

DOUG DAHMEN

interview

by Urszula Leczycka – Arabhorsepromotion.com ■ photos by Irina Filsinger, Erwin Escher

Doug Dahmen – respected breeder and trainer. His life was strongly influenced by Arabian horses with these from famous Om El Arab International on top. The fascination resulted in the great horses he bred or promoted himself – including Esteem, Sandhiran, Dakar El Jamaal or Mazkarade. He is also very well known European and American judge. This year we will see him in the ring again judging one of the most important and his favorite – 2009 World Championships.

Tutto Arabi: Let's start from the beginnings – how did you get interested in Arabian horses particularly – when and why?

Doug Dahmen: I grew up in a small farming community in Washington State. My family did not have any horses or interest in horses, but I was obsessed with them from the time of my earliest memories. Luckily, friends had riding horses that I had free access to, and we spent many days riding in the hills. In 1969, the Sandahl family moved to my town with their Arabian horses, and I was hopelessly captivated. I was immediately under the spell of their beauty and grace, big soft eyes and soulfulness. Their mare Butterfly became my first show horse and one of my two most important dam lines. Butterfly, through her daughters China Moon and Beau Cherie has produced U.S. National, Canadian, Brazilian and Australian National Champions, as well as multiple winners in Scottsdale. In Europe, Esteem (by Fame VF) became the first winner of the Triple Crown, and Sandhiran (by Sanadik El Shaklan) has been an illustrious show horse. His titles include Nations Cup Jr Champion, Euro-

pean Res. Jr Champion, Champion Stallion at Menton, UK International Res. Champion, and Bronze Award winner at Aachen, not to mention at least a dozen show championships. I have mares from both branches of this first influential mare.

TA: Where did you get your most important life experience to be a breeder and a judge?

DD: Besides working with and riding horses for most of my life, many years of breeding Arabians has been the most important facet of my experience. From the beginning with Arabians, I sought out knowledge from all sources available, including mentorship from well known and successful breeders. I visited and talked with as many as I could. Without a doubt, the most fortuitous thing I did was to travel to Europe in 1974 and visited Arabian farms in Sweden, Germany, and Spain. The visit to Om El Arab in the Black Forest of Germany was especially historic in my life with Arabians. Sigi Constanti

(then Merz) showed us Shaker El Masri, Estopa (at the time carrying El Shaklan) and her daughters Estarwa, and Estasha. Seeing this incredible mare and her daughters galloping across the high meadow is indelibly imprinted in my mind.

TA: You are one of those rare people closely connected with some of world's most famous horses in the world like the great stallions of merit – Sanadik El Shaklan that you shown at 1983 World Championships to achieve World Champion Foal title or as a breeder of great sires as Sa-



Doug with Ferdinand Huemer, Wels 2009



Wels 2008

nadik's son – European Reserve Champion Stallion Sandhiran who is returning to the rings this season with a glory or Esteem – grandson of El Shaklan and sire of the first Triplecrowned mare ever – Esteema. Which of the famous horses influenced your look on Arabian horse nowadays the most?

DD: In 1981 I returned to Om El Arab in Germany and saw there 6 year old then El Shaklan. He was the most unique and beautiful stallion – lovely sweet look to his face, tall and elegant with powerful movement, and incredible tail carriage. He had the most wonderful personality, charming and with obvious affection for people. It came to pass that he came to California to stand at stud at my farm, Intara Arabians, and to be shown by me. El Shaklan drew visitors from all over the world. To say that El Shaklan influenced my life would be an understatement. He literally determined my future, not only from the offspring I bred by him but from the people I met because of him who became lifelong friends and clients. The most notable of these friends who came to see El Shaklan is Lenita Perroy from Brazil. In 1983 she was just beginning in Arabians, she came to see El Shaklan and fell in love with him. She bought several mares and bred them to him, bought daughters, and opened Brazil to him. As time passed Om el Arab established



Wels 2009

their farm in California, and El Shaklan went to live there. I bred a beautiful son of him, Solare out of Butterfly's daughter, Beau Cherie. He won his class of 92 two years old colts at Scottsdale and was Res. Jr. Champion colt. I also had El Shaklan's illustrious daughter Espressa, dam of Esteem. Later on I would have great success with Sandadik el Shaklan on China Moon producing Sandhiran. I later added Bellah Reina – Sandadik daughter and full sister to Om El Sandadiva. However, I needed to go my own direction in breeding and that occurred when Lenita



Dubai 2009

Perroy obtained Ali Jamaal through me. He stood at my farm for 3 different years, and produced outstandingly, as history has shown, and many of those have been from El Shaklan lines. In 1997 I obtained in partnership the weanling Ali Jamaal son, Dakar El Jamaal, from Lenita. He was out of a National Champion mare, Sonoma Lady that she had purchased through me. Dakar like his father and grandfather became U.S. National Champion, and is siring International Champions, the most prominent being the great Dakharo. Among the mares I bred to Dakar are granddaughters of El Shaklan. Dakar El Jamaal in turn, has sired for me the outstanding stallion Mazkarade, as well as linebred Jamaal as well as outcross individuals.

TA: One may have an impression that in the modern show horse breeding is mostly about the shape of the head and expressive movements as the most important, also some of the judges seem to pay the most of their attention in judging those features that in consequence pushes a lot of breeders to run for the pretty heads only. Do you think this is true and so how the show horse breeding will be developing in the future or how it should be?

DD: There is a very strong emphasis on the heads in particular which is not to be criticized, as long as it doesn't become a caricature, attached to poor necks, deformed top lines, crooked tails and legs. Overall excellence must be the goal in breeding. Breeding for just one aspect of type or conformation will surely result in obtaining that, but at the detriment of all else. Judges are responsible for evaluating the entire horse, with appropriate emphasis on the characteristics of type.

TA: It seems the market, fashion for Arabian type, di-

sciplines and methods of judging seem to be so different between different parts of the world, particularly between Europe and Middle East and United States. Looking at your experience as a breeder and judge – how do you combine judging the shows in Europe and Middle East being American judge and in turn – how do you use the experience you got in Middle Eastern and European while in the US? Do you feel any differences?

DD: My standard for the Arabian horses remains the same regardless of where I am judging. Here in the US there has been a welcome move towards more type, but faults that hinder an Arabian from an athletic level of performance will and should be strongly noted.

TA: Was there any particular horse you have been judging that especially came to your memory?

DD: Of course, there have been many at this point, however, having the opportunity to judge Piannissima was spectacular.

TA: Which point of your career was for you the most important and which one the most satisfying?

DD: Breeding Arabian has always been the most important and satisfying to me.

TA: If you could point 3 most important features describing a good judge nowadays it would be...

DD: Knowledge, discernment, and integrity.

TA: The show that you will remember until the end of your life was (so far)...

DD: Paris in 2007, having to pick between Kwestura and El Dorada.



Paris 2004



Paris 2009

TA: Your favorite shows to judge and why?

DD: Wels, Aachen, Paris, and Las Vegas. Wels, because of its uniqueness and the great care to detail Ferdinand and Gerlinde give it. Aachen - the excitement and the participation from great horses from so many countries. Paris - the city, the horses, the elegance of the whole experience. Las Vegas, because it was such a great new show, giving us encouragement for a new direction here in the U.S.

TA: I wish you a good luck and easy choices during one of your favorite shows - the coming 2009 World Championships in Paris then. □

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