



The famous shake! Daryl Hopson & Rick Gervasio

Morgan People

Rick Gervasio

Collaborated by Barbara Irvine and Terri Travers

Did you see the fabulous picture from the last year's Morgan Grand National that showed Morgandom's quintessential gentleman and sportsman, Daryl Hobson, shaking hands with another western trainer? Who was that guy? Florida based western trainer Rick Gervasio made that famous shake. The picture from center ring captured the heartwarming camaraderie of our Morgan breed and celebrated the extreme ends of the United States coming together in our adopted Morgan hometown, Oklahoma City. Beyond the shake and getting to know this relatively new Morgan trainer, Rick Gervasio has devoted his lifetime to training horses and honing his craft with several other breeds. Recently we have had the pleasure to welcome him to the Morgan world and appreciate seeing his western creations.

"I have a great group of clients right now that believe in their horses, want to show them, and want to buy better ones or sell their nice ones. They support each other at shows and enjoy coming to the farm." ~ Rick Gervasio

Rick's background begins in Ringoes, New Jersey where he was raised by divorced parents. By the age of 15, Rick knew he was going to be a horse trainer. His father, Arnie Gervasio trained American Quarter Horses so Rick grew up training horses with him from the time he was young. Rick laughs, "The way I look at it, I was just free help until I was old enough to move out of the house!" He spent weekends and summers on the farm and eventually moved in with his father full time when he started high school.

At 20 years old, Rick apprenticed with other trainers. He spent two years with **Troy Oakley** and then

moved to Texas for three years and worked for **Edgewood Farms**, one of the country's leading American Quarter Horse breeders. After that, he worked for **Tom Chown** at **Willowtree Farm** for two years. Rick reflects, "I spent a long time apprenticing for whom I consider to be some of the best western pleasure trainers in the business. . . I've never had another job other than training horses. I never really showed much in youth or junior exhibitor because I just rode at the barn and went to horse shows and helped Dad with the customer horses. I always rode young horses: that was my specialty."

In 1994, Rick set up his own horse

training business, Rick Gervasio Pleasure Horses, and in 1999 bought his current farm in the horse capital of the U.S. - Ocala, Florida. The facility is 15 acres with four paddocks, three round pens, an arena and a trail course. He lives on the property and keeps a 14-stall barn with two employees and himself and tries to make a few improvements every year. The temperature year round is ideal; Rick works outdoors all year and rarely has to take a day off for rain.

Being lucky enough to reside in the horse capital of the U.S., Rick is just around the corner from the HITS show facility, where all the hunter/jumpers spend the winter. Rick cannot imagine

living anywhere else and enthuses, "We have a great support community (vets, farriers, feed and equipment) here that is unequaled anywhere else in the country."

Rick manages his facility with a quality versus quantity philosophy, "I do not believe that bigger is better. I don't want any more stalls than that and I do not really want to be taking 15 head to the horse show. My ideal number is 4-6 horses to a show. I don't want to take horses to the show that I don't feel are the quality to win, really respectable horses. I want quality over quantity."

Barbara Irvine: How did you get involved with Morgans?

Betsy Marsted sent me **Graywood's Belinda Breeze**, she was the first Morgan I ever rode and maybe even the first one I'd ever seen. She was looking for a western trainer in the area. I liked her and took her to my first Morgan show -- it was Tampa Charity. I showed her and never had a horse that so many tried to buy. They were chasing me out the driveway trying to buy that horse. I took her to a couple shows and the next thing I knew, a couple people started sending me Morgans. That one horse really introduced me to Morgans. I thought they were all going to be like her. I found out they weren't.

Are you working with other breeds?

I still have a couple Arabians in training and go to a few Arabian shows each year, but my main focus at this point is on the Morgans. The majority of the horses in my barn are Morgans. I like to catch ride other breeds for trainer friends at NSBA shows or Appaloosa Nationals, but I just don't train them anymore.



Graywood Belinda Breeze
2011 RWC Open Western Pleasure



Graywood Belinda Breeze

"As a breeder/owner who enjoys showing my horses under saddle, it is paramount to me that my horse is trained well enough that my "beyond middle age" fluffy self does not end up with a horse only a professional can ride. I want a horse that is started with the end goal of having an amateur owner in mind. I think to best sum up Rick, his calm laid back personality is what truly transcends to his training." ~ Laurie Faust

Rick waiting for judging



I know that you had great success at the Morgan World show last year. Can you tell us about that and other success that you have had in the Morgan show world?

Last year was my third year showing Morgans and going to the Morgan Grand National. Of course, last year was the best I've ever done out there. The years before, I just had Belinda (**Graywood Belinda Breeze**, 2011 RWC Open Western Pleasure). I think the reason I did better last year was that I had four good horses to show. I just kept coming back, so the judges got to see me more than once. Each time I came back in with another good horse and all four of them got ribbons. I think that was the difference and that's why last year was better -- I just had more than one good horse.

There was also one other thing I did different last year. Usually I go to the Morgan national and then the Arabian nationals. I knew I had a nice group of Morgans, so I decided just to skip the Arabian Nationals and stay focused on the Morgans. I had confidence in my Morgans and

made them my priority and once I did that, it made a big difference.

I was very proud of my three year olds from last year. Everyone thinks about the Open, but I was very proud of my three year olds. I took two; I won the Grand National Three-Year-Old Western Pleasure Mares (**TFF Selene**) and was reserve with the three-year-old stallion (**Gael Mountain Bugle Boy**). In the Championship, I was reserve with the mare and I had Julie Adams show the stallion. She had never ridden him before and was third behind me. I felt good that I could turn him over to someone else to ride and he did well. She darn near beat me!

I also tried out the new Western Dressage at the Grand National and placed 8th out of 11 in the Primary Level Test 1 Finals with Selene, the same three-year-old mare that went RWC in pleasure (all aged horses in the class). It's a different class than

I'm used to showing, but not far off my horses' normal work routine, so just another chance for them to express their training.

Belinda Breeze was also Reserve World Champion Open Trail Horse, which is a class I enjoy for the variety for both horse and rider. I have a trail course set up at home and all my pleasure horses spend time there as well as in the work arena.

Last year was really my best year at all the Morgan shows. I went to Citrus Cup, then Bluegrass was my next show and I won the Reserve Open Championship (**Treble's Take The Stage**), won the junior horse championship with **TFF Selene**. I also won the Mare qualifier with the three year old (Selene). Then I went to Jubilee Regional and won the open qualifier with Take The Stage. I didn't take any of the young horses there; so Oklahoma was a nice ending to a good season.

"Rick is talented and has worked hard to make his training center recognized as one of the premiere training barns in the country. Although his roots were in working with Quarter Horses and Arabians, he has demonstrated his versatility as a trainer in working with Morgans as well. Having started with just one Morgan in his barn 5 years ago...he now has filled his stalls with Morgans in training which speaks for itself." ~ Karen Burrridge



Can you tell us about other success that you have had in the open show world?

I've been the National Snaffle Bit Association (NSBA) High Point Rider twice (high money earning), won at the Quarter Horse Congress in three-year-old futurity western pleasure, was National Champion Appaloosa Open and Junior Western Pleasure, and have been Top Ten at the Paint Horse Nationals and the Arabian Nationals.

What is your training philosophy?

It's very important to me to have what I consider a well-trained, well-broke horse. To me, the most important things in training are body position, correctness of gait and transitions. The three go together. If you don't have one, you won't have the other two. That's just the most important thing. The jog has to be a good two beat jog. The lope has to be a true three beat lope. It's very important that they take a lead correctly and transition from one gait to the next. Body position affects both transitions and good gaits. Then once you have those three things, then everything else is built from that.

I think you have to do your training at

home, your conditioning, your discipline. All my training and hard work is done at home, so when I get to a horse show, it's easy for the horse. They'd rather be at a horse show than at home. When we go into the show mode, they've just got to go on the rail, I hold my hand still, they just go down the rail at all three gaits, that's easy and they're happy to do that.

I never train a horse to go slow. I never work on going slow. I work on a horse's cadence and rhythm, their speed is variable, so they go whatever speed I ask them to go. So when I ask them to go fast, medium, slow, they'll go any speed. I never just work on slow.

Specifically in reference to preparing and presenting western pleasure horses, do you have any special or unusual training or presentation methods that you could share?

Basically it goes back to the other three things: body position, correctness of gait, and smooth transitions. I never force a horse to go slow. Just make sure they follow my lead, my rhythm, whatever I do with a horse when I show or train, it's like two people dancing and I'm the leader. They have to always follow my lead. They're always waiting on me to tell them how fast, how slow, when to lope off; they're always waiting for me.

I also feel that proper nutrition is really

important. Every horse is an individual and you need to pay attention to what works for them and make sure they're getting what they need to be healthy and happy. Although Ocala isn't the cheapest place to buy feed, thanks to our Thoroughbred industry here, we have outstanding hay in all varieties shipped in by rail all year long. We also have a wide selection of feed distributors here so I can get exactly what I need to keep the horses in top condition.



TFF Selene during Western Dressage test



In what ways do you find Morgans to be similar to training other breeds? How about ways in which you find Morgans to be different from other breeds?

My experience is with stock breeds and Arabians and I pretty much feel like they're kind of a combination between the Arabian and the Quarter Horse. The Morgans are smaller in body and brighter than the Quarter Horse. And conversely, the Morgans are bigger than and not as hot as the Arabian. I really like riding and training Morgans and most of all I like the style, way of going and presentation. They still have a true gait and a nice natural head carriage. I enjoy training and riding their style, as opposed to what some other breeds have done with going too slow, or their heads too low. I enjoy the way the Morgans are presented in the show arena.

What are some of the challenges that you have had competing?

You should need more than a beautiful horse to win; it should be trained. In the stock horse breeds, your judges and trainers and exhibitors are all specialized in the same discipline – western. So when the judges step into center ring, they know exactly what they're doing and there is very little variation in preferences to pin. In the Morgans, you've got a breed where they're showing in several different disciplines and it's hard to have judges that are comfortable and thoroughly knowledgeable in all these different disciplines. So they may tie a western horse because he looks like their kind of horse, which might be a hunter, or a saddle seat horse.

Who are your mentors?

I'd have to say my first mentor was my father; he's the person I've learned the most from. He used to train and show, but now he's a horse shoer full time. Usually if I have problems with a horse, I reach out to him. He shoes for top competing hunter, jumper and dressage people. He still has a beautiful farm up there in New Jersey.

I don't really have any other particular person, I like to do trial and error and just try to figure things out for myself. Whenever I go to a new breed, I just pick someone out that is a good horseman and I like the way they work and I just watch them and try to pick up little bits and pieces of the picture they're presenting.

"The biggest thing I've learned is that every breed has a different style and you have to adapt to their style. I've learned that just from watching."

~ Rick Gervasio

Gervasio

PLEASURE HORSES



The home of Gervasio Pleasure Horses



TFF Selene

“I have known Rick for about 5 years now; he is charming, funny and perhaps even a bit modest about his training ability. At first glance you may see a man who looks great on a horse but if you look a bit closer, you will see a man who clearly has a deep connection with his horses. Simply put, you see the ease with which the man and horse work together. It is more of a partnership, and it is very apparent that his horses not only appear happy working, they are willing to work.” ~ Laurie Faust

Conclusion:

We celebrate the addition of Rick Gervasio to our Morgan community and are fortunate his varied paths through other breeds have led him here. As with any trainer/farm owner, time is a limited resource. So if there is a little time left over, Rick enjoys his motorcycles and relaxing on his boat. A little fishing does a mind good! Rick aspires and concludes his earlier sentiments, "I'd like to continue to build my Morgan business with quality horses." Take a moment to visit www.RickGervasio.com or better yet, visit him in the Sunshine State. Here is a quick peak at his farm and one of his western creations that is available for purchase, WRR Eldorado:



GF Jullyens Joy

Suzanne
©2011

We would like to thank Tami Johnson for all her help in coordinating this feature and appreciate all the artwork she has created through her company www.Masterworks.net that was used in this article.