

How Arabian Sport Horses Are Changing the Game

February 3, 2015 Lorraine Jackson Lorraine Jackson #Arabians Leave a comment

Anything you can do I can do better. In the sand dunes.
Without water for six days.

What originally began as a discussion on Facebook among Arabian sport horse enthusiasts has quickly turned into a full magazine and a burgeoning organization: [The Arabian Sport Horse Alliance](#). While many people might hear “Arabians” and think instantly of the 100 mile endurance horses or the shiny stallions posed like dolls at Scottsdale, there is a growing demand for Arabians and half-Arabians in the sport horse world. ASHA is out to support and promote that diversity at a whole new level.

According to the ASHA committee members (who answered collectively for this story through an online Q&A), “The group’s members represent the full range of sport horse disciplines and venues including dressage, eventing, show jumping, working hunters, combined driving, driven dressage, and endurance at all levels of competition. We have breeders who are breeding purebred Arabians, Shagya Arabians, Anglo-Arabians, as well as breeders who are involved with various Warmblood and sport pony registries.”



JAG Royal Knight (Hunters) Registered Half Arabian and Half Welsh Pony

Owner and Breeder: Kathy Gilker of JAG Arabians (Alpharetta, GA) Exhibitor: Anna Tootle Trainer: Karen Boysen of Centurion Farm (Holly Springs, GA). Photo by Jessica Gillker

Bridging the Gap

The Alliance bridges a rather incredible gap between two very different worlds: The huge variety of sport horse disciplines, and the Arabian breed show folks (also known as the “Main Ring”) which features halter, pleasure classes, show hack, and other traditional rail classes. They support those who are out showing in the open-breed disciplines, and also the growing wing of events within the Arabian community just for sport horses, such as the annual Arabian Sport Horse Nationals.



Example of a Sport Horse and “Main Ring” crossover horse: Black Magyk+ Purebred Arabian Gelding (Sport Horse in Hand, Sport Horse Under Saddle, Dressage, Western Dressage, Main Ring Halter & Main Ring Hunter Pleasure) Shown by Clint & Mikayla Voris, Christa Voirol, and Victoria von Uhl. Owned by Voris Family. Photo courtesy of Mystic Valley Arabians

That bridge is not always an easy one to cross, but the ASHA has made it a primary mission to share the benefits of branching out from the main ring. “The Alliance’s approach to communicating with the traditional Arabian breed show community is to welcome their interest and educate them on what the sport disciplines have to offer,” offered the ASHA Committee. “There are many participants in the AHA Sport Horse in Hand and Sport Horse Under Saddle classes who are traditional breed show exhibitors seeking an alternative to the breed show halter and rail classes. Our hope is that they will discover the opportunities that exist in the sport disciplines to continually challenge themselves as they develop their horse up the levels in whichever sport suits them and their horse.”

Promoting Arabians Among the Disciplines

For those who are out in the open-breed disciplines, the mission is to promote Arabians and the unique qualities they add not only to the sport, but the potential breeding pool. “Intelligence and heart, stamina, agility, responsiveness, longevity of soundness, and athleticism merged with elegance are all valuable qualities that Arabian lineage contributes to the sport horse disciplines. The willingness of mind and joyful partnership that Arabian-bred sport horses offer is perhaps the aspect that is not as commonly known.”



DA Just Push Play+ competing In-Hand at Devon in 2014. (Dressage and Dressage Sport Horse Breeding, Open Circuit) 3/4 Arabian, 1/4 Hackney Horse. Owned and Exhibited by Jacqueline D. Scott. Photo courtesy of Jodie Robbins, Pumpkin Run Photography

While integrating Arabian blood into the racing, military, and sport horse lines is a centuries-old tradition going back to the Godolphin Arabian and beyond, there was a stretch through the 20th century where Arabian breeding was more focused on meeting the standards of the Arabian show world alone, and sport horse Arabian breeding was only happening in the margins. “As an independent organization, the Arabian Sport Horse Alliance will be able to function as a liaison between Arabian sport horse breeders and the sport horse registries,” says the ASHA. They also plan to recognize and support horses with Arabian blood that fall outside the regulations for Arabs and Half-Arabs in the traditional sense, but are still out promoting the breed and the crosses within their respective sport.



GA Ehstaire (2nd/3rd Level Dressage). Purebred Arabian gelding, owned and ridden by Janet Bellows, Bred by Denise and Robert Gainey. Photo courtesy of Janet Bellows

The Up and Comers

With the growing popularity of Arab sport horse events and the use of Arabians, Half-Arabians, and Anglo-Arabians in the open disciplines, a whole new generation of Arabian sport horses are staking their claim in the pinnacle of sport. “The result is that the caliber of horses being produced with capabilities for sport performance is rising.”

Vermiculus and Lauren Kieffer (Eventing)



Lauren Kieffer and Vermiculus. Photo by Brant Gamma Photos, courtesy of Lauren Kieffer.

2014 USEA Lady Rider of the Year Lauren Keiffer has long been an advocate of Anglo-Arabians (a breed constituted of Arabian and Thoroughbred lineage) ever since she moved up the levels and completed her first 4* with Snooze Alarm in 2010. She's now got an exciting prospect in Snooze Alarm's full sibling, Vermiculus (owned by Jacqueline Mars), and the promising 8-year-old gelding completed his first CIC2* this past September.

Aleros and Hilda Gurney (Dressage)



Aleros, Arabian stallion owned by Barbara Parkening ridden by Hilda Gurney. Photo by and courtesy of Barbara Bella

Former Olympian Dressage Queen and USDF Hall of Famer Hilda Gurney is making great waves at the Grand Prix level with her purebred stallion Aleros, who recently placed third in the Region 7 Freestyle Grand Prix Championship. Hilda notes in particular that his piaffe and passage are “just outstanding”.

Marjas Becker and Ariella ASI / Beth Steinke and Miss Josephine (Combined Driving)



Miss Josephine – Arabian/Morgan owned by Beth Steinke. Photo courtesy of Suzy Stafford

Combined driving is a discipline where Arabian-bred horses have often excelled; currently Marjas Becker and her Ariella ASI are competing successfully at Intermediate level and ASHA member Beth Steinke and her mare Miss Josephine are competing in pairs and singles on the CDE circuit.

Kristin Hardin and Ability (Show Jumping)

Ability, Arabian/KWPN owned by Gregg & Nancy Shaffer, ridden by Kristin Hardin. Photo by Captured Moment Photography

Known best for her feisty partner Grand Prix Jumper partner Bert, one of Kristin's other beloved mounts is a Half-Arabian mare named Ability, a consistent winner in the 1.10 m jumpers. The pair has been sweeping up the past three years on the open circuit, and are Canadian and US National Champion Jumpers at the Arabian shows, including a big win in the Gambler's Choice class at Scottsdale in 2013.



Oration (Working Hunters)

Originally bred for the racetrack, Oration was imported from France, and has been a “superstar” at the breed show hunter circuit for years; quite the opposite life his breeders had intended! After repeated championship and high point wins at Arabian Sport Horse Nationals, he is now dabbling in the open hunter circuit with great success. He

was named Arabian Sport Horse of the Year in 2013, and was recently made the newest Breyer Horse model and 2015 festival guest.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwa2mkMWHZQ>



Athena (Dressage and Paradressage)

Athena, Anglo Arabian owned & ridden by Rita Mason. Photo by Tamara Torti

Athena, an Anglo-Arabian mare who attained Grand Prix level and a USDF Gold Medal with her amateur owner, Rita Mason, recently served as a para-equestrian mount for a young rider who qualified for the WEG, was shown by several very young intro-level riders, and is now helping another adult amateur rider work towards her USDF Bronze Medal.

Zee De Man (Dressage)



Zee the Man, owned by Laura Hinson. Photo by Tess

Started as a reining/cutting horse, Zee found his niche as a 9-year-old in dressage. Less than a year after his first training session in the sandbox, he debuted at 3rd Level and won his stakes class. In 2012, his rider got her Silver Medal on Zee in his first three Prix St. George tests! That same year, he was named 2012 FEI USEF Arabian Horse of the Year. After taking a year off to work cows (!!!), he is now helping talented young Junior Riders earn their medals and find their way in the big levels like the schoolmaster he is.

Facing the Future

In coming years, the ASHA will face the same challenges that all equestrian sports seem to be facing: baby boomers aging out, and the younger generation is entering at a lower rate. But the Alliance is very determined to continue building enthusiasm from all directions, and keep the excitement growing with horses who make wonderful partners in the sport of your choice and at whatever level you start and end. "Since attracting new riders is essential to the horse industry, we recognize the value of offering Arabian-bred horses across the sport disciplines, across registries, and at all levels of participation."

Committee members enthusiastically added, "The Arabian Sport Horse Alliance is poised to help meet the challenges ahead!"



Caraechstrodinair (In-Hand and Dressage to 2nd Level) Hanoverian-approved Arabian mare. Owned and exhibited by Tamara Torti. Photo courtesy of Tamara Torti

AAA Legend of the Seas (14.2 Hand and Under: Working Hunter, Hunter Hack) Purebred Arabian gelding. Owned by Kobe Pielow and Sari Bolnick, ridden by Haley Korejwo. Photo by Done Stine



Eros Galaldoniaa (Dressage, Hunter Pleasure, and Sport Horse in Hand) Arabian/Hackney cross. Ridden by Jennifer Smith, owned by Keystone Equestrian. Photo courtesy of Jennifer Smith



Aroze to Nobility (Dressage), purebred Egyptian Arabian. Owned and Shown by Angela White. Photo by Tracy Kelsey



Kaiserin (Working Hunter and Dressage), Half-Arabian Trakehner mare. Owned, Ridden AND Trained by Courtney Percival. Photo by Jay Goss



CJA Debbonheir+ (Dressage 1st and 2nd levels and Sport Horse Show Hack), purebred polish and CMK Arabian. Owner, Adult Amateur Rider, AND Trainer is Jodi Reynolds. Photo by Blue Moon Studios



Aurora MR+++// (Dressage Int. II; Open and Breed Shows), purebred Arabian mare. Owned by James and Karen Ernst and ridden by Danielle Casalett

Go Arabians.