

Letter Perfect: Morgans in Dressage

The Morgan offers dressage riders talent and an excellent disposition in a smaller, manageable package.



"Spring Hollow Destrier" and rider Pam Thompson were the First Level Champions at the 2001 Mid-Atlantic Morgan Regional Championships in 2001.

One *Silhouette* son, *Spring Hollow Destrier*, recently campaigned by trainer Pam Thompson in Pennsylvania, will be ridden by his amateur owner Gail Bowden this year. Bowden is an avid dressage enthusiast who attends DeKunffy clinics and trains with Paul Belasik, both well-known dressage professionals and authors. When she found *Destrie*, she says, "I was completely smitten." Bowden searched for a year and a half. She had competed with warmbloods, but after hurting her back was looking for a more comfortable ride. Her big horse was "huge and very difficult to handle," she says. "Everything he did was big and I felt so totally overhyped and also felt that,

after I got hurt on him, what I truly wanted in a horse and what was reasonable for an amateur like me to deal with was 16 hands, max. I wanted a versatile horse I could grow older with and one with smooth gaits."

She thought back to a Morgan mare she once had the chance to ride at her barn. "I hopped on her one day and she was so incredibly smooth and so forward," Bowden recalls. So she began her search using the Internet, and was surprised to find *Destrie* so close to home. "When I took him out for a test ride I was convinced he was the horse for me."

While she loves dressage, Bowden says, "I also love crosscountry jumping and would love to foxhunt *Destrie*,

and I'd love to drive him. How many horses can you buy that you can take to a dressage show one day, foxhunt, drive, or go to a hunter show the next? I don't want to be in the ring all of my riding sessions."

She credits *Destrie's* "huge personality" and being the "brightest bulb in the barn" for her ability to enjoy all facets of riding now, not just dressage. However, *Destrie* (shown by Pam Thompson) has already, at the age of seven, won the USDF Region 2 championship, was ranked the fourth-placed Morgan in the country at First Level by USA Equestrian, was First Level champion at the Mid-Atlantic Morgan Horse Show, and, in an open show (Dressage at Heavenly Waters), claimed first in qualifying First Level classes and tied another Morgan for fourth in two other classes, ending up as Reserve Champion. His scores are as high as 70 percent.

The spark he brings to the show ring comes from breeding, training, and the fact that "he has a bit of fire in him," says his owner. "I wouldn't call him a beginners horse, but even in his rankest moments I feel completely confident. He's such a sensible horse that he may dance around but I know he's going to come back and settle down. He has such a good mind and is very people-oriented. I don't really think of *Destrie* as a Morgan in dressage, I just think of him as a horse doing dressage. I haven't really defined him by his ability to do the sport as a Morgan, I just think good training is good training and a good horse is a good horse."