

≈ FOCUS ON NEW ENGLAND, THE HOMELAND ≈

# *Northampton's* CLASSES OF A CENTURY PAST

*In another age, Morgan owners had a diverse list of classes—family class, Justin Morgan standard, trotting races, park harness pairs—in which to compete. Here we have recollections of bygone days.*

By Patti Brooks



**ABOVE:** At the opening of the 1957 New England Show John M. Seabrook delivered the judges and officials to the stands in the above park coach, with leaders Redstone and Captain Ken and wheelers Bolinvar and Fort Knox (photo © Warren Patriquin).

**T**he show, now known as New England Regional, began back in 1939 when Owen Moon hosted the first “National” at his farm in South Woodstock, Vermont, the day after the completion of Vermont’s three-day, 100-mile ride. Since many Morgans participated in the ride, it was an easy call to schedule a show while many Morgans were already there where they joined other Morgans trailering in for the show. You’d think the horses would be a mite tired after 100 miles up and down Vermont’s mountains. Of course not. They were Morgan horses!

In 1947, Ted Davis took over hosting the National at his Windcrest Farm in Windsor, Vermont. He continued to host the show when it moved to Buena Vista Farm, also in Windsor.

The growing show attracted exhibitors from the entire Northeast and housing for horse and human was becoming scarce. So J. Cecil Ferguson (“Fergie”) of Broadwall Farm in Rhode Island and president of the New England Morgan Horse Association, chaired a committee to find a new site. The National came to Northampton in 1952.

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Once upon a time, in the past century, when Morgan Horses arrived at the fairgrounds in Northampton, Massachusetts for the New England Morgan Show most owners considered it their vacation and they were determined to have fun.

“Oh, sure,” Conky Paquette Price said, “we worked all day preparing horses for the ring and putting them back in their stalls.” Once night classes were added, the show often ran past midnight. “But it didn’t mean there wasn’t time for hijinks. All sorts of fun, like putting jog carts on barn roofs.”

From its earliest years, the show committee thought outside the box and offered a variety of classes that, for the most part, can’t be found in today’s prize list. This article is meant as a recollection of what activities we devised for our Morgans in those early days of horse show activity.

These Morgans were family members and they were up to just about anything asked, even though it might not be practiced at home. Winning one of the races or the Jack Benny class might not result in folks flocking around to pay top dollar for the winner. It was friendly competition and camaraderie with others of the Morgan horse community.

“Before 1972, when professionals were allowed in the pleasure division,” said Mike Goebig, “it was all amateurs who did all the work involved in showing, but frequently sought help from coaches and trainers.”

Nancy Caisse said if a class looked like fun, you’d go ahead and enter. Mike Goebig said if you wanted to go in a Western class at the last minute you’d go around to the barns and find a saddle to borrow.

As a teen, Art Perry worked for Steve Tompkins and it was his job to spend hours preparing Orcland Leader for the parade class. Orcland Leader had several stripes of black on his four white hooves and Art painstakingly painted the black strips. The parade class was the “show girl” of the show. It required all the glitz and glamor to wow the spectators—and judge.

Mike recalls really good times with the trotting races. His mare, Tastee’s Indian Summer was always one of the fastest. Mike got Tastee in the 1959 Tastee farm dispersal and he did all her training.



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** Ted Davis and his daughters took first in the 1958 family class with three of their good Morgans. Left to right are Mrs. J. Alan Ferguson & Upwey Ben Don, Mrs. Hadwen P. Stone & Windcrest Annfield, and Ted Davis & Little Sister (*The Morgan Horse*); Jane Morrell and Mike Goebig, 1968 Trotting Race (*The Morgan Horse*); The 1964 Mare and Produce Class fills the ring (photo © Warren Patriquin).



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** George Gobel owned by Mr. and Mrs. William Barton, took first place in the Half Mile Race, Roadster, and also the Mile Race in 1958 (photo © Warren Patriquin); Portledge Steven was famed for his form in the trotting races with Cheryl Pratt (Rivers), silks (photo © S. Shreve); Vigilendon, 1960 Grand Champion Pleasure Stake, owned by S. R. Orcutt and F. H. Orcutt.

Once the show held night classes, every night session began with a race. Art Perry said everyone dropped what they were doing and hurried to the track. It's been rumored there was quite a bit of betting on the races.

Barb Irvine, riding Lippitt Easter Tweed for Bridle Vale Farm said, "It was a treat to wear Bridle Vale's blue and green silks in the race and the roadster saddle class."

The jockeys and their horses picked up on the excitement of the spectators. Mike said he'll never forget the sensation of racing Tastee's Indian Summer down that straightaway in front of the grandstand crowded with cheering people. But one year he had Jane Needham Morrell chasing him.

Jane said Tastee's Indian Summer was a really fast mare, taking the lead early and keeping it. But Jane's Bayfield Bonnie Lass set her sights on catching him. Jane felt she couldn't pass Mike before the finish line, but that thought flew out of her head when Mike's mare broke (meaning he had to stop and get her back in a trot before continuing). The crowd was screaming and waving their arms about as Jane's mare passed Mike just in time to win the race.

The half-mile and mile races were so popular that they drew Morgans from a distance. Connie Barton of Big Bend Farm in Illinois sent George Gobel. Gary Shank traveled from Pennsylvania with Dulay and Everett Reed sent Gallant King from Oregon to race on the track at Northampton.

When Portledge Steven and Cheryl Pratt Rivers hit the track, the pair was hard to beat. "Steven went full speed right out the gate and raced right to the rail," Cheryl said. One year, Cheryl lost a stirrup. When asked what happened next, she said she just grabbed a fist-full of mane. (Thank goodness for a Morgan's full mane!) She was far more fearful of her dad's wrath than falling off. Stan Pratt, a trainer, insisted on the best performance from his daughter. The only horse to beat Portledge Steven was Gary Shank's Dulay. It happened only once, Cheryl assured me.

Spectators were surprised when they first saw Upwey Ben Don showing up on the track for the races. The New England bred stallion had been Grand Champion Stallion in 1951, won the Sire and Get Class six times and was a consistent saddle winner. Folks thought he didn't have a chance, but in the mid-50s, the stallion won both half and one-mile races. Upwey Ben Don won the half-mile race in 1954 and 1955 and was second to his daughter, Miller's Debutante, in 1956. In addition to winning the races, Upwey Ben Don got gussied up for the parade and cavalcade classes, as well as competing in pairs and the family classes.

During this period, a few really big winners of the traditional championships didn't want to quit with their horses. They were finished with defending their titles and wanted to both keep their horses in front of the public and have fun with the "odd ball" classes.

Townshend Debadonna made her mark when she won Grand Champion Mare in 1967. "Debbie" was also the horse to beat in the saddle and ladies classes. Later, she joined the Townshend family in the family class and cavalcade. Cavalcade brought smiles to everyone's faces and after the class was judged, spectators were invited into the ring for a closer look and to take pictures. It was judged on historical correctness and turnout.

Year after year, Doctor Bob Orcutt and Fred Herrick took the



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** Dr. Bob Orcutt with Windcrest Benn Beau and Windcrest Show Girl (photo © Warren Patriquin); Fred Herrick with Trophys Emerald & Applevale Challenger, winning Park Harness Pairs (photo © S. Shreve); Parade and Broadwall Drum Major with owner J. Cecil Ferguson, whip, and Mrs. Potter, with Dr. L. K. Maier and Mrs. Margaret Ferguson, winner of the 1959 Cavalcade Americana class.

horses they had made into successful champions and kept them going in both park harness and saddle pairs.

Everyone raised their heads for a better look when Cecil Ferguson's pair drove by. The stallions, home-bred Parade and his son Broadwall Drum Major, were both a great match and beautifully turned out for both harness pairs and cavalcade.

Harness pairs were thought to be one of the most beautiful classes of the show. Spectators could count on awesome pairs presented by Bob Orcutt and Bob Brooks, but many felt that the matching color and conformation added to the precision of cadence set Fred Herrick's pairs apart.

In 1952, a park harness pair caused quite a sensation. It was the year Gerald Taft brought three park harness horses and each qualified for the Park Harness Championship. One of the three was shown by the farm manager. Mr. Taft could drive one as well, but what about the third horse?

Easy. The two horses were put together as a pair and Mr. Taft showed them in the Park Harness Championship. Just how "legal" was this? Judges and officials didn't know what to do. The program called this a "Park Harness Championship." But, the AHSA rule book called it a "Park Harness Horse Championship." How do you justify a pair? Seeing the consternation his pair was causing, Taft withdrew. Noteworthy sportsmanship. Grandstand went wild as the pair left the ring.

Partner of the harness pairs, saddle pairs was another favorite of exhibitors and a treat for spectators. Barb Irvine enjoyed putting together saddle pairs. She paired up with several different students and horses over the years.

Nancy Ela Caisse said "We always did well with lots of different horses both within Townshend Farm itself or with friends. We never practiced, even the year we rode the Orland Vigildon daughters, Townshend Debadonna (Nancy Caisse riding) and Townshend Vigilbell (Barry Caisse riding)."

The Townshend mares placed second to Saddleback's Ledgewood Pecora (Jeanne Herrick in the irons) and Applevale Challenger (Fred Herrick in the irons). Fred's ability to turn out matching pairs with outstanding consistency and cadence earned him a legendary reputation.

Nancy also rode pairs with Jane Raucher Elliott on various Townshend horses. Just had to choose a chestnut that matched Jane Elliott's famous pleasure horse Lady Roxanna.

Jane bought Lady Roxanna from Woody Henry, Sr. as a young filly. She credits trainer George Nichols at Mt. Holyoke for helping her train Roxy. "He was a demanding task-master and never coddled me." George emphasized light hands, which was a tough lesson to learn given Roxy's go-power. Jane didn't have a trailer, so she rode to the shows.

In 1967, Jane and Lady Roxanna won the 30-horse English Pleasure Championship. What a year it was for Jane and Roxy! The pair also won the English pleasure qualifier, the Western pleasure, the trail class, and second level dressage. And just to keep busy, they were second in stock horse, road hack mares, and versatility. They weren't done yet! Roxy and Jane got a third in the nine-pair saddle pairs with Nancy Caisse on Townshend Melinda. To round out the



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** Miller's Adel and Windcrest Sentimental Lady, ridden by John Lydon and Sue Annis, 1st Saddle Pairs and 2nd Harness Pairs Class in 1958, owned by Waseeka Farm (photo © Freudy); The Ela Family, 1st, 1968 Family class with Townshend Vigilissa, Townshend Vigilass, Townshend Cornita, and Townshend Debadonna (*The Morgan Horse*); Jeanne & Fred Herrick riding in Pairs.

week, Jane and Roxy took a fourth in the cavalcade.

The very next year, the pleasure championship was a little different. The Western pleasure horse, Wal-Thor won! The class specs at the time allowed for this, saying that horses could jog or trot, lope or canter. But Wal-Thor, owned by Walter Kane of Michigan, is the only Western horse of record to have won the pleasure championship at Northampton.

The in-hand classes were always packed. Sue Simmons Caisse recalls a Five & Over Mares class that had horses around the entire ring. These classes were of great interest to the Morgan horse owners that hung over the rail to study each horse.

Mike Goebig said, "Folks would be ringside to choose their next cross and or the next horse to buy by what they saw and liked." Claire Murphy of Fiddler's Green wasn't the only breeder to make next year's breeding decisions by what she saw at Northampton. She usually bred a mare to the winner of the Sire and Get class.

The year of the show's 25th anniversary, the pleasure division had exploded in both size and variety of classes offered. There were 37 in the Pleasure Saddle Geldings, 57 in Equitation, and the Pleasure Driving Mares was split into over 15 hands and under 15 hands.

In 1976, Sue Caisse won the 40-horse English Pleasure Championship on R Bar B Charlie Brown. On a side note, Sue Caisse had been coming to the show since she was eight. Her mom would leave her off every morning before the show started as Sue was anxious to get a good seat in the grandstand. She got a dollar every day for a sandwich and drink and mom would pick her up at five.

It's easy to see how the night session often went on past midnight. In addition to huge classes, there were classes with multiple elements, like the Justin Morgan and stock Horse classes.

For a few years, the prize list contained a stock horse class. Specs called for horses to execute a figure eight at a lope, go at speed, stop, turn on hind end.

In 1952, the prize list offered a Ten Mile Road Test through the cornfields next to the fairgrounds and finishing on the track. It was judged on time and condition and the judges preferred the rounded Morgan look.

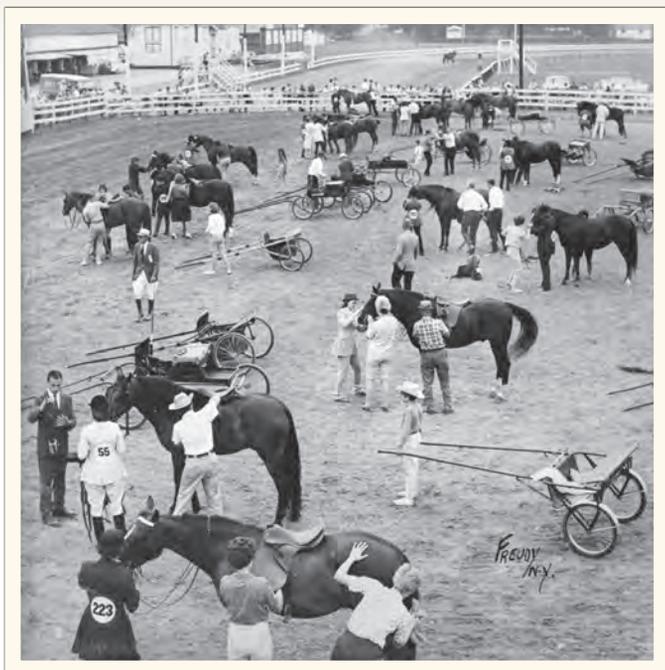
In 1950, the stable inspection competition began. Of course, it's easy to see how it evolved into our present-day tack room awards.

Louise Orcutt Henry entered everything possible with Johnny Appleseed. One of her favorites was the jumping class which has evolved into today's hunter over fences held in the infield.

Park combination was another class with several segments. Louise recalled the year the park combination class could have been a disaster. Horses entered the ring in harness. After completing the harness section, horses lined up. A crew came in for each entry, removing the buggy and exchanging the harness for a saddle. When all the horses were saddled, they went to the rail and the class would continue.

"I remember Woody (Henry) came in the ring with a young bay horse," Louise said. "We had a young man who was to help with the harness/saddle change." Anxious to get the horse saddled quickly, he yanked off the harness bridle before the horse was unhitched. "The bridle-less horse ran around ring before being caught and saddled up." Louise mounted and rode the saddle portion of the class.

Probably the Justin Morgan Class ate up the most time.



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** A birdseye view of the 1965 Versatility class showing exhibitors just saddling up after the driving portion (photo © Freudy); Broadwall Patrick, owned by Gene St. Germain, 5th in 1964 Justin Morgan Performance (*The Morgan Horse*); Mandate's Peggy Lou, owned by Mrs. Ayelien Richards, took the blue in the 1958 Justin Morgan Performance Class, as well as 3rd in Road Hack, 5th Roadster in Harness, and 6th in Pairs Class with Little Miss Pepper (photo © Freudy).

First horses raced a half mile, changed harness for saddle and had a gallop race. Then, probably changed into a full bridle for the walk-trot-canter class. Lastly, horses changed saddles for a collared work harness for the stone boat pull. Each segment was judged separately. Often the stone boat pull separated the men from the boys.

Dawn Severence wrote: "I won the Justin Morgan performance class twice at New England with my mare See Jay Donette. 1977 was the first year I entered, my first time competing at New England and my last year as a junior exhibitor.

"My dad made a stone boat to practice. I started out sitting on it on a bale of hay. Over time I kept adding people until I was sure she could pull whatever they gave us. When Donette started moving the load in the show, everyone started clapping and yelling. She was so excited it took me half way across the ring to stop her!"

Barb Irvine recalls preparing for the Justin Morgan class with Acadia's Auburn Lady. "Auburn" was owned by Bridle Vale Farm where Barb taught and trained for many years. She fixed her hair in a braid with a stick in it, so it stuck straight out behind her, the plan being that it would look like they were going very, very fast for the race portion of the event.

Acadia's Auburn Lady went to her former owners, Sandy and Dr. Merritt Wooding who showed Barb how to do the "stone boat thing."

US Panetz, the 1959 Pleasure Saddle Champion, was a force to contend with in the Justin Morgan class. Dick Nelson, University of Massachusetts trainer, took the time to make the stallion excel in each section.

Nancy Caisse, while at the Ela's place in Vermont, discovered she had a neighbor who went the stone boat pulling circuit with her oxen. Perfect! The neighbor taught Nancy how to pull using her Townshend Vigit. To this day, she is proud of having beaten US Panetz in the stone boat section of the Justin Morgan class. Nancy did place second but more important, she conquered the difficult stone boat pull section.

As you can see, the show offered classes for everyone. Young and old. Not only was there a boys' under 18 equitation class, but a Jack Benny class for "old" folks. The New England youth club pestered Nancy Caisse to get a Jack Benny Class in the prize list. They wanted a way to thank parents and other supporters who, although they rode at home, they did not show.

Specs announced the class was open to riders 39 and over, (if you will admit). Walk-trot-canter (correct leads, please) both ways of the ring. No obstacles. Horses will be judged on giving a good ride despite the ability of the rider.

Papa Tom Dooley donated a two-plus foot statue of Jack Benny for the class. It was presented with a box shaped like a casket. This trophy is now in the Morgan Horse Museum.

And then the whole family could go in the family class. Barb Irvine competed in the family class for many years with her niece, Elizabeth Young Fina. They practiced and practiced for the class each year and tried to match up a good pair from the horses Barb had in training throughout Liz's teenage and early adult years. They both loved the class and viewed it as a very special moment

to celebrate their shared love of the Morgan horse and the New England Morgan Horse Show.

One year they won the gorgeous silver ice bucket filled with the finest Mum's champagne. After the show, they took it up to the Vineyard to share with the whole family.

On the other side of the spectrum, Louise Henry said the Lyman Orcutt family never practiced. It was group effort and didn't worry if they were on the correct lead; just wanted to canter as a group. "It could be hairy when one group tried to pass on a corner," Louise admitted.

This tradition of "no practice" appears to have been a family thing as Nancy insists practice consisted of getting together on the track before the class was called into the ring. This tradition included the families of Lyman Orcutt, Dr. Bob Orcutt, Dickson and Ela.

"The exception to that," Nancy said, "was that her dad, Roger Ela, would practice once or twice at home and write himself notes to help him remember how to canter."

Originally this was the "Dickson family." Grandma Dickson (Ruth Bennet Dickson) rode with some of her grandchildren, then she joined with Anna, Roger and Nancy Ela.

As Ruth Dickson Orcutt's family grew, they had a separate family unit as did Anna Dickson Ela. The Dr. Bob Orcutts, being related through Lyman Orcutt, sometimes showed as a family.

Nancy Ela Caisse remembers one year after the class was judged, they all formed a line across the ring to make an exit. Wobbly, but impressive!

In 1957, *The Morgan Horse* covered the event as follows: "After the family class, the Ela and Orcutt entries returned to the ring with Mrs. Brenton H. Dickson on the 26-year-old mare, Sadwin. Mrs. Dickson at 80 years of age was proof that enthusiasm for Morgans and horsemanship never wanes."

That little Townshend mare, Sadwin, showed at 15 shows! Not only was she counted on to be Grandma Dickson's mount, but also to carry young equitation and junior exhibitors to good ribbons. At 26, Sadwin won the trailer race. The mare wasn't retired until she was 28 at a proper retirement ceremony in Northampton's center ring.

Ann Hutchinson Scussell won the family class with John and her mom and dad in 1970. Ann will never forget the year Nancy Caisse rode into the class with baby Mark in a backpack. The baby was handed off to someone on the ground before getting jostled during the trot.

Ann also showed in the Cavalcade with Town Ayr Minute and Town Ayr Heather and recalls Caroline Sebring being a big help.

Everyone interviewed for this article felt the trailer race was the most exciting class. Trucks and trailers would line up in the ring facing where we now have the box seats. At the signal two people would jump out of the truck. One would drop the tail gate while the other went to the horse's head and backed him out. Halter and lead rope were exchanged for saddle and bridle.

The rider would hop on the horse and race to the grandstand side of the ring. Had to touch the rail then race back to the trailer. Next saddle and bridle were removed and placed in the truck. The horse was loaded, tail gate latched. Contestants would jump back in their truck and turn on the lights, signaling they had completed



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** US Panez placed 3rd Justin Morgan performance, 4th versatility, 4th Harness Pairs, and 6th English Pleasure Horse in 1955 (*The Morgan Horse*); The Elas, 2nd, Family Class on Townshend Melinda, Townshend Meloise, and Townshend Vigilat. These three horses accumulated 16 ribbons at the 1964 National Show; Mark Caisse in his mother Nancy Caisse's back pack (1968); Trailer Race was won by Townshend Sealais, 2nd Sadwin, both owned by Townshend Morgan-Holstrin Farm (photos *The Morgan Horse*).



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Wathor, Champion Pleasure Horse and 1st Stock Horse in 1957, owned by Walter Kane (photo © Freudy); Saracen, Half Mile Race Under Saddle winner for four consecutive years, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Coombs, Jr. and ridden by Mr. Coombs; Mr and Mrs Frederick O. Davis and daughter Mrs. J. Alan Ferguson driving Little Sister and Wind-Crest Annfield and foals, placed fifth in the 1958 Gay Nineties Class; Bruce Geddes, owned by Edwin Cole, 2nd place 1955 Western Pleasure Horse (photos *The Morgan Horse*).

the class. Dick Nelson was a major contender in the trailer race and Nancy Caisse competed with her dad, Roger Ela.

So, where did all these classes go? Barb Irvine said today's horses are more specialized, training for perfection in one division. In the earlier days of the show, most horses were family owned and trained. The family's horse was expected to take the youngest member in Leadline, as well as showing under saddle and in harness.

Bonnie Herschede Sogoloff agrees. She remembers the early year where most people, herself included, went in every class they were eligible for. Most exhibitors wore a white jacket and black pants. Bonnie thought she was "it" when she got her first saddle suit.

Mike Goebig feels so many owners send their horses to trainers because they don't want to have to do all the things it takes to get a

horse in the ring and put away, all the while keeping your saddle suit clean. That's in addition to having a serious training regimen for the horse at home.

And the home farm plays into this as well. It's more difficult to find affordable properties where horses are permitted and with sufficient land for rings and such.

But Morgan horse people are lucky they have Morgan horses, a breed that for generations enjoyed taking on the challenges presented by their owners. Don't for a minute think today's Morgan is "different." Good Morgans enjoy life and look forward to tackling new jobs.

In 2019, the 80th anniversary of the show, the show committee is planning to bring back a few of these classes. Let them know which ones you'd like to see and, more important, which ones you will enter. ■