

ENDURANCE



WAHO

Awards the World of endurance in Compiègne

by Monika Savier ■ photos by Cidinha Franzao, Katharina Nagel-Osterndorff, Monika Savier

August 21, 2009, was the 4th time for The World Arabian Horse Organization to give the WAHO trophy to the highest placed purebred Arabian at the World Young Horse Endurance Championships in Compiègne, France. WAHO is the coordinating umbrella organisation of the national organisations charged with establishing and maintaining studbooks of purebred Arabians in over 70 countries of the world. We took the opportunity to go into the details of why endurance riding should be attracting so much attention with the responsible people at WAHO.

It is well known that Arabian horses are versatile all-rounders, horses with specific and distinctive traits to their breed, able to genetically improve other horse breeds highly specialised in sports. That way, they are in a roundabout way responsible for a lot of the high performance in top equestrian sports.

There is probably not a single horse breed in globalised equestrian sports that is without a distinct percentage of blood from the gene pool of the Arabian breed. Differently put, Arabian horses were the "materia prima" in Europe for centuries, improving cavalry horses in Royal and state studs, improving warm bloods for top sports, and even providing

the basis for new breeds with a high percentage of Arabian blood, such as Anglo Arabians, Shagya Arabians, or Trakehner horses.

Since endurance riding – marathon competitions with a distance of up to 160 km to be covered by a team of horse and rider – has been established, purebred Arabians with all their original traits have been much more in demand. Looking back on the history and development of this breed, there is no question left as to why this particular breed should have depended for their survival on their genetically consolidated capacity for long-term performance and for their will to survive – and why these traits should come in handy for endu-



Theodor Horschelt: Arabian mare in the desert, Munich, City Museum

rance riding. Daily life for people and animals in the desert of the Arabian Peninsula, the country of origin of Arabian horses, can be compared to performing extreme sports on a continuous basis. In this grim harsh environment, with no protection offered against extreme oscillations in climate, hunger, and other hardships of life in the desert, the horses were not only dependent on their own ability to adapt, but also on the humans protecting, feeding and watering them. In the course of centuries, this imbued the breed with a strong bond with humans. For their survival in this environment, the Bedouins roamed the vast deserts with their animals, constantly seeking feed and water – a continuous marathon at any season of the year that predestinated the desert hor-

ses for extreme feats of performance while negotiating those long distances over rock, sand, or gravel. The inhabitants of the inner deserts of the Arabian Peninsula were nomads, Bedouins fighting for their own survival. Owning a horse under these conditions was a luxury, not a necessity for everyday living, as it was camels who were uncomplicated in dealing with all the routine jobs of carrying loads and

The partnership between Arabs and their horses has been extensively expressed in arts and poetry.
Fresco, Esfahan, Iran, about 1600 AC.





riders. Camels, however, were “the slowness of being”, while horses satisfied the desire for speed, for domination over the vast expanses of land, for power and grandeur. Horses were without comparison for hunting, for ghazus (raids), for assaults and warlike action. How did the breed come to possess their incomparable qualities, however?

“Being nomads was a way of living that did not allow for selective breeding activities. Doubtlessly, nature took the part of the active selective agent. Humans and the creatures surrounding them just obeyed nature’s every whim... Humans could only react to nature; theirs was the adaptive part, not the active one.” (Nagel, Bremen 1998, p 55).

There is hardly doubt that horses were bred successfully on the Arabian peninsula even before the holy prophet Mohamed was born there in 570 AC. The founding of Islam, however, was a landmark in the history of this horse breed. It is not possible to discuss Islam without discussing the role of Arabian horses. What is more, a symbiosis was created between Islam and “his” horses.

“The prophet Mohamed was the first Arabian to support the cause of taking care of Arabian horses. With great zeal, he watched out for the horses to be taken good care of. He forbade people to introduce foreign blood, fearing to impede the pureness of blood maintained up to then, for he knew: once it was lost, it could not be brought back”. (Omar Abdel Aziz, Cairo, 1966)

On the other hand, it would have been impossible to spread the teachings of Islam in so short a time and even across continents if it had not been for the Bedouins with their fast horses. When Southern Europe was conquered by Arabian horse people in the early Middle Ages, the legacy for European royal houses was not only trembling respect, but they would frantically try and analyze the horses they had experienced, horses who covered those enormous distances without problems and even brought a side effect of improving the indigenous breeds of heavy horses during the years they spent in Europe.

Lessons learned: the cavalry units of Europe were in need of the Arabian horses, of their toughness and stamina, and of their bond with humans, as all of these were the basis for their successes in war. Innumerable purchasing expeditions into the Arabian countries provided the Arabians from the orient for the royal stables of Europe. When emperor Napoleon entered Russia for his war, he commanded a cavalry of 260,000 men mounted on horses, of which 1600 were Arabians. Napoleon’s personal adjutant, Count Lantivy, wrote in a letter to general Daumas:

“The Arabian horses endured exertion and hardships better than the European horses. After that brutal campaign in Russia, the emperor had almost only his Arabian horses left. The division General Hubert only succeeded in bringing a single one of his horses back to France – this one was an Arabian horse. Captain Simonneau only had his Arabian left in the end – and it was just the same with myself.” (Daumas, Paris 1855).



Albrecht Adam: Napoleon in Moscow with his Arabian stallion





There were even instructions issued to the cavalry on how to cover those tremendous distances with all their gear loaded onto their horses. They were meant to alternate between 7km at a walk and 7km at a slow canter. Trot was avoided in order to spare the horse's backs. In this context, the somewhat square build of Arabian horses is a distinct advantage, as they have a short back and will generally have no problem with bringing their hind legs under their bodies, more easily carrying the rider's weight than the long-backed warm bloods normally can.

However, it's not only morphology and the natural traits of Arabian horses such as frugality, toughness, stamina and quick regeneration that are pivotal when using Arabians for today's sport of endurance riding, predestining them for long-

distance work and rendering them almost without match for that. It's particularly their symbiotic relationship with people that Arabians have been imbued with for centuries and that is instrumental not only for warfare, but is also a "winning point" in today's sport of endurance riding. Relating to people is what earned Arabian horses the reputation of being "one (wo)man horses". Genetically consolidated, Arabians will closely relate with the people they are in contact with, eagerly willing to perform at top level for their riders. There are innumerable stories illustrating this point (refer to the collection of the Asil Club, for example). Their patience and

The WAHO delegation visiting Syria in 2007. Even today, the Aneze Bedouins breed and train their Arabian horses the way their ancestors did.



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gentleness, affection, courage and fearlessness are their best traits, but however, they will only display them with people they know and respect. They can instantly behave the other way round, for example when they lose the person they used to attach to and are treated as an animal that doesn't matter, such as in the show circus. Resistance towards an unsympathetic handler who the horse either fears or mistrusts results in behaviour that unfortunately can be observed at some halter shows, and is readily recognized even by the amateur spectator through the body language of the tense, trembling or even aggressive horse, giving the clear impression the horse just wants to turn its back and flee. Such behaviour in the desert would have meant the certain death of the abandoned human, with no means to reach safety without his horse if it runs away from him. Harsh riding can also destroy an Arabian's trust in the rider.

Like no other breed, Arabians will register everything in their surroundings and will take a distinct stand towards the persons around them – and that stand can be from a negative or a positive relationship. This is, however, where the rider gets his chance for the long distance ride. No matter whether the ride is about a Bedouin ghazu, a flight or a war attack, or a 160 km course through the forests of Compiègne – what matters is the relationship between horse and rider as the pivotal factor for survival or victory.

With their analysis and coordination and with closing the existing studbooks, WAHO has accomplished an important contribution towards preserving the Arabian breed in more than 70 countries around the globe. Now, according to their statutes, WAHO takes care for promoting, preservation and protection of these horses.

Part of this promotion is a particular emphasis on fields in



WAHO-Race in the desert of Oman.

Daily life for people and animals in the desert of the Arabian Peninsula, the country of origin of Arabian horses, can be compared to performing extreme sports on a continuous basis.

which these horses are capable of a high performance in open competition with all other breeds, because of the original traits of the Arabian breed. Endurance riding, which has been recognized as an equestrian sport for decades, has recently become extremely popular in many countries of the world, such as France, Qatar, Malaysia, or the USA. And horses need a lot of exercise and some challenge in order to stay healthy and authentic, it is the same with people, and that's a good match for this sport.

Desert Heritage asked WAHO president Dr. Hans Nagel about WAHO's involvement in endurance riding, as demonstrated on the occasion of the World Championships in Compiègne, France:

"Well occupied with ensuring the correct registration of every purebred horse in the world in their WAHO-





acknowledged studbooks, WAHO also recognises promotion and propagation of the Arabian horse as one of their most prominent tasks. Breeding shows and today's show events have long been the most important showcase of the Arabian breed, displaying these horses in all their beauty and their unique, attractive disposition. In addition, history tells us that Arabian horses surpassed every other breed with their will to perform and their stamina.

These were the horses that wars were won with, and with all of their traits and characteristics, these are the horses that have become the improvers for almost every other horse breed in existence.

Today's sport of endurance riding is an expression of the extraordinary characteristics Arabian horses are born with. That's why it is an interesting task for WAHO to put particular emphasis on this high-performance sport, which lends itself for giving proof of the abilities of Arabian horses today and for comparing them to other breeds.

As an expression of their involvement, WAHO has taken over patronage of the endurance event for horses 7 and 8 years old, in Compiègne in France. Thorough monitoring and scrutiny established that such races are excellently organised there. The premises and local conditions are outstanding, and standards for the well-being and care of the participating horses are observed precisely.

This is why WAHO considers the yearly Compiègne event an



Dr. Hans Nagel and his daughter Katharina



From the left: Claudia Caraballo De Quentin breeder and member of the WAHO Board, Argentina and Cidinha Franzao, Equestrian Journalist, Brazil

exemplary event, providing excellent orientation for member countries of WAHO who are interested in organising similar sports events."

We also asked Mrs. Claudia Caraballo De Quentin, Argentina, a breeder of Arabian horses and member of the WAHO Executive Committee: what's the role of WAHO in connection with endurance racing?

"The best way of promoting the Arabian horse is to show the world that the Arabian breed is the fastest and the best choice for the sport of endurance. It is fascinating to see how endurance has become popular all over the globe!

Although the first endurance race was the Tevis Cup in the US it is well known that France is the "home of endurance", with many calling it the "University of endurance". In France, they have developed a new concept for this sport, and the rest of the world is following suit. This is the reason why WAHO has chosen Compiègne!

An important way to promote the Arabian horse is through the WAHO Trophy as it underlines that we prize those who preserve the integrity of the Arabian horse. The WAHO Trophy should be also awarded to the winners of the Endurance World Championships around the world because by doing so we can demonstrate that Arabian horses can race in the desert, in the forest, in rocky mountains and in the plains".

Xavier Guibert, WAHO Executive Committee member, explained how WAHO's association with this event came about:

Left to right: Christian Depuille (Compiègne World Young Horse Endurance Championships Organizer) Howard Pike (USA) WAHO EC Consultant Peter Pond (Australia) WAHO Vice President.

Winner: the pure Arabian mare Orette de Tanues, ridden by Qatari Faleh Nasser Saleh Abugaim Hans Nagel (Germany) Waho President Bob Fauls (USA) WAHO EC member Claudia Quentin (Argentina) WAHO EC member Annette Hedley (UK) WAHO EC member.





First Place and title of World Champion 7 Years old and the WAHO Trophy went to the bay arabian mare Orette de Tanues, owned by Al Shaqab Stud , ridden by Faleh Nasser Saleh Abugnaim, from Qatar.

“From the beginning, the main goals of WAHO were the promotion of the specific traits of our breed, which are for example beauty, intelligence and endurance, and also of animal welfare. In this area, regarding animal welfare, about 10 or 12 years ago the International Equestrian Federation (F.E.I.) started to organise specific Championships for Young Horses within the various Olympic disciplines. So there is a show jumping championship for young horses in Lanaken in Belgium; one for dressage in Verden in Germany; and for eventing at Le Vieux Logis in France. These competitions are completely specific for young horses, in order to preserve their health and their career.

The reason why it was proposed that WAHO should be the umbrella organisation for this F.E.I. Championship is because endurance is the only discipline where our breed can compete and can win against all the other breeds. In other disciplines such as show jumping and eventing and dressage, the other breeds have been selectively bred for these sports and they normally win against any Arabians taking part, but in endurance at every competition all over the world, every year the Arabians are in the top 10 and normally they win. So that’s why we think that this is a good opportunity for WAHO as this is the best discipline for the promotion of our breed.” (WAHO Oman Conference, February 2009).

In 1852, Abbas Pasha addressed Baron von Hügel, the stable master of the German King Wilhelm I, after von Hügel had purchased a number of Arabian horses during an auction in Cairo. Abbas Pasha I is reported to have said:

“I do believe that you have succeeded in purchasing noble Arabian horses, but I do not believe that you will be able to continue to breed Arabian horses from them, for an Arabian horse is an Arabian horse only as long as he can breathe the air of the desert” (according to E. Schiele, Munich 1975, p. 214).

With their activities, WAHO aim to preserve Arabian horses as “citizens of the world”, preventing degeneration by promoting sports use of Arabians – last but not least in hopes that Abbas Pasha I might be proven wrong, after all. □



The Second place went to the French rider Virginie Atger, riding the arabian gelding Azim du Florival. Third place, just 1 second behind in an exiting gallop finish was taken by the German rider Sabrina Arnold, ridding the chestnut arabian mare Hotspur Quarra. They finished with an average speed of 21 kph on the 130 km ride!

For more information, please visit the websites:

www.waho.org

www.compiegne-endurance.com

www.enduranceworldonline.com

Other interesting websites suggested by the WAHO office

<http://www.enduranceworldonline.com>

http://www.fei.org/Disciplines/Endurance/About_Endurance/Pages/What_Is_Endurance.aspx

<http://www.lrgaf.org/journeys/300-miles.htm>

http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9A05E2D81038EE32A25753C2A9669D946896D6Chttp://endurancewaikato.homestead.com/Kilometers_Awards_etc.html \o

<http://ezinearticles.com/?The-Australian-Colonial-Arabian-Horse-and-Endurance-Riding&id=2078251> \o

useful basic information here:

<http://hubpages.com/hub/An-Introduction-on-Endurance-Horseback-Riding> \o

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Munich 1972

Thanks to the Asil Club and Dr. Olms for the kind concession to publish the historical pictures taken from the ASIL BOOK Vol. III