

# The MAGNIFICENT ARABIANS Debut at the Rolex Central Park Horse Show



By Patricia N. Saffran

**M**ark Bellissimo, CEO of Equestrian Sport Productions and International Equestrian Group LLC, and founder of the Rolex Central Park Horse Show, decided to add a new category this year. Besides top jumping and dressage classes that are already part of the show, now in its second successful year, he said, “It’s our goal to educate the public on the power and magic of horse sport, and introduce more disciplines to engage a broader audience.” Mr. Bellissimo’s wife, Katherine, told me that they were enthusiastic about hosting the U.S. Open Arabians, presented by Aljassimya Farm of Doha, Qatar. She explained, “As we wanted to include more breeds in the show, we contacted Chrystine Tauber, President of the United States Equestrian Foundation. Chrystine recommended that we feature and now we commit to The breed Park show on 2015. Competitor Ted Carson from North Carolina, commented, “I’ve been showing horses profes-

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sionally for 26 years now and this is the most amazing spot I have ever shown a horse in. To run out there with the first horse of the show was truly special. This is probably the best setting ever.” Mr. Carson went on to win two Gold, one Silver and two Bronze Championships Wednesday night.

There is a good reason to feature the well-liked Arabians, one of the most ancient breeds. After the domestication of wild horses by nomads in the grassy Eurasian steppes in 3,500 B.C.E., horses reached what are now Syria, Iran, and Iraq in the Near East about 1,000 years later. Horses next arrived in the Nile Delta 900 years later. Archeologist Curator, Sandra Olsen, of the University of Kansas says, “The horse doesn’t start to look Arabian until around 1,450 B.C.E., when Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III obtained them as war booty in chariot warfare against the Hittite people.” The first Arabian types went from a chariot horse to a riding horse to survive in the desert. The horses were prized then just as they are today for their beauty, athleticism, and endurance, the characteristics for which they have been bred. Arabians were used by Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Caligula, and many other leaders and armies in the distant past. During the Hijira (the spread of Islam) starting in 622 C.E. from the Arabian Peninsula, Muslim warriors rode what are now referred to as Arabian horses. About this time the horses came to be known as a breed. The warrior riders mounted on Arabians and Barbs, which have Arabian blood, fanned out across the Ancient Middle East, and later reached North Africa, and beyond to Spain. The Ottoman Turks from 1299 on traded for valuable Arabians and established stud



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farms to enable a continuous supply of warhorses. There already were famous stud farms in Egypt around this time, including one owned by the Sultan of Egypt. During the Third Crusade, at the Battle of Arsuf, Palestine, in 1191. Richard I of England (the Lionheart) defeated Saladin, Sultan of Egypt and Syria with 20,000 Crusaders versus 25,000 of Saladin’s Saracen forces of mostly light cavalry. What is notable is that many crusaders returned home with the spoils of war — spices, jewels and Arabian horses. Probably the largest battle involving the breed was the Siege of Vienna in 1529, when the Ottoman Turks under Suleiman the Magnificent failed to capture Vienna, Austria. They rode 400,000 horses that were mostly Arabians. Many were slaughtered, but after this siege, the breed came to be known in Europe with Poland and Russia becoming well-known breeding centers. At the Battle of the Pyramids in 1798, Napoleon deployed divisional squares fighting off of what was reported to be up to 20,000 mounted Mamelukes cavalry, of which likely the majority were Arabian horses. It was in Egypt that Napoleon became an aficionado of Arabians and imported them for his own mounts. At Waterloo, in 1815, Napoleon was mounted on an Arabian, and

Wellington was mounted on a part Arabian. During the British campaign in WWI, Lawrence of Arabia and King Faisal probably gathered as many as 100 tribes to join their initial forces in 1918 for the raid on Aqaba, so that Faisal’s effective forces may have numbered as high as 30,000 men, mounted on camels, horses and mules. Arabians were also involved on both sides in the Sinai, Palestine campaign, also in 1918, with the combined forces of about 20,000 of General Edmund Allenby against about the same number of Ottoman Turks cavalry. Apart from the historical importance of Arabians in warfare, the horses’ bloodlines also made an impact through trade and breeding. The imported three foundation Arabian stallions brought to England in the 18th century were vital in establishing the Thoroughbred. Arabian bloodlines may also be found in many other breeds including the Andalusian, Barb, Morgan, American Quarter Horse, American Saddlebred, Orlov Trotter, Percheron, and more.

Cynthia Richardson, President of the U.S. Arabian Horse Association, told me, “There are currently 85,000 U.S. members of the association that includes owners of pure breeds, half breeds and Anglo-Arabs. The breed book in the U.S. was started in 1908.” Ms.



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Richardson was very excited to have Arabians as part of the park horse show. She introduced me to some of the competitors who were in the show’s Wollman rink warming up the afternoon before the night’s competition. Ms. Richardson explained the popularity of the Arab and its conformation, with the gorgeous mahogany bay, Squeezebox, standing at attention close by, “When I go into the stable at night, after the horses have eaten, they come right over to be with me, they are so friendly, which is why they make such wonderful family horses. Or if they are in the field, they do not feel the need to be with the herd and some will also come over to me if I’m at the edge of the paddock. The Arabians have stamina, beauty, and strong bones. They are the foundation of all light breeds of horses ridden in the U.S. (Quarter horses, Saddlebreds, Thoroughbreds, etc.). The horses have large eyes set on the side of the head to give them better peripheral vision. They have larger hearts and lung capacity in portion to other horses. Their thin skin with veins close to the surface helps them to cool during exercise and in the hot desert sun. Their nostrils flare open to take in more oxygen. The fine throat latch allows more air to pass into the lungs. They are built to over stride (hind hooves reaching past the depression of the front hooves) allows for a very long stride and therefore, a conservation of energy over long distances, making them the ideal trail and distance horse. Their hooves are round, and of course they are light weight which also contributes to their ability to go long distances over the desert. The only problem with the horses in the desert is how to find water and food for them. The Bedouins solved this problem by having the horses travel with camels. The camels are milked and the milk along with dates provide the horses’ nourishment in the desert when grasses or grains are not available. The mares were traditionally kept in tents because they were considered more valuable, so stallions and colts were outside. In a storm, they turn their tails to the wind and gather together for protection. The mares were not just prized for breeding, but they were most attached to their owners and therefore more responsive during battle. Arabians over the generations in the desert were bred for their loyalty to their owners (just like any trait that you wish to continue such as straight legs) and that is why still today that show the tendency to want to be with people.” The Bedouins used them in desert warfare known as Ghazu. These were quick raids done in stealth where the



horses needed to accelerate and allow for bow and arrows to fly, and later rifle attacks, and then retreat in great haste.

The Rolex Central Park Horse Show featured Arabians in both mounted and halter classes. Gold, Silver and Bronze Champions were awarded in ten classes. Ms. Richardson explained how Arabians are judged, “When a class is a pleasure class, the judges are only adjudicating the horse. The Country English Pleasure Class [saddle-seat] was an Amateur to Ride class so the judging criteria are attitude, manners, performance, quality, conformation and suitability of horse to rider.” This class was won by Brooke Jarvis on Afire Star VF. The Silver Champion was New Yorker, Sally Wheeler-Maier on Captain Courageous PA, who said, “Usually you travel all over the country to show, but I only had to walk ten blocks carrying my show hat, and I had a lot of family and friends here cheering me on, which was an amazing feeling.” Like many children, she read *The Black Stallion*, and was so enthralled by this tale of an Arabian that she asked her father for a black Arabian horse, a wish that was granted. She has been showing Arabians ever since.

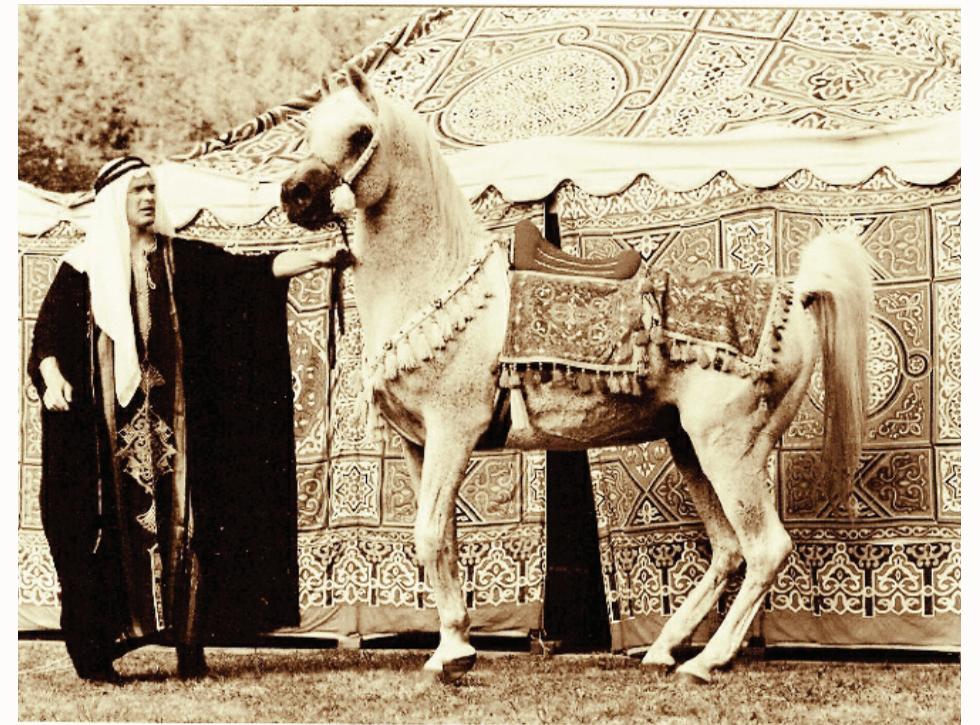
I asked Ms. Richardson if there was an attempt with the halter classes to show a horse’s spirit and were the handlers purposefully getting the horses excited? She replied, “Yes, our horses are very

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playful and like to show off so they are allowed to play a bit in the halter classes, yet they can come right back down to a quiet, loving horse. Arabians naturally like to strut and show off. For example, when they get turned out to play, they will often snort and blow, then put their heads down to graze. The stand up for the judges, a stand at attention pose, [and elongating their necks] is what we call ‘The Look of the Eagles’ — very majestic and of course, the opportunity for the judges to evaluate their conformation up close. As to the crowd pleasing Mounted Native Costume, it’s judged 75% on performance and manners plus 25% on the costume.”

After Ms. Richardson explained the horses’ conformation to me, I saw a competitor pick up the soft pink sand with its Geotextile mixed in and comment, “This is a best surface possible for the Arabians, and possibly the best in the world.” The surface, which is created by ESI (Equestrian Services International), was about to get even better for the evening competition. Brett Rafflowitz, President of ESI and General Manager, Britton Winter, were planning to redo the compacted sand that had been stored in Connecticut from last year. It was made harder by the equipment used to put in the bleachers and stands (once again supplied by the Nussli Group) They told me that the surface will be made “pillow top quality” for the Arabians that night. For each type of event during the following nights, the sand was to be groomed differently — a little firmer for the dressage horses and softer, for a softer landing, for the jumpers.

Sitting on the perimeter during the warmups, I found Bart Van Buggenhout, manager of the California branch of Aljassimya Farm, the presenting sponsor. Mr. Van Buggenhout told me that the California farm was in its 4th year. Previously, he had worked for 13 years as manager for Al Rayyan Farm in Qatar, one of the leading stud farms of straight Egyptian Arabian horses. He was intrigued by the offer from Sheikh Jassim bin Khalifa Al Thani to find a U.S. location for his serious commitment to breed his own show horses. They chose the Santa Ynez Valley, CA, known as “The Valley of the Arabian Horse” with five Arabian horse farms already there. Their goal was to increase the quality of breeding stock. Mr. Van Buggenhout explained, “It’s expensive to show Arabians at the top level, so many farms sell their best horses to support the rest on the Arabian farm, then there are less quality offspring left to produce better quality.” For the new Aljassimya farm, he bought breeding stock abroad. They share them with the other breeders nearby. Now, the farm wants more amateurs to show and be involved. They even



held a foal festival to stimulate the public and encourage breeders. Mr. Van Buggenhout told me that he was very happy with his breeding plan saying, “We chose well. Arabians take time to develop so we can tell more when they are six or seven years old. We don’t want to develop flashy stock that looks great in one year, but we want better bone structure, stamina and all the characteristics that are the best in Arabians. Our filly, at just one year old already won her class at the Arabian World Championships in Paris. We’re proud of her accomplishment.” As to the Central Park show, he said, “We’d like to stimulate more interest in Arabians in horse farms on the East Coast, so this is a great opportunity for us.”

Besides the U.S. Open Arabian classes, which emphasize quality riding horses or sound breeding capabilities, the breed has a practical side that may be seen in other sports and competitions. Actor/producer/reenactor and Arabian owner, Fritz Bronner says, “They are a wonderful, incredibly versatile sport horse that is capable of doing anything regarding disciplines and activities. Hunting, eventing, pulling, roping, driving, team penning, cutting, tenting, pegging, endurance, mounted shooting, and combat, to which my own Arabian horses have done most of these.”

For complete results of the U.S. Open Arabians, and for more information on other competitions, see [arabianhorseresults.com](http://arabianhorseresults.com) and for complete Rolex Central Park Horse Show results, see [cphs.coth.com/category/press-releases](http://cphs.coth.com/category/press-releases)

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Photos: page 22: Sally Wheeler-Maier and Captain Courageous PA accept Silver Champion Arabian Country English Pleasure from Cynthia Richardson, photo courtesy of Emma Maxwell; page 23, left: Petroglyphs of cavalymen and a camel, probably after 1,500 B.C.E., near Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, photo courtesy of Richard T. Byrant; right: Mary Elizabeth Kelly on Squeezebox, Bronze Champion Arabian Native Costume, photo courtesy of Emma Maxwell; page 24, top: Jalal Aljassimya, Gold Champion Arabian Yearling Colts, presented by Giacomo Capacci, photo courtesy of Emma Maxwell; bottom: Valentino’s Angel MI, Gold Champion Arabian Senior Mares Halter, presented by Andy Sellman, photo courtesy of Emma Maxwell; this page: Lawrence of Arabia, Marist College Archives for Lowell Thomas photos.