

The European Amateur Cup &

Aljassimya Amateur Challenge

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The Arabian horse has been popular throughout Europe for centuries. Early importations of desert horses by European royalty and aristocrats were all the rage in the late 1800s and early 1900s. However today, the Arabian horse is not just for royalty. Everyone can enjoy these beautiful, kind, intelligent, and athletic horses. Recently, a group of devoted Arabian horse owners came together to create the European Amateur Cup – a one of a kind event in Europe.



“Every successful sport must provide a high level of professionalism. However, on the other side, for every one professional, 10 to 20 amateurs must be enjoying it as a leisure activity. If this would not be, then how could you expect to fill up a football stadium?”

In our Arabian horse industry, especially the halter world, those numbers are not in balance! Aljassimya Farm is dedicated to assist in trying to get those numbers back in balance. This will result in an extra market for those horses that are not competitive in the highest leagues of the show ring. Furthermore, we try to give young people the chance to start somewhere and build themselves up over time in a less competitive way and maybe find the experience and passion to become a professional.”

Bart Van Buggenhout



A Fun & Rewarding New Concept:

According to the President of the European Amateur Cup Show Organization Team, Rob Rens, “The main goal is to offer a platform for all Arabian horse owners in Europe to come together, meet people with the same interest, and enjoy their horses together. We created the Amateur Cup to meet the request of many to have a show with fair rules and fair competition on an entry level with non-professional handlers. Horses are shown in hand and in performance classes. The promotion of the universal use of an Arabian horse, as a pet, family member, friend, show horse, ridden companion

is very important to all of us. We hope to be able to show the versatility of these horses and their kind nature to all participants, sponsors, and visitors.”

It was a positive idea and worth trying. Rens continues, “The Amateur Cup started in 2014 and the first event was held in April. Then, in 2015, we had three Amateur Cup shows: the European Amateur Cup Spring Edition in April, the Emerald Cup in July, and the European Amateur Cup Fall Edition in September. The number of participants at these shows confirms that the interest in amateur shows is growing rapidly.



“The EAC is a great idea. The generous support of AJF will inspire others to join us and help us to create a completely new circuit in Europe. Already after these few shows in Belgium, some of the amateurs have been approached by professionals to join their teams, whether as a groom or assistant-trainer. This is good progress and hopefully, we will be able to “create” new professional handlers with a good mentality towards our beloved breed. The future looks promising. Thumbs up!”

Ronny Vosch & Marleen Geysen





“Amateurs are an important part of the market that should not be ignored, yet their contributions had been overlooked for way too long. After all, they are the foundation of the breed and, certainly in Europe, there are far more amateur breeders than big professional stud farms. Stijn Schyvens, one of the organizers of the European Amateur Cup, had worked for Bart Van Buggenhout, the Manager of Aljassimya Farm, owned by Sheikh Jassim Bin Khalifa Al Thani, so from the beginning there was a direct link between Aljassimya Farm and the European Amateur Cup. “We were very honored that Aljassimya Farm and Sheikh Jassim showed an immediate interest in supporting the Amateur Cup. Bart Van Buggenhout, who represented Sheikh Jassim, agreed that our program could add an extra exciting element to the European show scene and bring back the atmosphere and enthusiasm that could be found at shows in the past. They recognize the value of amateurs for



our breed and so they created the Aljassimya Amateur Challenge, a program that supports the Amateur Cup and rewards amateur handlers. The Amateur Challenge has been very successful in achieving our goals and bringing a lot of attention to the Amateur Cup.

“In 2015, Aljassimya Farm sponsored the first Amateur Challenge at our Amateur Cup shows. They generously offered our participants the possibility to win tickets to the Arabian Horse World Championships in Paris through the merits of their efforts at the shows. There were a limited number of tickets to win and so at every show, the top five or ten “best handlers” became eligible, based on their results at that particular show. This created extra excitement for our amateurs and was a huge bonus to the enjoyment they had competing with their horses.”

Amateur Cup Official Information:

The European Amateur Cup is recognized by ECAHO, the official governing body in Europe and so the organization follows the ECAHO rules regarding Amateur Classes and Show Conditions of Entry, as well as their criteria for handlers to be eligible to compete in Amateur Classes. Following the rules already set by ECAHO, creates clearly defined parameters, as well as a fair and level playing field for all participants, which is of paramount importance to all who compete.

The European Amateur Cup has created three clearly defined rankings for amateur handlers participating in their classes - Novice, Amateur, and Overqualified - as well as guidelines for advancing through groups.

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I work as a groom with Arabian horses at Jadem Arabians for Christine Jamar. This year, I participated at the European Amateur Cup for Arabian Horses in Lier. I had no idea I won a ticket to Paris. When Bart Beckers told me I had won, I couldn't believe it!

The European Amateur Cup is such a great thing to experience! We should support it in every way we can. It brings people closer to their horses and each other. There is such a relaxed atmosphere at the show. It's just you, your horse, and your friends enjoying each others' company and having fun!! That's what it's all about.

"I would like to say "Thank You" to everyone involved with organizing these great Amateur Shows and to encourage them to keep it up! It's such a great initiative. I hope more and more people will see it and will join the group of amateur handlers!"

Joyce Rosowski



Novice Handlers: The term Novice means non-professional, inexperienced handlers who have never won either: 3 times best Novice in show, a class winner in Amateur classes, a class winner in Over Qualified or any show including a C-show or higher. A novice handler who has won Best in Show three times is promoted to the level of Amateur classes or Over Qualified classes.

Amateur Handlers: These are non-professional handlers with some show experience, who have not received payment from a third party to show horses. Handlers who have won titles in a C-show are considered Amateur handlers. Winners in high level shows are considered professional and excluded from participation. Owners who have an ECAHO permit and only have shown their own horses can participate in Amateur Classes.



Over Qualified Handlers: These are handlers who have had several wins already in the amateur shows. Every handler starts at Novice level more or less then by wins collects points and grows through the 3 levels over the years they are showing. Over Qualified Classes are open to all Amateur handlers.

The European Amateur Cup also follows the ECAHO Entry Restrictions for horses. Again, the point is to create an opportunity for amateurs to participate in a fair competition and a fun experience with their Arabian horses. All of these rules and regulations can be found in the ECAHO Blue Book, which is available on their website, as well as the European Amateur Cup website under the title of “Downloads.”

Rob Rens explained how the Amateur Cup Classes are judged, which is different from Open or Professional Classes. “Our Amateur Cup shows are officially recognized by ECAHO and so they are judged on the same basis as the regular European shows and are all judged by ECAHO-listed judges. The biggest difference with other shows is the fact that our judges give seven points instead of the regular five points. In addition to the points for type, head and neck, body and topline, legs and movement, we’ve added two extra categories: harmony and presentation. The point for harmony is based on the relation between handler and horse: is there mutual respect, how gently does the handler act, etc. Presentation includes the technical part: is the stand-up performed well, does the handler walk on a straight line with the horse, is there a fluent trot without excessive



circling, etc. We hope that by adding these points we will encourage our amateur handlers to work even more with their horses and we want to make it clear that just having a pretty horse will not be sufficient to win.”

Sharing Our Passion for Arabian Horses:

The European Amateur Cup is primarily a platform for competition. However, it is so much more for those who participate. All their hours of taking lessons, working with their horses, practicing, grooming, planning and dreaming creates a bond unlike any other. For some, it is a very special way to spend quality time with their family and to follow the saying, “The family who plays together, stays together.” For others, participating in the European Amateur Cup is the beginning of a new dream for their life and for a very lucky group of amateurs it also provided a thrilling surprise and the experience of a lifetime.



In November of 2015, a group of over 50 people were the guests of Sheikh Jassim Bin Khalifa Al Thani and Aljassimya Farm, who provided a trip to Paris and the 2015 Arabian Horse World Championships. Aljassimya Farm Manager, Bart Van Buggenhout, organized and managed every detail of the trip for the winners of the European Amateur Challenge. The people were all picked up in a luxury coach and whisked away for a weekend of fun, excitement, and glorious Arabian horses. Everyone in the group received a “swag bag” full of fun items, as well as a gorgeous personalized white team jacket. When they arrived in Paris, they were treated to first class accommodations at the beautiful Mercure Hotel, which was just a short coach ride

to the show grounds. Although the travel time was relatively short, it gave members of the group a chance to visit and get to know each other better and to share their experiences with their horses and the Amateur Cup. As the group arrived at the show each day, they enjoyed wonderful hospitality at the Aljassimya Farm booth. Then, they all made their way to their reserved seats in the main arena to see the best Arabian horses in the world compete and to witness history in the making. The grand finale came on Sunday, after the high drama of the championship classes where the judges selected their Gold, Silver, and Bronze Champions. The show may have ended, but the excitement continued as the Amateur Challenge group gathered



at the Aljassimya booth one last time. It was time to draw the Grand Prize – a trip to visit Aljassimya Farm in Santa Ynez, California. Sheikh Jassim was there to personally assist in drawing the winning numbers.

The lucky winners include: Lore Beckers, Jannes Prins, Michèle Boelen, Ronny Vosch, Liesbet D'joos and Remco Vander Vliet. Their cheers of delight could be heard throughout the exhibition hall. For many of the amateurs attending the Salon du Cheval for the Arabian World Championships it was a dream come true and for the winners of the California trip, it is an opportunity of a lifetime. After countless congratulations and heartfelt thanks to Sheikh Jassim and his Aljassimya team, the group boarded their luxury coach for the ride back to Belgium, their homes and their beloved Arabian horses.

Future Plans For Growth & Improvements:

When a dream of a lifetime is fulfilled, what comes next?



We create new dreams, find new horses, make new friends, and set new goals. What are the plans for the European Amateur Cup and the Amateur Challenge in 2016?

Bart Van Buggenhout explained the efforts that are already underway to grow and improve the EAC and Aljassimya Amateur Challenge. “We now have a created a Show Board of Directors. They worked together to formulate a plan and to make a consensus for one standardized set of rules and guidelines, and to bring the concept for Amateur competition to more shows throughout Europe. This information, along with a proposal for sponsorships, which include ribbons, trophies and standardized advertising packages, was sent to selected show organizers. The results were very positive. The 2016 show season promises to be very exciting; now there will be shows in Bel-

gium, Holland and Germany that will also include Amateur Cup Classes and that will be included in the Aljassimya Amateur Challenge. In addition, we are also working to add classes in Amateur Trail In Hand and Performance classes in Western, Hunter and Classic disciplines. So now there will be something for everyone, on every level, to enjoy.

”We are happy to see that interest in the Amateur Cup is growing and this year the Challenge will be even bigger. The basic conditions will remain the same and amateur handlers will be able to earn points in different experience levels at each show, based on their ranking in each class. We are working to encourage amateurs by rewarding their efforts with their horses. Through this program, there is a welcoming place to begin. In the Novice category there is absolutely no pressure on them –

“I showed the purebred Arabian Gelding, Postar (Om El Bellissimo x Pomerania) at the 2015 Emerald Cup in Brecht. We won the Open Gelding Class and became Best in Show Amateur in Brecht 2015. I also won the ticket to Paris. I enjoyed the group in Paris a lot. The atmosphere was very relaxed and nice. The highlight of the weekend was seeing the championship classes of the show, when all the best horses came back into the show ring. I would like to thank Aljassimya Farm for their efforts for putting it all together.”

Marwen Ben Nasr

“The sponsors of the Amateur Challenge, Aljassimya Farm, certainly deserve a big thumbs up because supporting a non-profit event is not an obvious way to help to grow the breed. In the future, I believe this will be create a new market for the smaller breeders, also it makes it easier to get horses sold to people who are interested in participating in shows and with Arabian horses.”

**Jurgen Lievrouw,
Sixtus Arabians**

“In 2015, I showed a mare, owned by Flaxman Arabians, named Redwood Lodge Odessa Estopa (Om el Abadan x Malikah Estopa). I am very proud that I won the mare class with her and I also won the trip to Paris at the show in Brecht.

We had a nice group in the bus and a lot of fun. I spent a lot of time with my friend Koen Hennekens and his friend Jerom van der Griend. We enjoyed sitting in the grandstand at the show ring; waving flags, and cheering when the Aljassimya horses entered.

I still want to continue to learn to be a better handler in the future and the EAC gives me the opportunity to do so between my friends and not in a group of professionals. It gives a bit more excitement and more competitors at different shows. It is a very good initiative with good thinking behind all the classes. I am looking forward to starting again in 2016. Also, I want to be on the bus again!!!”

Niels Wilms

“The EAC has really enhanced my experience with my horse. The connection between me and my horse got so much stronger. It was so special to see how much she trusted me at the show and how she really wanted to do her best. I think the program has influenced the Arabian horse community in Europe a lot. It gives people like us, who are not long yet in the Arabian world, or are small breeders, the opportunity to participate at a show that is less expensive than the other shows. It's also so nice that we get feedback from the jury after showing our horse, so we can really learn from the experience. I think this is a super good organization and I hope it's the start of a lot of shows like this.

This was the first time we went to the World Championships and it was a great experience. Everything was organized so very well and we got to know the group much better. Throughout the whole weekend, there was a very nice 'connection' between our group. It was an unforgettable time! The best moment in Paris was the ticket selection, when we met Sheikh Jassim. I really want to thank Aljassimya for this great opportunity.”

**Maaïke Vanderhaegen &
Ruben Van de Moortele,
Al Sharif Stables**

“I was born and raised at our farm called Flaxman Arabians. I participated in amateur classes in 2014, and in 2015, I participated at the Emerald Trophy Amateur Cup in Brecht. I won the trip to Paris with my yearling colt Fa Mikhail. I was very happy and excited that I was allowed to go to Paris. The trip and the group were very nice. The whole atmosphere was amazing. I enjoyed it very much. One of the best parts was cheering for Jalal Aljassimya and for Om el Aisha Aljassimya when Giacomo trotted them into the class.

“I have had lessons in show training from our resident trainer, Peter Wilms, and I want to improve my skills more and more. The program is a positive thing and I think it will attract new talent into this world of showing. The Novice class is a very positive thing for newcomers to start in. It is fantastic now that they are setting up a whole tour in Europe to participate in EAC in different countries.”

Koen Hennekens



only a fun opportunity to compete with their horse. If they are successful in showing their horse and earn a limit of 80 points, then they advance to the level of Experienced Amateur and so on. Also, if a handler takes a break from the program, for a season or two, they can come back at a later time and begin again. Handlers can fluctuate between categories and every year, the handlers will be re-established within a category. Once again, the people who have earned the most points at the end of the show season will be awarded with tickets to the World Championships, sponsored by Sheikh Jassim and Aljassimya Farm. “We are also working in other areas to improve

the program. We will be upgrading the website to become more useful by expanding the information it offers such as a listing all of the participants and showing their rankings and the points they have earned. This is development now and more information will follow soon. We invite everyone to visit the website for detailed information, as well as news and updates. We encourage everyone to learn more about the European Amateur Cup, the Aljassimya Amateur Challenge, and to join us in sharing our passion for the Arabian horse.”

Visit www.europeanamateurcup.eu for information and to experience the fun and excitement of the 2015 European Challenge sponsored by Aljassimya Farm.