

THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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AL SHAQAB, QATAR

with JEFF WALLACE

The world doesn't feel that they know you ... here's your opportunity.

Your family has been involved with Arabian horses for generations. Can you share a story from your family history in which Arabian horses play a role?

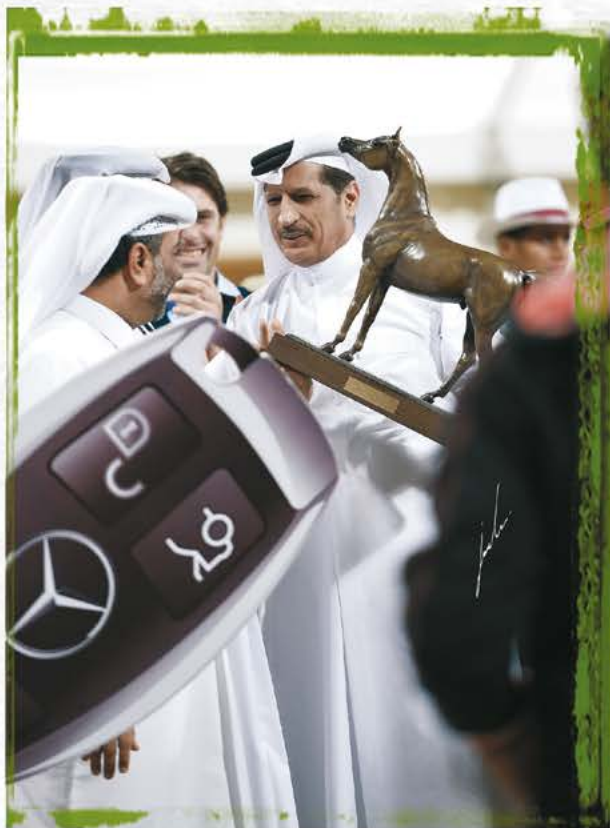
My uncle, Yousef Al Romahi, introduced me to the Arabian horse. Yousef was the Manager of the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club. He established Qatar as a WAHO Member, initiated the Qatari Arabian Horse Stud Book and the first Qatar International Arabian horse shows. But most importantly, I think, he led the initiative toward horse ownership and breeding in Qatar. My uncle had traveled extensively throughout the Middle East and North Africa and possessed an intimate knowledge of the breeders and their horses. As a result of his passion for the breed, travels, and his work at the Racing and Equestrian Club, he became involved in the establishment of Al Shaqab. He was instrumental in Al Shaqab's acquisition of Sahaba (Adeeb x Hasanat), the dam of Johara Al Shaqab and the then famous Mesada (Maher x Nagwa), both from Egypt. This is important because today, both Sahaba and Mesada have established significant straight Egyptian breeding families at Al Shaqab.

You were once quoted as saying, “Our goal is not only to improve our horses year after year, but also to improve the Arabian horse breed in general.” What lies underneath the confidence of that statement? Are you able to prove your point with a few examples?

I have been tasked by Al Shaqab’s Board of Trustees to preserve the Arabian breed at the highest level, with the aim of making a lasting and positive contribution to the future of Al Shaqab’s breeding program and the Arabian horse breed, and I take this objective very seriously.

Among the initiatives we have implemented and that have yielded satisfying results are, the Stallion Leasing Program, The Qatari Support Program and the bespoke Breeding Exchange Agreements. Each of these programs serves to benefit Al Shaqab, our partners, and operate at minimal cost to the participating parties. It’s important to understand that these programs were not developed to generate a profit, but to offer the opportunity of improvement to everyone wanting to participate.

A typical stallion lease is essentially an exchange. The lessee may utilize the Al Shaqab stallion for their own mares and sell the stallion’s breeding service and retain the proceeds to compensate them for the costs they will incur to transport the stallion and his daily maintenance. This allows the stallion to breed non-Al Shaqab owned mares and often allows for breeders located in regions where frozen semen might be the only opportunity to utilize fresh or fresh chilled semen. In exchange for the lease, Al Shaqab is permitted to select foals that are sired by the leased stallion and bred by the lessee. These selected foals will be incorporated into the Al Shaqab breeding program.



During our many travels, we often encounter outstanding mares that we believe will breed suitably with one of the Al Shaqab stallions and in these circumstances we will ask the mare owner to enter into a breeding exchange agreement. A typical breeding exchange agreement consists of exchanging a foal from the selected mare and sired by the stallion of Al Shaqab’s choosing and in return, the mare owner will receive multiple breeding services to the Al Shaqab stallions of their choice.

The Qatari Support Program was initiated with the foundation of Al Shaqab, but after some time, support and interest in the program dwindled. Therefore, in recent years we have worked to reestablish the program. Today, any Qatari National may breed to an Al Shaqab owned stallion free of the breeding fee charge and regardless of the location of their mare. In 2014, nearly 400 mares were bred worldwide under the program and with growth to just over 600 mares in 2015, we are now seeing an increase in Qatari breeders selling their home-bred Al Shaqab-sired offspring outside of Qatar, specifically in the Middle East and North Africa. It is our hope that increased use of the Qatari Support Program will eventually enable the Qatari breeders to sell their horses further afield, perhaps to Europe and the Americans.

We’ve also been analyzing a show sponsorship program intended to support smaller breeders of offspring sired by Al Shaqab stallions, and we now try to maintain an inventory of frozen semen from all of the stallions around the world so that breeders will not have to incur the cost and complexity of shipping frozen semen internationally.

Ultimately, I believe that easy access to quality horses that have been purposefully bred to reproduce their idealistic conformation and characteristics will greatly enhance overall improvement. Certainly, at the very least, these programs offer betterment for all involved.



You are the Breeding and Show Manager at Al Shaqab. How did your role evolve over the years?

The evolution has been about streamlining our processes and reducing waste, such as resources, time, and pursuing unnecessary activities, etc., while equally making strong strategic alliances with breeders around the world and building a team of people who are committed to working together for the betterment of Al Shaqab.

What people and influences have helped to guide you in the Arabian business?

We follow a common sense procedure of best practices when it comes to being guided and making decisions, and it's fair to credit almost everyone I have ever met through our extensive travel all around the world, to have influenced me. Obviously, that influence is to varying extents, but I consider these influences to be an informal education and this learning can be applied every day. A few years ago we had the great privilege to become acquainted with Sheila Varian. Today, Sheila is among our dearest friends, and on one of our visits to Varian Arabians, Sheila was telling me how she keeps a notepad beside her bed because she often wakes in the night with new ideas. I do this too. Granted I make my notes on my iphone, but in essence, even the simplest thing that someone might do or say could influence a new idea or project or perspective.

What is important about Al Shaqab promoting the preservation and heritage of the Arabian breed in Qatar?

As a member of Qatar Foundation, Al Shaqab is responsible for taking a leadership role in educating all Qataris about the culture associated with the heritage of the Arabian horse breed.

You earned your Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering at the University of Detroit, and later spent six years working as an engineer in the U.S. What does your 20-year history in engineering add to your toolbox in your position at Al Shaqab?

My education provided me with a sound working knowledge for my position at Al Shaqab. Just like the construction of any project, we make a plan, starting with the foundation, materials, time factors, etc. We apply the same basic principles to our work at Al Shaqab.





Please describe how you typically apply your Five-Year-Breeding Plan to a particular stallion or mare.

I believe planning is very important and a plan is assigned to every horse within days of their birth or at the time of purchase. These plans are frequently updated, especially within the first two to three years of age. But there is a basic plan to follow for every horse and these plans are typically governed by the each horse's quality, conformation and sometimes their pedigree, and later their ability to reproduce their quality and idealistic conformational characteristics.

When you are alone, walking through the facilities and pastures at Al Shaqab, what thoughts run through your mind? Do you take the time to bask in the warmth of your success, or are you constantly pondering the next step to take?

The generally accepted meaning of the word success is not a part of our vocabulary at Al Shaqab – so no, we are not taking the time to bask in success. Nor do we ponder. We establish plans and we set goals relevant to those plans, we work to execute those plans, and if the goals are accomplished, this would equate to a measurement of our definition of success. Success, for us, is a matter of working to fulfill our plan and forward our goals, while remaining flexible and open-minded, knowing that our plans and goals might need to be adjusted. In my opinion, success is a personal matter that can only be defined by the person or people responsible for the objective.

So, for anyone who wants to know me better, there it is; to be a valued member of our team, you need to make a positive contribution to our plans and goals.

You travel extensively. Do you typically take the time to absorb each stop along the way, or do you prefer to reflect on a trip in its entirety?

Everything is absorbed, addressed at that time or at the conclusion of the day and reevaluated at the conclusion of our trip – regardless of it being the evaluation of a horse, a discussion with a fellow breeder, the impression of promotion, or simply an observation worthy of remark.





When you decide to purchase new breeding stock, what goes into making those selections? Is there a formula or decision-making process that you follow? Or does it simply just happen when a horse is there, available, and the price is right?

Al Shaqab is, first and foremost, a breeding establishment. Therefore, purchasing horses is not our highest priority and we do not purchase horses to be shown. However, it has been necessary, although less so today, to purchase or lease horses for incorporation into the breeding program. The entire herd is evaluated regularly and we have an evolving concept of the conformation and characteristics that should be procured to be incorporated. Quality is always a high priority too. Therefore, typically we are following a set plan to source horses that meet our criteria.

How do you select the trainers who are entrusted with Al Shaqab's finest show horses? What qualities do you look for and how do you develop those relationships? How much does the character and personality of the individual come into play?

Although the outside trainers are essentially service providers, they, like all service providers, are expected to contribute to our team in a manner that will add value to Al Shaqab.

Tell us about one very special mare, Johara Al Shaqab. She is a shockingly amazing producer. She has gifted not only Al Shaqab, but also the entire Middle East through her son Farhoud Al Shaqab and her many daughters. How is her health? Do you expect more foals from her to add to her legacy?

I must say that I've never thought of Johara as being shockingly amazing! Perhaps you need to meet her to understand. Johara has the demeanor of a queen, in a monarchical sense; she is polite, empathetic, understated, elegant. If a mare could rule, Johara would be the greatest sovereign of them all. Today Johara is happy and healthy. Typically we take two embryos from her each year and we only breed her to straight Egyptian stallions. She resides in the main mare barn with OFW Mishaahl, White Silkk, Abha Myra, Kamasayyah, Negma Al Shaqab, Miss El Power JQ, Hazmia Al Shaqab, Aliaa Al Shaqab, Venetzia, and of course, her daughter Amwaj Al Shaqab.

Interestingly, last year, Amwaj Al Shaqab's Egyptian Event champion daughter, Amina Al Shaqab (by Al Adeed Al Shaqab) produced the first non-straight Egyptian, tail-female Johara descendant. The filly, Um Graiba Al Shaqab (by Hariry Al Shaqab), is perhaps the best of all the fillies born in 2015 and represents a very special pedigree. In addition to Johara, her pedigree includes Kajora, Little Liza Fame, Sundar Alisayyah and White Silkk. It is our hope, that like Johara, Um Graiba Al Shaqab will establish her own special family – a non-straight Egyptian branch of the Johara family.

Would you say that Pilar, from Janów Podlaski State Stud, is in the same league with Johara Al Shaqab, but on the non-straight Egyptian side? If yes, then please explain why that is so. What other horses in the Al Shaqab program do you hold in similar esteem?

Pilar had proven to breed consistently well with Gazal and Al Adeed before we procured her. That justified her high purchase price. She has produced a succession of foals, two of which have been retained; Methail Al Shaqab (by Marwan Al Shaqab) is a pleasing filly that will be trialed as a breeding mare when she comes of age, and Remal Al Shaqab (by Wadee Al Shaqab), who best represents the standard of the new generation. She is the filly we had dreamt of breeding when we bought Pilar and we hope that Remal will help to perpetuate Pilar's family at Al Shaqab.



REMAL AL SHAQAB (WADEE AL SHAQAB X PILAR)



UM GRAIBA AL SHAQAB
(HARIRY AL SHAQAB X AMINA AL SHAQAB)



Your image and persona in the Arabian horse world is bigger than life. The Al Shaqab booth at major shows is simply gorgeous, tastefully elegant, with amazing visuals and great storytelling. Are those your ideas brought to life, and if not, who should be congratulated for such a stunning display?

All of the work at Al Shaqab is a team effort; each of us offering differing skills, experience, and expressions of creativity that complement one another. Therefore, any impression we create or interaction someone might experience with Al Shaqab, is a result of the team's collective effort.

I am extremely proud of every member of my team. Every one of them is worth their weight in gold and certainly we could not deliver the standard we have achieved without them. On a more personal note, it's exciting for me when a member of our team suggests a new project or idea for Al Shaqab. Qatar Foundation's mission is to unlock human potential, and I want my team to do and be the best they can be. They are all professional, hard-working and deserving.

Do you think the world appreciates Gazal and Marwan as much as the staff at Al Shaqab does?

I've never put any thought into this question before today. I'd like to think that breeders and enthusiasts respect Al Adeed, Gazal and Marwan for their individual qualities and breeding and showing accomplishments.

Do you feel the pressure of having to give the world more Gazals and Marwans and Al Adeeds? Or do you feel that it is not necessary to replicate success?

I'm tasked with the responsibility of preserving the breed at its highest level. We've chosen to do this by breeding successive generations – to breed successors of Al Adeed, Gazal and Marwan, for example: Farhoud, Hadidy, Kahil, Hariry, and Wadee, among others. By the laws of nature, there will not be any replication. Therefore, we work to perpetuate the horse's quality and ideal conformational characteristics. I also suspect it would be unrealistic to set a goal to replicate show ring achievements. Certainly this showing aspect is not among our goals. Ultimately it is not important if the horses win at a show. It is important that they can reproduce their quality and conformation with consistency.

What are the biggest challenges in operating a breeding farm in the Middle East?

There are many ways to interpret this question, however, I think the simplest answer is that with our state-of-the-art facility and dedicated team, we don't really face any significant challenges.

