phone number as he took the bus to school. Inside, however, he is still that same, enthusiastic kid, who was willing to work so hard to realize his dream.



**Looking for
the next
issue of the
Equine and
Canine News**