



East Texas Sketchbook



Southern Cross Morgans

Sailors of antiquity used celestial navigation to keep on course at sea. So it was fitting that Ric Walker, who has made the sea his career, and his wife Rhonda decided to name their East Texas farm after one of the most recognizable groupings of stars in the Southern Hemisphere.

But there's another parallel. It's the smallest constellation, he points out. Likewise, the Morgan horse is smaller than many other breeds, but has qualities that shine brighter.

"They're intelligent, athletic, docile, and people-oriented," he says. "They'll greet you at the gate."

Growing up near Sacramento, Calif., Ric had owned a Morgan mare. But sports, particularly swimming and surfing, dominated his interests as a teenager. He wanted to be a commercial diver. Right out of high school he joined the Navy SEALs, the special operations forces employed in direct action and special reconnaissance.

After four years of active duty, including one tour to Vietnam, he was honorably discharged and started to work for a diving company in Morgan City, La. Since 1989, he has been an independent diving and subsea operations consultant for major oil companies. His work has involved projects as far as 100 miles offshore and to depths of over 10,000 feet.

Ric travels about half of each year to such destinations as Trinidad; Russia; Nigeria; New Brunswick, Canada, and Qatar, U.A.E.

While living in Houston, he met Rhonda, a Tulsa native, through his cousin. They were married in 2000 and in 2003 settled into a log home on 10 acres of pines in Woodville, which they had discovered on a Sunday drive.

Three years later they moved to another log home on a more open 15-acre property near Mt. Enterprise in Nacogdoches County. "I like our neighbors, because there aren't any," jokes Ric.

Rhonda home-schools their 13-year-old son, Stephen, and manages the farm. "I'm just a hired hand!" Ric says.

Their land has room for the family's two palomino (pale golden and chocolate) stallions and seven mares.

Partial to the foundation bloodlines and to color, the Walkers are members of the Foundation Morgan Horse Society and the Rainbow Morgan Horse Association, as well as the Morgan Horse Club of Texas and the Heart of Texas Morgan Horse Club.

Described as "baroque" in type, the Foundation Morgan was popular in the late nineteenth century. They had compact bodies, substantial bone, deep quarters, oblique shoulders, a medium neck nicely crested, and a broad forehead with a soft eye and short ears. Foundation bloodlines have no Saddlebred outcrosses after 1930, and the male sire line must trace directly to Justin Morgan, the founding sire of the breed.

Gold Correll Chinook FD, the Walkers' golden palomino, was a halter champion at the 2006 Iowa State Fair and is an 80 percent-plus color producer. They call him "Prince" for his lordly demeanor. "He's the boy in town."

Joshua's C Diamond, the chocolate palomino, "looks like he rolled in ashes," says Ric. He has a much more mellow personality. A neglected herd sire, he had been rescued and rehabilitated by Winter Moon Morgans in Nebraska before the Walkers purchased him.

Both stallions will be standing to outside mares in 2010, for \$500 and \$400 respectively. Shipped semen will be available.

The farm currently has two yearlings for sale - Crux Morning Glory, a buckskin filly, and Crux John the Baptist, a palomino colt. (Crux, Latin for "cross," is the prefix name for Southern Cross-raised horses.)

The Walkers prefer driving and trail riding to the show circuit. Ric mainly rides Mantle's Magnolia Mist, a chestnut "bundle of chrome and flash." Rhonda's favorite is her long-awaited, recently-purchased smoky black mare, CFF Texas Tea.

They are considering participation as a family in Civil War re-enactments, such as the Battle of Port Jefferson, billed as the state's largest. Morgans, after all, served nobly in the War Between the States.

They haven't acquired the costumes yet, but Ric has a piece of "major hardware" - an 1848 Third Dragoon black-powder revolver. ★

For more information, call (903) 812-9000 or visit www.southerncrossmorgans.com.