

JAY CONSTANTI



INTERVIEW FOR TUTTO ARABI

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T*tuttoArabi: To all of the people who do not know of Jay Constanti yet, could you give us a small introduction about yourself, your lifestyle and family?*

Jay Constanti: I would like to tell people who do not know me, and those who know me but know little of my background, that I feel extremely privileged to be able to travel the world to judge, to show, to evaluate and to consult with breeders of Arabian horses. Looking back at the early years of my life, Arabian horses are a rather unlikely career path for me. I grew up in a suburb of San Francisco in a family of journalists and educators.

However, my passion for horses started when I was very young. My grandfather, a newspaper editor, took me to a horse show for my birthday each year starting when I was seven or eight. It was called the "Grand Nationals" and the event was a horse show, national finals rodeo and a livestock show. I watched in admiration as the exhibitors showed their Arabians, Saddlebreds and Quarter Horses in Arabian Mounted Native Costume (Arabians), the gaited classes (Saddlebreds) and Reining (Quarter Horses). I was captivated by the skills and daring of the cowboys riding bulls and saddle-broncs and roping calves. In the livestock barns I walked the long rows of show cattle and sheep and I felt like I had been transported to another world. I felt a deep passion and affinity within me to join this world of horsemen, cowboys and livestock. Each year my grandfather and I would attend the Grand Nationals and each year that passion inside me grew stronger and stronger.

My great fortune as a boy from the suburbs of San Francisco was that my family believed that everyone should have dreams and goals, however unlikely, and be encouraged to follow them. All of my grandparents had the courage to pursue life-changing dreams. My mother's mother was born in China, the daughter of a missionary nurse and British Naval captain. At twelve my great-grandmother sailed with her daughter from China to San Francisco so that my grandmother could receive

a "proper education". My father's family emigrated from Italy (at Ellis Island our family name was changed from "De Costanzo" to "Constanti"). My father's mother and her family came to the U.S. from Sweden. All had the courage to pursue their dreams, however unlikely.

TA: How did you start with Arabian horses?

JC: My life with horses started with the purchase of my first mare, a Quarter Horse (my grandmother helped subsidize that purchase) when I was sixteen. I boarded her at a stable where everybody was involved in horse shows showing in Western, Equitation and those with Hunters and Jumpers were jumping fences. My riding and horse skills were miles behind everyone else. I was in high school and had an after-school job, but found time to ride everyday, even if was at night under the arena lights.

I think that I was eighteen when I was invited to go on a "trail ride". My idea of trail riding was cooling my horse down after arena work on a bridle trail for about fifteen minutes. We trailered our horses to the coast where we met some other trucks, trailers and riders. They all had Arabian horses. They saddled their Arabians in light-weight English tack as I put my heavy Western saddle on my Quarter Horse mare. They all started down the trail at a rather quick pace and my mare decided that she would do her best to keep up for awhile, but she soon tired and was happy to walk, and we didn't see the other horses and riders until we got home 30 miles later. My mare was weary from the long day; I was ecstatic. We had spent the day riding through state parks and private land, along rugged trails canopied by trees, crossed creeks and climbed hills. I felt that ancestral, pioneer spirit. I didn't know it then, but that day I became hooked on distance riding.

It was evident that my mare was not suited for long distance riding so I was "allowed" to ride an Arabian gelding. I soon became a dedicated admirer of the Arabian horse, for all their talents, their courage and their beauty.

TA: What made you prefer the Arabian breed over all the other breeds?

JC: Before that long trail ride that changed my life with horses, I was not very impressed with the Arabian horse, coinciding with the general opinion of the local horsemen who owned Quarter Horses or Hunters. The Arabians generally could not win a ribbon in the ridden classes at the local horse shows and were rarely seen in jumping classes or competing in dressage. Most horse people in that area didn't see the Arabian horse as "athletic" or "trainable". In my opinion now, looking back forty years, the trainers in that area, though phenomenally skilled, had little patience for the Arabian. I learned to understand over time that the Arabian horse does not do well being forced into doing anything. To me they have the mind-set that needs to first understand and then embrace an activity before they will do it willingly. Trainers then, especially those from other breeds, didn't have the patience or desire to get to know the Arabian's mind. It is partly this quality, this unwillingness and resistance to be subjugated and intimidated into doing anything against their will that has earned my admiration for this breed. One must understand them in order to train them. Someone once said, "The Arabian horse will be your friend [forever] but not your servant." To me, this is one of the noble qualities of the Arabian breed.

TA: What is your ideal image of the Arabian horse?

JC: I believe that the harsh conditions of the Arabian Desert helped to create the physical qualities of the Arabian horse. As the basis of those qualities, in my opinion, is their balanced and correct conformation built on a durable frame with hardy physiology. That translates to straight legs, well-shaped feet, good angulations of shoulder and pasterns, harmony and adequate substance through the body and an efficient way of carrying themselves and their rider over difficult terrain and weather conditions over long distances. Among the necessary qualities that bring "signature" elegance to the breed are large dark eyes set wide on the head for greater vision, large open nostrils for the intake of air, fine yet dense bone to carry a lighter frame long distances, depth through the heart girth and spring of rib for greater heart and lung capacity, a relatively

short top line for strength of back and a tail set high off the body for better heat dissipation.

My ideal image of the Arabian horse possesses all of these qualities. To me the Arabian horse is a beautiful, elegant athlete in the truest sense of the word. My ideal Arabian horse has a relatively short head with some dish, large black eyes set wide and low on the head, with smallish, well-shaped and well-placed ears. I appreciate a neck that is well-shaped and refined, with a clean throat-latch. I am impressed with a body that is well-balanced and gives the appearance of both harmony and function. Like many horseman of all

breeds, I like to look at a horse from the ground up, paying attention to the horse's need to be a functional athlete. But as a breeder who appreciates exotic Arabian type, I also like to appraise a horse from the top down and from head to tail. My ideal Arabian exudes Arabian type and is unmistakably an Arabian horse from a very long distance away.

TA: If you could name one Arabian that would come the closest to your ideal, which one would that be?

JC: My answer to this question goes well beyond my description of the ideal Arabian horse and deep into the character of the breed to a more personal realm where an individual horse becomes a trusted, valued and reliable friend, who is cherished as much for personality as for athleticism and beauty. For me that horse was Sanadik El Shaklan. To me Sanadik had it all: exotic type and balanced conformation, strength, athleticism and elegance. Sanadik and I spent over twenty wonderful years together: in the breeding barn, at horse shows and many long hours just riding in the mountains. That famous American cowboy poet, Will Rogers, once said, "There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man." Sanadik and I had that once-in-a-lifetime bond. I will forever cherish my memories of the times we shared together.

TA: We are seeing your face everywhere in the world! Judging, handling or visiting. When did you start showing horses for clients?

JC: My early training career started with conditioning and training distance horses for clients through the 70's - prior to,



during, and somewhat after my college years. In the late 70's I got swept into the show ring by Arabian horse owners who wanted their horses shown at halter. The Arabian halter scene was fairly young and only a few trainers were specializing in that field. Fortunately I brought horses to horse shows in the early years and did well, mostly based on their qualities and not mine as a halter trainer. Over time I developed a halter training system that I could adapt to most every horse that came in for training.

TA: What was the most memorable horse that you ever showed?

JC: To this question there are three horses. The first was a gelding named Farlayk. He is mostly Crabbett-bred and was born in 1964. He was the gelding that carried me into the realm of the Arabian horse through distance riding. "Far" possessed incredible heart, stamina and athletic ability. He was not "pretty" but very few horses could match his abilities on the long trail. He gave me 100% always. I have not ridden a horse since that possesses his abilities on the technically challenging long trail. Far helped me win my first National title.

My second most memorable horse is also a gelding. His name was Kameron Bey V. He was a son of Sanadik El Shaklan. I trained Kameron at halter first as a colt then as a gelding. He was handsome and correct and moved well and he always gave me 100%. We were good friends and won the title of U.S. National Champion Futurity Gelding.

My third most memorable horse was a filly I foaled. Her mother delivered her while standing and I caught her to prevent her from hitting the ground. She lay still in my arms, both of us soaked, as I stared at the finely sculpted features of her face . . . and watched as she took her first breath. With that foaling, we bonded.

We ended up selling her to a breeder in Germany with the condition that I would show her in Paris that December. I trained and conditioned her and traveled with her on the airplane to France. She had complete trust in me as I led her at the Salon du Cheval in Paris, among the giant Clydesdales drawing heavy wagons, to her stall. She won her class and then went on to be named International Reserve Junior Champion Filly. After the show I loaded her into the trailer that would take her to her new home and new family in

Germany. It was a sad farewell for me. The following year she was named World Champion Junior Female. Her first foal was FS Bengali, who won many titles in Europe, and came to the U.S. to be named U.S. National Champion Senior Stallion.

This mare's name is Om El Sanadiva and she is the much loved and appreciated matriarch of the Sanadiva Dynasty.

TA: You are also a worldwide respected judge. When did you start judging? And how do you combine this with your job as a handler?

JC: I got my judges card about six year ago, however I judged at smaller shows well before that. My judge's card is licensed by the Arabian

Horse Association in the Arabian division for most all disciplines. The cards that judges get in the United States are different from the cards that judges receive from most all other countries. Judges here must demonstrate a proficiency in judging a wide variety of ridden classes, from Western to English to Ladies Side-Saddle, from Mounted Native Costume to Reining to Park. We also must be proficient in judging the in-hand and breeding classes, but that is just one discipline of many.

I enjoy judging all disciplines, but my passion is the breeding classes. I showed in those classes for over thirty years. I believe that judges who have trained and shown many Arabian horses have the advantage of knowing what the handlers are doing to try to present their horses in the best way possible. A handler's responsibility is to present their horse to his or her best advantage. A judge's job is to try to see through the presentation to evaluate the horse's type, conformation and movement, all the while appreciating an elegant and tasteful job done by the handler.

TA: What do you find interesting about judging the Arabian show horses of today?

JC: Some years ago it was not uncommon to hear Arabian horses described as "American" type or "European" type. To me the "American" type referred to an Arabian horse with a long, upright neck, a longer body, with a more vertical way of carrying themselves. The profile of the "American" face on an Arabian, in my interpretation, was generally straighter. The "European" Arabian was often more compact, with a shorter



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neck and a shorter body, and often had a shorter, "typier" head, with a more concave profile of the face. Their movement was often more forward rather than the more vertical movement of the American Arabian.

In my opinion, the horse that I see and judge in the arena today is more a blend of these two types. It is not uncommon to see exotic heads, with longer, well-shaped necks, smooth balanced bodies, long legs, with a very airy, elegant way of movement. To be successful in the large international shows today a horse must score very high in every category: type, head & neck, body & topline, legs and movement.



European breeders were, ironically, able to sell their offspring without much effort because they really wanted to keep them.

It seems to me today that European breeders are following their American counterparts by breeding more and more for "marketability" and "show" and are using fewer and fewer stallions to cover mares that may not be ideally suited for them.

In a show catalog for a large international show today it is not uncommon to see the vast majority of young horses being sires by just a few stallions.

TA: Do you think there is a big difference in showing than it was ten years ago?

JC: Yes I do. I believe the American handlers have changed their training methods and are taking some pressure off their training procedures, in order to keep their horses happy and free moving. I think that the European handlers have learned the art of the "stand-up" to best present their horse in front of the judges. The combined result can be a presentation that is fresh and exciting to watch, whether the observer is experienced or new to the breed.

There is another significant difference, I believe, in showing today than some ten or more years ago. This goes to a belief that I had in the basic difference between "American" breeders and "European" breeders which I thought was clearly evident when I first became familiar with the European shows and breeders in the mid-80's. American breeders seemed to flock to breed their mares to the current "star" stallion – the current Scottsdale Champion Stallion or the reigning stallion carrying the crown of U.S. National Champion Stallion, whether or not the stallion was ideally suited to their mares. Many American breeders bred their mares, in my view, with the principal goal of selling their offspring. Consequently a few stallions in the U.S. bred a large percentage of the mares.

By sharp contrast I believed that most European breeders carefully selected a stallion that best suited their mare to produce a foal that would come closer to their breeding ideal, and would be a foal they intended to keep. The result was that a wide variety of stallions were being used and marketing of the offspring was not the principal goal. It seemed to me that

TA: What was the most memorable moment of your judging career?

JC: My most memorable "moment" was actually an entire show. It was the World Championships of the Arabian Horse, Salon du Cheval, Paris last December. This was significant and memorable for a few reasons. While standing in center ring my memory took me back over the years to those first horse shows I attended in San Francisco with my grandfather and remembering that I wanted the world of horses to be my world. Here I was with the privilege and responsibility to give points to some of the most beautiful Arabian horses gracing today's show ring, and to bestow the title of "World Champion" to the individual I felt worthy of the title. The show was especially meaningful for me too, because my mother and my daughter attended with me.

The other aspect of the World Championships that made the show so memorable was wondering, before the show started, how I would feel once the show started. Would I feel somewhat nervous with the weight of the responsibility? Would I feel distracted by the large crowd and all the noise and pageantry going on? There are some things you never really know about yourself until you do them. From the moment I walked to center ring with my fellow judges to await the opening of the gate for the first class of horses, to the crowning of the final champion, I was relaxed and focused and thoroughly enjoyed myself. It was a great show to judge!

TA: Which show is still on your list to judge?

JC: There are many shows I would like to judge. In this

country I'd love to serve on the panel of judges for the big show in Scottsdale and the U.S. National Show. In Europe I would be honored to judge the All-Nation's Cup show. In the Middle East I hope to be asked to judge in Dubai and Saudi Arabia sometime in the near future. I've judged quite a bit in Australia and would enjoy judging the Australian Championships as well as the National Championships in New Zealand. Many of the shows that I have previously judged I would like to judge again, such as the shows in the UAE, the Egyptian Event, Europe, and the Elran Cup in Belgium.



TA: Does the judging influence your personal life?

JC: Yes, judging does influence my personal life. In my view when you seek a license to judge you agree to hold yourself to a high standard of ethics, both in judging and in your personal life. A judge's behavior, inside and outside of the show arena, is a reflection on his or her fellow judges, the breed, and your country. When I judge abroad I am often the only American judge and sometimes the only American at the show. I believe that some people will judge all Americans as they judge me and my behavior. We judges are de-facto ambassadors for our countries.

Another way that judging influences my personal life is in spending time and getting to know people in other countries and their cultures. Often the judging panel alone is a mix of cultures from Europe, the Middle East, South America and Australia. I feel enriched by these experiences where I can learn from people and understand and appreciate the differences in their lives and backgrounds which often contrast greatly from my own.

TA: What do you think the show scene will look like ten years from now?

JC: That is a difficult question. It is my feeling that the show scene will stay as it is now for quite some time. There are fewer people showing now than there was ten plus years ago, and the general quality of the horses being shown now is higher. There are shows that stand apart from that statement, such as the Arabian Breeders World Cup show in Las Vegas, the All-Arabian Show in Scottsdale, Arizona and the recent Abu Dhabi International Arabian Horse Show in the UAE. These

shows all have seen record breaking numbers of entries. I believe that a few shows will continue to grow in popularity and prestige because they offer something unique and sought after. In general, I believe the small breeder will continue to

be reluctant to breed and to show against those that have the means to acquire the world's best. If I project these trends forward ten years, I could easily believe that very few people will be showing very good horses at very few shows.

TA: Where do you see yourself ten years from now?

JC: I admire the Arabian horse above all breeds. I have spent most of my life

with them. I appreciate the Arabian horse as a show horse. Attending and/or judging Arabian horse shows and experiencing some of the most beautiful Arabian horses in the world is a thrill and an honor for me. When I see an individual that captivates me I always want to know the pedigree to better understand what gene pool came together to create that. Breeding for that ultimate typey individual that also can be a supreme athlete will always be a fascination of mine and always be an ultimate goal.

For twenty-three years I guided Om El Arab International from the worst of times to the best of times, first as sole owner and then as managing corporate partner. For many of those years I handled most all the training, conditioning, showing, breeding, foaling, promotion and ranch management. I showed our horses to championships in the U.S., Europe, Australia and the Middle East.

In the mid-eighties, like all American breeders, we faced a significant change in our tax laws, which resulted in many heavily invested people to leave the breed. We had a fairly strong international clientele that purchased our horses and kept our business going. As we were struggling to recover from that setback WAHO suspended IAHA, our American registry (now AHA), effectively closing off our international sales. The combined effects of the tax law change and the suspension of our registry by WAHO threatened to put us out of business.

Over the years we always found a way to move the "business" forward. We out crossed to different bloodlines for their qualities, all the while preserving the Om El Arab "look". Our horses were being shown successfully across the U.S. and

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around the world. We felt enormous pride when we were awarded the title of "Breeder of the Year" and also recipient of the "Breeder's Cup" for most successful breeder at the Arabian Breeders World Cup show in Las Vegas.

As the horse shows in Europe grew more important, and the interest from the Middle East in purchasing Arabian horses grew stronger, international demand for our horses increased significantly. Today the farm's horses are more popular than ever.

However, I also see the show world as not being the be-all, end-all for the Arabian horse. To be sure, the show ring is a captivating showcase for their beauty and versatility. After spending forty plus years with this breed I can say with conviction that, in my opinion, the one venue, the one arena, the one test that will always place the Arabian horse above all other breeds, is competing on the long trail. On the 50 and 100 mile endurance rides, whether climbing 10,000 foot rocky mountains or flying across smooth sandy deserts, the Arabian horse has no equal.

At this point in my life I am combining my history with Arabian horses: I appreciate the art and challenge of a world-class breeding program and truly admire the show horse and the thrill of their beauty and presence; I also respect and hold in awe the stamina and courage and athletic supremacy of the Arabian endurance horse.

I am currently in the process of founding an Arabian bloodstock company. The goal of this company will be to assist in the management and consultation for owners of breeding programs around the world, however large or small. We are already in the process of developing new Arabian breeding programs and equestrian facilities at home and abroad. We are seeking the purchase of a facility on the central West Coast of California to stand internationally acclaimed stallions and also serve as a showcase for top quality show and breeding stock, and a place to host educational clinics and seminars. We are working with a partner to develop his 500 acre property in Florida, called "Desert Lion Arabians", which will serve as our East Coast facility. We will also expand our base of services to Latin America with our partner whose extensive property in Mexico is known as "Casa de Cortes"

I am also coming full circle, back to the reason I first became

captivated by the Arabian horse. We are working on the development of an equestrian facility dedicated to the promotion and training of Arabian endurance horses. My daughter, Shannon, is spear-heading this project. She rode and

completed her first endurance ride (55 miles) at age five, thirty years ago. She and her mother, Terry Reed, are very active and successful competitors on the endurance circuit. Among her many wins, Top Tens and Best Conditions, Shannon won the U.S. National Champion 50 Mile - Best Condition award in 2010 and finished 2nd on the 2011 Western States 100 Mile Endurance Ride (most commonly known as the "Tevis Cup", regarded as the toughest endurance ride in the

world). Shannon and Terry will open a new facility with approximately thirty horses in training for a South American endurance project, along with training and conditioning horses for trail for local clients. Eventually we will purchase a world-class facility right on the Tevis trail to train and condition horses for endurance and trail riding, as well as to house riders from all countries who want first hand knowledge of the art and science of trail and endurance riding.

Where do I see myself ten years from now? I hope that I'll be judging a show, or presenting a newly imported stallion to a prospective breeder, or consulting with a client who owns an internationally acclaimed breeding program, or helping a new client who wants to develop one, or riding the trail with someone passionate about the world of endurance, or assisting with the development a new equestrian program somewhere in the world.

TA: Is there anything specific you want to add to this interview to tell the readers?

JC: If you take anything from reading my story about myself - a young boy who grew up near a big city, far from pastures with horses, with little to no knowledge about horses, with no idea of how to ever learn how to ride or own a horse, or care for a horse . . . if you take anything away from this story it is to follow your passions and dreams however unlikely they may be. Whether you are reading this issue of Tutto Arabi in an apartment in Milano, a high-rise in Paris or a suburb of San Francisco, if you want Arabian horses in your life bad enough, they can be. They will be. Just follow your dream with a passion.

