

Why Breed a Morab?

By Linda Konichek

When dealing with any breed of horse that is created from two purebred parent breeds, the inevitable question always seem to arise; can a Morab really be considered a breed? How can you charge as much or more for what many might consider a cross--bred horse? Why breed a crossbred horse instead of a purebred?

The desire to combine the best traits of two treasured breeds, the Morgan and the Arabian, has inspired breeders since the 1800s. The first reaction of most newcomers to the breed is similar to that of Morab breeder Anita Messenger of Arkansas, "When we heard the word 'Morab', our interest was pricked. Wow, what kind of horse could be produced by crossing the Arabian and Morgan breeds? We were soon to discover that Morabs are not only a registered breed, but a breed with a fascinating history."

Modern Morab breeders carefully select mares and stallions that will combine the best genetic traits of the two parent breeds. The fusion of Arabian and Morgan characteristics is genetically complimentary and gives the resulting Morab enhanced beauty and strength.

The ancient desert horse of the Bedouins was bred for beauty, stamina, soundness, speed, and disposition. Several centuries later, that same Arabian blood was part of a still unknown genetic formula that resulted in the legendary stallion, Justin Morgan. This one horse founded the Morgan horse, a uniquely American breed. The rugged terrain and harsh climate of Vermont in the late 1700's only served to enhance the merits of this hearty little stallion, who proved himself time and again in tests of his incredible strength, speed, and endurance. These traits, plus his friendly, willing disposition, were passed on with unfailing accuracy to his progeny, as they are now, 200 years later.

Today's well-bred Morabs combine Morgan strength and depth with Arabian refinement and sensitivity. The Arabian horse often called the "drinker of winds" for its powerful lungs and endurance capacity, combined with the broad, powerful chest of the Morgan, gives the Morab a naturally superior breathing system.

Morabs possess a shorter back than other breeds, one backbone less as does the Arabian. This shorter back, combined with the longer croup of the Morgan, endows the Morab with great strength and smooth gait. This enables Morabs to excel in competitive and endurance riding.

These traits also give the Morab, working off its powerful hindquarters, a natural athletic ability that makes it well--suited for the high--performance demands of dressage, jumping and cutting horses.

The mature Morab's hooves and legs hold up well to excessive stress, since the Morgan contributes wonderful formation of bone and a medium--length pastern, and the Arabian parent adds the broad hard hoof and lower heel. This accounts for the almost non--existent foot and leg problems of the Morab breed and many breeders report that their Morabs are never shod and require minimum hoof trimming.

Muscular, yet refined, best describes the appearance of the mature Morab. The Morab's head may be straight to slightly dished with a big powerful jaw in contrast to a small muzzle with large, bold nostrils. The refined, sculpted beauty of the Arabian, joined with the Morgan's dramatic natural style and stamina, creates an elegantly powerful horse for use in the show ring, as a working horse, or on the trail. Indeed, most Morabs comfortably switch back and forth in all of these activities.

The Morab body should be compact, of medium length, well--muscled, smooth and stylish. A wide forehead sets off the Morab's large, dark and expressive eyes. The Morgan horse adds a thick, luxuriant mane and tail to the Morab, which balances out its muscular build.

Despite all the other highly prized traits of the Morab horse, most Morab owners and breeders will cite the Morab's intelligent, dependable and affectionate nature as its most valued quality. When the spirit and people--loving nature of the Arabian is added to this, the resulting breed is a horse that cannot be beat in temperament, intelligence, and willing attitude. That is why mature Morabs are so popular as mounts for children, amateur riders, and senior citizens.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture Handbook #394, "A breed of horse may be defined as a group of horses of common origin and possessing certain well--defined, distinctive, uniformly transmitted characteristics that are not common to other horses..."

Cross breeding between breeds can produce desirable horses if the parents are of high quality. But often the resulting crossbred foals (even from the same parents) do not show many like traits and may not even look alike. This is not true in the Morab: all well--bred Morabs have a consistently uniform look, with some degree of refinement. And second, third, forth, and even fifth generation Morabs show very little, if any, change from the first generation Morab. It is this ability of Morabs to transmit their distinguishing characteristics to their progeny that makes the Morab a distinct breed, rather than just a nice crossbred horse.

History's first recorded Morab was bred in 1855, in the era when the driving horse was the main mode of transportation. This stallion was Golddust (bred by Andrew Hoke near Louisville, Kentucky) and sold as a weanling for \$1000 to L. L. Dorsey of Eden Stock Farm. Golddust was a horse of great merit; his sire was a Vermont Morgan, his dam was the Hoke mare said to be by Zilcaadl, a chestnut Arabian horse presented by the Sultan to the United States Consul and imported by him.

Golddust was a recorded Morab #69 in the Morgan Registry. (Provision for recording the Morgan/Arabian cross was made in both the early Morgan Registry and Arabian Registry). He was pure gold in color, 16 hands tall, and weighed 1275 pounds. Golddust was never defeated in the show ring at the trot, and it was said he could cover six miles per hour at the flat walk. No stallion of his day produced larger, more showy horses, or more winners in the show rings and trotting races of the time. His grandson, Goldsheen, won his classes at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904.

Golddust was the peer of anything bred in Kentucky, and in 1861, defeated Iron Duke in a match race, best three out of five heats, for a purse of \$10,000. Although his stud career was curtailed by the Civil War and his own untimely death, he sired 302 foals and left 44 trotters of record. In getting speed, he outranks even the great Hambletonian.

After that, little is recorded about Morabs until the 1920's, when William Randolph Hearst coined the word "Morab" and bred a number of fine Morabs for use in the mountainous terrain of the Hearst Ranch.

Soon, Texans started breeding Morabs after discovering that crossing Morgans with Arabians could result in fine cutting horses with great stamina and sense. The Swenson brothers, near Stamford, Texas, produced some out—standing stock horses by crossing Arabians with their Morgan stud colts #6775 Red Bird and #5957 Gotch. One example was a Bay gelding, Rey Boy, foaled in 1943 and owned by "Wild Bill" Elliott of Hollywood fame.

In the 1950's Martha Doyle Fuller of Clovis, California, developed a Morab breeding program while working on creating a breed that would perform exceptionally well in the show ring. It was from her successful breeding program that her daughter, M. Ilene Miller, started the first Morab Registry in 1973.

The average Morab today ranges from 14.1 hands to 15.2 hands, with the variety of colors and markings common to Morgans and Arabians, and weighs between 950 and 1200 pounds.

The International Morab Registry requires documented Arabian and Morgan bloodlines and allows no more than 75% Arabian to 25% Morgan, or vice versa. Thus, a pure—bred Morab stallion of 50% Morgan and 50% Arabian bloodlines can be bred to purebred Morgans, Morabs, or Arabians for registerable foals. This allows a breeder many options in matching mares and stallions for a foal that truly offers the best of both breeds.

In summary, today's Morab horse is a carefully—bred animal, representing the finest traits of both its parent breeds. The fusion of the Arabian and Morgan breeds produces the "Magnificent Morab", a refined, muscular, graceful, free—flowing horse – a horse that is ideal for any type of riding from endurance, to dressage, to working cattle.

The Morab's calm, intelligent, people—loving disposition, combined with its stamina and willing attitude makes it an easy horse to train and handle. Muscular, beautiful, proud, and genuinely loving, it is easy to see why Morab owners treasure their horses and usually keep them for life.

The International Morab Breeders Association is dedicated to educating the general horse public about this versatile breed, and providing support and direction for Morab breeders worldwide in producing enough Morabs to meet the ever—growing market. The International Morab Registry™ provides a computerized registry capable of recording the thousands of future Morabs that will be produced, Morab archives, award programs, and all other important records involved in the creation of a breed.

For information on Morabs or how to register a Morab, please contact the International Morab Breeders Association, 24 Bauneg Beg Road Sanford, ME 04073 or call 1-866-667-2246. Email: imba@morab-imba.com
Website: www.morab.com

