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In Search of Roan Morgans

by Laura Behning The Morgan breed comes in a wide variety of colors, many of which are also common in other breeds. Roan is one color that is somewhat common in other breeds but is very rare— in fact, on the brink of extinction— in the Morgan. Often we hear people say they know of a roan Morgan, and what is usually meant is a horse with a sprinkling of roan hairs caused by the as-yet unidentified roany sabino-like white pattern that is sometimes seen in the Morgan breed, or, somewhat less commonly, rabicano. In contrast, the true **dark headed roan** has white hairs mixed with its base color on the body only; the points and the head remain dark. It is a dominant gene, which means that a roan foal must have had a roan parent. Because roans may be registered before they completely shed the foal coat and their roan coloring becomes apparent, the notation of “roan” may be missed on their registration. Identification of roans is further complicated by the fact that like other white patterns, there is a variance in the degree of expression; minimally expressed roans may look almost non-roan. This has made tracing roan lines more difficult, as the registry volumes are not always reliable sources for determining whether or not a given Morgan is or is not roan.

While there are other genes that cause a roany effect, genetically they differ from the true roan and their mode of inheritance is not as well understood. They include **rabicano**, marked by roan hairs concentrated in the flanks and at the top of the tail and the simple addition of **roan hairs** sprinkled throughout the horse’s body. As with true roan, the expression of these genes may be so minor that it is not even noted on the individual’s registration papers, leading to more obvious expressions of rabicano and roany sabino-like markings seemingly “cropping up” on horses some generations later.

There were two main surviving color lines for true roan in the Morgan breed in the late twentieth century. The first of these were descendants of the 1940 chestnut roan Torchy (Mansfield x Daisy of Willowmoor). Torchy’s dam was a bay roan and her roan gene came from her dam, the Morab, Queen (registered as chestnut roan), though the color source is uncertain beyond that point. Torchy was described by long-time Morgan owner and breeder Martha Von Redlich as “registered as a chestnut, but I knew her and she was a red roan, strawberry roan, if you like.” Martha’s assertion is backed up by the August 1954 issue of THE MORGAN HORSE magazine, which contains a listing of National Show entrants, where Torchy is listed by her owners as a roan. Martha continues “You wonder if any other horses were roans like Torchy and not registered as roan because of prevailing prejudice against them in those years.” Torchy’s full sister, Upwey Cassandra, was also a roan. She had two foals, neither listed as roan.

Torchy had five offspring, and at least two of them are verifiable as roans from photos. They are the registered-as chestnut mare Double J Pepper, listed in the same 1954 Nationals program as a roan, and Double J Crusader, also registered as roan but clearly in photos a classic dark headed roan. Both were by Orcland Leader (who coincidentally is the probable source of many roany sabinos). Pepper was in turn the dam of Double J Step Aside, a gelding who also looks in photos to be roan; and Double J Apollo, who is the sire of the sole known surviving roan mare, Viv Lamae (out of Carlyle La Mae), foaled in 1985. The



UPWEY CASSANDRA 05153



Left: **Upwey Cassandra** (Mansfield x Daisy of Willowmoor), 1935 chestnut roan mare.
Right: **Torchy** (Mansfield x Daisy of Willowmoor), 1940 chestnut roan mare, shown with her owner Clarence F. Atwood of Hartland, VT.

TORCHY 05622

Morgan mare, owner and rider, Clarence F. Atwood, Hartland, Vt.

Double J horses have many descendants to the present day, so it is possible there are other roans from the Torchy line out there, perhaps so minimally marked that roan was not noted on their papers. Unfortunately Viv Lamae has not bred on and it is likely that with her passing (if that has not already happened), roan will become extinct in our breed.

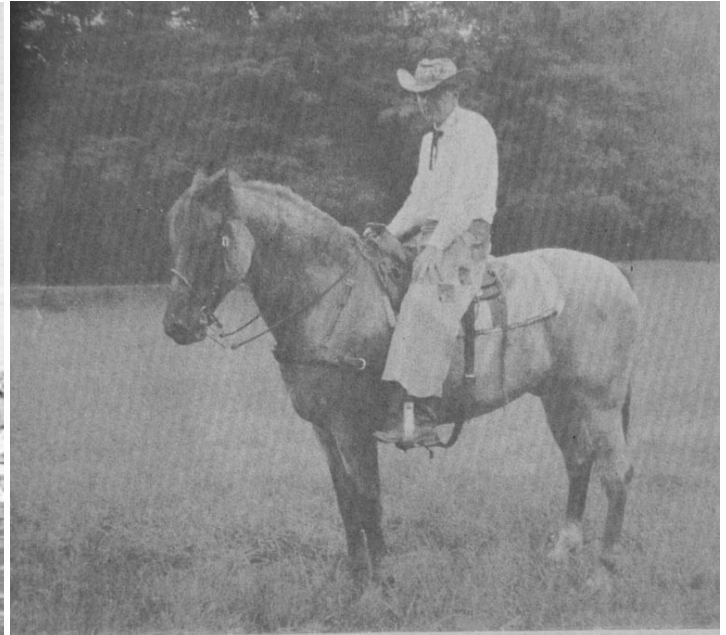
The second known extant line of roan Morgans comes down to us from the 1945 chestnut roan mare, Rosemont (Lamont x Dee Ann). It is a mystery where Rosemont's roan gene came from. There is the possibility that either Lamont or De Ann were barely expressed true roans, but they are from a very prolific family and had so many offspring one would think that true roan would have shown up elsewhere. While roan hairs caused by the sabino roan variant are common in Brunk-bred horses from Jubilee King and Liza Jane breeding, the Rosemont family seems to be the only true roan family of this breeding. Rosemont produced three foals: the 1960 stallion Sonfield Roany (by Sonfield), who sounds roan by his name but was not registered as such; the 1963 gelding Rosemont's Red by Easter Vermont (by Red Vermont) who is clearly a dark-headed true roan in his pictures, and her last foal, Doll-Rose in 1964 when the mare was 19. Doll-Rose, a chestnut roan, was also by Easter Vermont. She is the dam of the late Caduceus Herod, blue roan foaled in 1987, who was a very successful dressage horse for owner Barbara Putnam. Unfortunately, he was gelded before his breeder, Lowell Hughes, realized he was a roan. Herod along with Viv LaMae were the only known surviving roan Morgans in the late 1900's.

If for no other reason than sheer historical value, it is a shame to lose a color in any breed. We are fortunate that several colors, including gray and silver, were saved from almost certain extinction by the efforts of just a few breeders. Sadly, it looks as though roan may be one color that will not, barring some sort of spontaneous mutation (which has happened in other breeds, like the Thoroughbred), survive in the Morgan. Those who love roan will have to be content with roany sabino-like markings and rabicanos. To look on the bright side, we should be grateful that we have the variety of color that we do have in the breed. We might otherwise have a breed of all bays, blacks, browns and chestnuts— and that would be boring indeed!



*Left: The chestnut roan mare **Doll-Rose**, (Easter Vermont x Rosemont), foaled in 1964. She had only four offspring, of which only **Caduceus Herod** (above right) was known to have inherited her roan gene. Herod, by Wyoming Flyhawk, was foaled in 1987 and was Doll-Rose's last foal. A striking blue roan owned by Barbara Putnam, he won many awards in dressage through Prix St. Georges. Barbara also received her USDF Bronze and Silver medal with Herod. Left: The chestnut roan gelding **Rosemont's Red** (Easter Vermont x Rosemont), f. 1963, bred and owned by the Horsehoe Cattle Company, Loomis, CA. The chestnut mare behind him is Trixie Trix (Easter Vermont x Blossom F). It appears that another roan, perhaps Doll-Rose, is directly behind Rosemont's Red. Doll-Rose and Rosemont's Red photos courtesy of Joanne Curtis.*





DOUBLE J. CRUSADER, 2nd Stock Horse Class. Owned by Burnham S. Walker, Ashby, Mass. Ridden by Richard Cleveland, Lunenburg, Mass.



Roan descendants of Torchy include (top two pictures): **Double J Crusader** (Orcland Leader x Torchy), 1955 chestnut roan gelding; (middle, first picture) **Double J Step Aside** (Sunnyknoll's Showbiz x Double J Pepper), 1966 bay roan gelding; (middle, second picture) **Viv Lamae** (Double J Apollo x Carlyle La Mae), 1985 bay roan mare; and (bottom two pictures) **Double J Pepper** (Orcland Leader x Torchy), 1953 chestnut roan mare.



ROANS FROM THE PAST

Photos Courtesy of Renee Page

While working on her Brunk Historical CD, breed historian Renee Page found these old pictures among Doris Greenwalt's files. The mare is Blue Roan Mare, aka Bluebell or Bonnie Blue, shown in the first picture with her colt Skyhawk, by Flyhawk. Skyhawk was registered in Volume VI. His number is X-9818 and the registration says "Blue Roan foaled June 18, 1947. Bred by Sam Doak, Paris, Illinois", Blue Roan Mare, foaled in 1931, was by Sentiment and out of the bay roan Standardbred mare, Roany, by the chestnut roan Standardbred Baron Review.

The mare in the back of the first picture is Sentimental (Sentiment x Blue Roan Mare, by Sentiment) with Shadow Hawk as a foal.

Besides Sentimental and Skyhawk, Blue Roan Mare also produced the black stallion Black Jig, found in horses of Rimlo breeding. She has no roan descendants, as her only roan offspring, Skyhawk, did not breed on.

The second picture (above right) shows another view of Blue Roan Mare aka Bluebell.

