

ROBERT

Mechaniker

CASS

Magie

by Laurie Schmelzle



Catching up with Robert Cass is about as easy as trying to corner a leprechaun, or track down the elusive white tiger. As soon as you think you finally have him, something inevitably draws him away. However, when you finally manage to spend any significant amount of time with Robert, you quickly find that it was worth the effort.

Curator of all things 'bright and beautiful' at Michael Byatt Arabians in New Ulm, Texas, Robert Cass is manager and artisan, videographer, film producer, sound engineer, public relations coordinator, horse trainer, teacher, chef, entertainer, and above all everyone's highly cherished friend. The kind of friendship found in Robert Cass must have been similar to that which inspired Anais Nin when she wrote "Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that this new world is born."

Following is a glimpse at the life that defines Robert Cass, the irreplaceable 'man behind the machine.'



Robert Cass grew up on his family's farm in Trinidad, Colorado. His family raised Thoroughbred horses (a tradition continued today by his brother), along with a variety of animals, some raised for food, including cattle, sheep, and Robert's favorites the goats and poultry. As an active participant in 4-H, Robert showed just about everything; rabbits, exotic poultry, Quarter Horses, and his beautiful Thoroughbred gelding 'Thunder.'

Before long, Robert started judging dairy cows and dairy goats. He was often picked to judge showmanship classes because he would take time to teach the kids how to show to their best advantage.

Robert remembers, "One time, a very competitive class came in, and only one kid picked up on the fact that I had some dirt in my hand, and had wiped it on the side of his exhibit. He was the only one that went and wiped it off after I went on to judge the next exhibit. Needless to say, he won!"

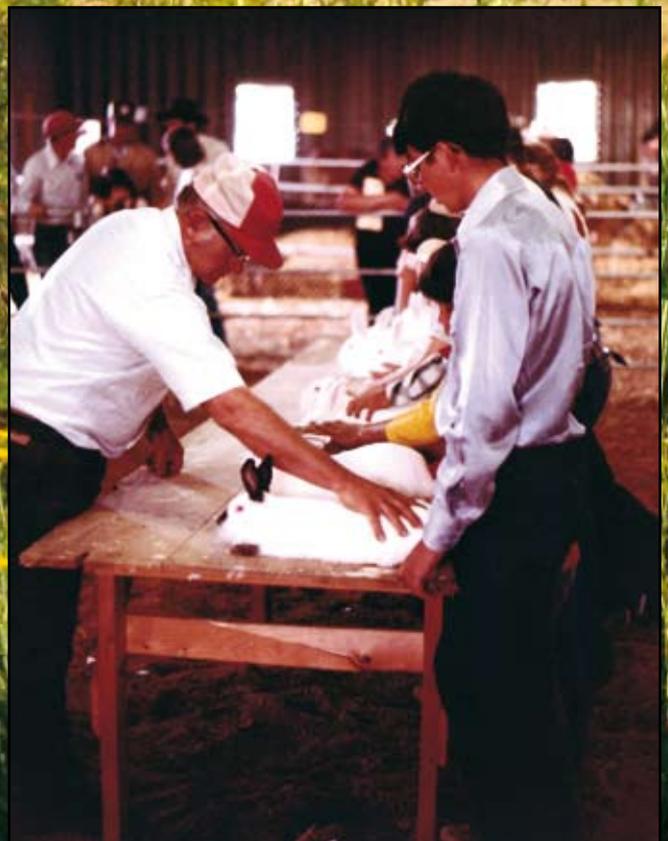
After high school, Robert spent a short time running his own dog grooming business and showing Afghan Hounds. In the evenings, he worked at a stable near his home. Late one night a mare arrived at the stable, and the encounter that took place remained forever vivid in Robert's memory... "I was 20 years old... I had seen pictures of Arabians, but never saw one in the flesh. My brother had a mare at a local stable on layup, which was across the road from my house. I used to go and take care

Above: Robert, age 10, at a Christmas party in 1972 at the Red Mill Restaurant with his sister Katie

"One of the waiters didn't show, so the owner brought me down a bowtie and asked if I could help out!!!...made a killing on tips that night!!!" -rc

Right: Age 17, competing at the Las Animas County Fair 4-H Rabbit Show in 1979

"Even at this age I blamed it on politics! She (Jane Doe), however, ended up being my best producer..." -rc



of her in the morning, turn her out, etc... This barn was a huge racetrack style barn made out of stone. It had Dutch doors and then a porthole type window about six feet up the side. The stalls were all made of adobe brick, so it was a fortress. Two stalls down from my brother's mare, I heard this commotion...a horse just screaming non-stop and kicking the walls. She had come in during the night and it was just about daybreak when I got there.

So, being concerned and of course curious, I had to stand on a couple of water buckets to peer into the small window. What I saw was the most amazing sight I have ever seen: the morning light was coming through the cracks of the door, and inside was this chestnut mare that was damp with sweat...steam coming off her body in the coolness of the morning...huge eyes that stuck out like globes and this face! Her nostrils were huge, flaring, and her tail carriage... Mind you I was used to Thoroughbreds and Quarter Horses so this was amazing to me. She walked up to me and stretched her neck out and I was just mesmerized! It was something out of a movie."

Robert never left the stable until the owner arrived several hours later. It actually ended up that an old high school friend of his had moved back from Denver with his girlfriend, who owned the mare. The mare's name was Mustafare, sired by

Mustafar, and out of a mare named Pine Owl. She was a 3/4 Arab. From that day on, Robert was on a mission to have one!

In October 1985, Robert suggested to some

"Robert is a very generous open minded person who does not judge people, and is willing to help with anything. He can cook a gourmet meal while reciting horses and pedigrees from memory and predicting your breeding plans. Robert has been numerous people's mentor, and shared his knowledge about conditioning, and preparing and training show horses."

-David Botha, trainer, Michael Byatt Arabians

friends that they travel to Albuquerque, New Mexico to see the Arabian National Show. It was only a three hour drive from his home. His friends had Thoroughbreds, but they all loved horses, so the general consensus was "why not?"

When they arrived at the showgrounds, they were mesmerized! As Robert described it, "It was

Below: Age 18, with 'Country Pacer' (aka Thunder) in 1980

"This was my pseudo Arab. He had really high tail carriage and a very pretty face. He was bred by my family, and since he wasn't very tall he wasn't a candidate for the race track. He was a patient horse, as I had broke him to ride. This was taken right after the Labor Day parade in Trinidad, Colorado, where I carried the 4-H flag for our club." -rc

Background: Mountains northwest of Trinidad





like Hollywood! 'Starstruck' wasn't even the definition. We had our trusty Arabian magazine in tow and we'd look up and see the actual trainers and horses that were in the magazine...talk about excited!"

Robert remembers standing in line for 30 minutes to buy tickets for Tingley Coliseum. When it was their turn to buy tickets, they were told the coliseum was sold out. However, the ticketmaster found room for them in the very top seats. Robert continues, "So here's this kid from the country and two women that were just thinking I had finally lost my mind. We were at the Nationals, our seats were in the very last row, but we were part of it..."

The first class, the Mare Finals, was called to the ring. The lights were dimmed, and the gates swung open. The gates were about to present to Robert a glimpse of his own unavoidable destiny as well.

Still vivid in Robert's memory, he recalls that "One after another, the mares came in through the smoke with the spotlights on them....crowd screaming...it was an amazing sight! The announcer called another number, and after what seemed like an eternity this handler came in the gate, and at the end of his lead was a chestnut mare with the neck of a sea serpent, eyes that gleamed, and a tail that drug the ground three feet behind her. She just floated on air. Every handler was wearing the typical dark suit, but this one had on an amazing green jacket."

By the time that handler made it into and around the ring, Robert had turned to his friends and said "I want to show just like that. I want to be just like that..."

That year, Ali Jamaal was National Champion Futurity Colt, Strike was National Champion Stallion, and Top Contender was Reserve. The chestnut mare was Amber Silk, and the handler was Michael Byatt!

Robert returned home to Colorado, but he couldn't forget the magic of Tingley Coliseum. Between 1987 and 1988, he began developing his skills as a trainer and handler showing for Dawn Arabians and Sheehan Arabians. One of Robert's first successes was winning at

Top: Rachel BV, 1994 US National Top Ten Half Arabian Hunter type Mare, owned by Dori Rath

"This was my very first US Top Ten. I thought I owned the world at that moment!! The owners were ecstatic as this was their first top ten as well... That was back in the day when a Top Ten really meant something." -rc

Middle: O'Liviab, 1995 US National Top Ten Half Arabian Futurity Filly, owned by Zamira Arabians

"One point away from Reserve National Champion...such a wonderful filly that has gone on to produce great horses." -rc

Bottom: Barexi Skywalker, 1996 US National Champion Gelding, owned by Ann and Michael Byatt

"This was such an amazing moment for me... to go down the chute into Freedom Hall in Louisville, KY with a great horse on the end of the lead. The magic that arena created was astounding. And, win photos on the front lawn on Sunday morning were the icing on the cake!! -rc

Background: The Atlanta skyline in Autumn colors

Estes Park with Elegant SA (by *Aladdin) in Most Classic, and with *Burzaan in Pleasure Driving.

Having had his share of Colorado winters, Robert decided to answer an ad placed by Shady Oaks Arabians in Sarasota, Florida. They were looking for a new trainer, and Robert got the job. He packed his belongings into his car, and headed south.

In the spring of 1989, the owner of Shady Oaks asked Robert to recommend a handler for the Egyptian Event in Kentucky that coming June. Robert recommended Michael Byatt, the owner concurred, and arrangements were made for Michael to handle their horses at the Event. Robert trained and conditioned the show string, and they departed for Lexington. At the show, the Egyptian-bred horses prepared by Robert dominated the futurities with Michael at the lead. The team was a success from the start!

Later in the week, Michael asked Robert if he would be interested in a position working for him; showing some horses, and 'possibly doing a little traveling.' Trying to maintain his composure, Robert replied that he would 'think about it,' but really he was doing cartwheels inside. Robert gave his notice, packed up once again, and left for Arabco in Atlanta, Georgia!

The 1990's brought many changes to the Arabian breed, some good and some difficult. But as Robert recalls, "...so many great moments with great horses and people. There was this wonderful chestnut stallion that came to stay with us for a while. He was absolutely a peacock and had the most beautiful face and carriage. I'd take him down the barn aisle to show him to visitors, and he would be snorting and bouncing; just in this animated prance. And, his knees would almost hit his chin. I could hear the owner on the other side yelling at me, "don't let him do that, he knows better!" But I didn't really listen and it was so much fun. His name was Monogramm."

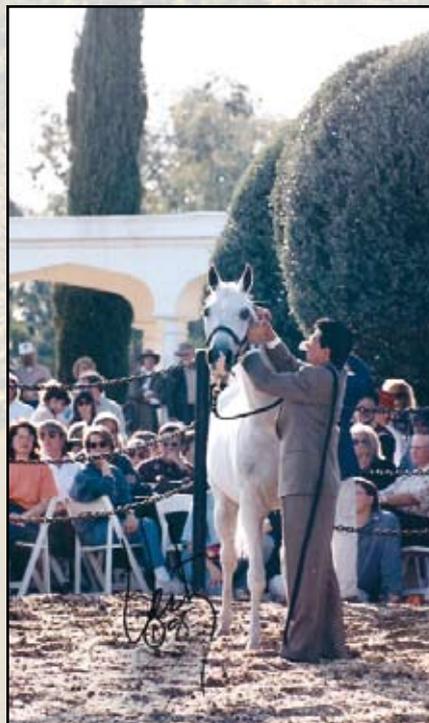
Another of my favorite moments was when another chestnut stallion came to live with us. An amazing soul and truly a king, it was such a highlight to present him at our open house...he was none other than *Padron."

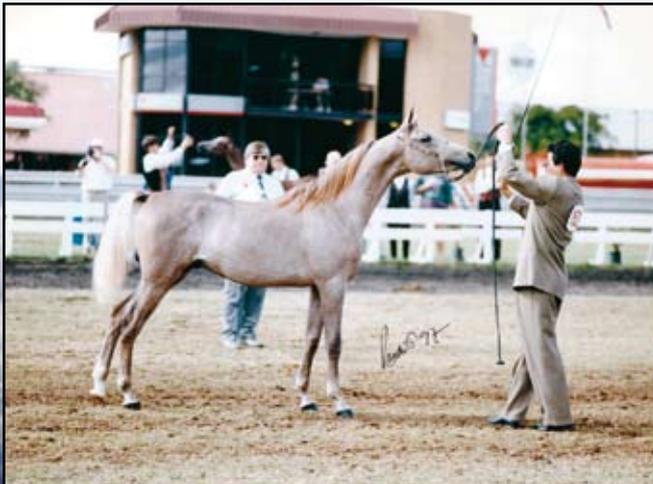
Among the events of the 1990's with which Robert was involved was the successful Lasma East International Centre & Arabco 'Regensis Sale.' 40 horses were sold in less than 150 minutes, for \$820,000. The Regensis Sale 'distributed some of the most brilliant, beautiful and enviable opportunities in the land.' One of his favorite mares in the sale was *Cometera, 17 years old at the time. Robert described her as "Ethereal and aristocratic... truly classic Polish."

Another favorite memory from the 90's was the story of the Egyptian filly Sataara. Michael Byatt Arabians was showing at the Egyptian Event. Robert relates, "It was the Two-Year old Straight Egyptian Futurity class. Michael had another filly in the class, and I was showing Sataara. Classes back then were huge, especially in the futurities, as the money was a nice payout. They had called out the Top Ten, and I was in that ten and I was thrilled! Then they started calling the horses in reverse order. When they got to the third place horse, I was in shock...two horses left. Michael looked at me and said, 'I believe Mr. Cass that you have just won this class.' The announcer called his number next, and you could have pushed me over with a feather!!!"

Willis Flick of Glenglade Arabians, founding member of the Pyramid Society, remembers watching this same class. He recently recounted the story from his memory. "Michael had qualified two young horses for the finals class and Robert was called in to show one of them. Much to everyone's surprise, Robert led the winner from the ring. Robert was masterful and presented his horse in the halter class as well as any trainer could have done. Apparently he preferred his other duties to showing or Michael found him irreplaceable in his other capacity."

*Below: *Cometera (*Bandos x *Felluka), with Robert on sale day for the Regensis Auction, 1995*





In 1997, as Johrhemar Arabians of South Africa was grieving the loss of their beloved Ibn Kaisoon, the arrival of Robert Cass helped lift their spirits and turn their focus toward preparing for the impending South African National Show. With only a narrow window of time in which to prepare their horses for competition, Robert Cass, highly proficient at all things equine, pulled off a most successful show.

In their farm newsletter published following the National show, Johrhemar Arabians writes, "About 14 days before the National Championship, we learned that Robert Cass, the well known trainer of the Arabco stables, belonging to Michael Byatt, would be coming to prepare & show horses for Fannie Buys & ourselves..."

If ever you would wish to meet a dedicated ambassador & true lover of the Arabian Horse, then it must be this man. He was an absolute treat & a star! More professional [than anyone] you would find anywhere in the world! We learned a tremendous amount about showing, with all the finer details, that we have always WONDERED about! Our horses took to him immediately. Considering the very short [time he] spent with them, it was quite unbelievable to watch and see what he brought out in them with seemingly the greatest of ease! Robert...did a sterling job."

After the show, Robert got to spend some time enjoying the sights and sounds of Africa. Fanie Buys arranged to take a small group on a photo safari in Kruger National Park. The group was joined by Liz Salmon and Phil Crabill, and they all enjoyed many fantastic and memorable sights together.

I got to know Robert well on our brief trip to Kruger Park. He is one of the greatest people I know. He has a wonderful and wicked sense of humour, is a great horseman and also an enormous asset to Michael Byatt Arabians with his people and equine skills. I am very honoured to call him a friend."

-Liz Salmon, Equine Consultant

Top left: JRM El Khartoum (Hamasa El Fagr x Gazella Bint Masri) 1997 South African National Colt Foal Champion

Top right: Two year old colt by Silvern Gleam

"An amazingly gifted stallion, and all his foals had incredible movement." -rc

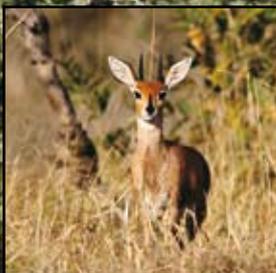
Opposite: L-R Liz Salmon, Fanie Buys, Robert Cass, and Phil Crabill preparing for the trip to Kruger

Opposite (right): JRM El Karnak (Hamasa El Fagr x Gazella Bint Masri) at the 1997 South African Nationals

1st Place Futurity Colts

1st Place 3-4 year old Colts

Background: Chalet overlooking Kruger National Park







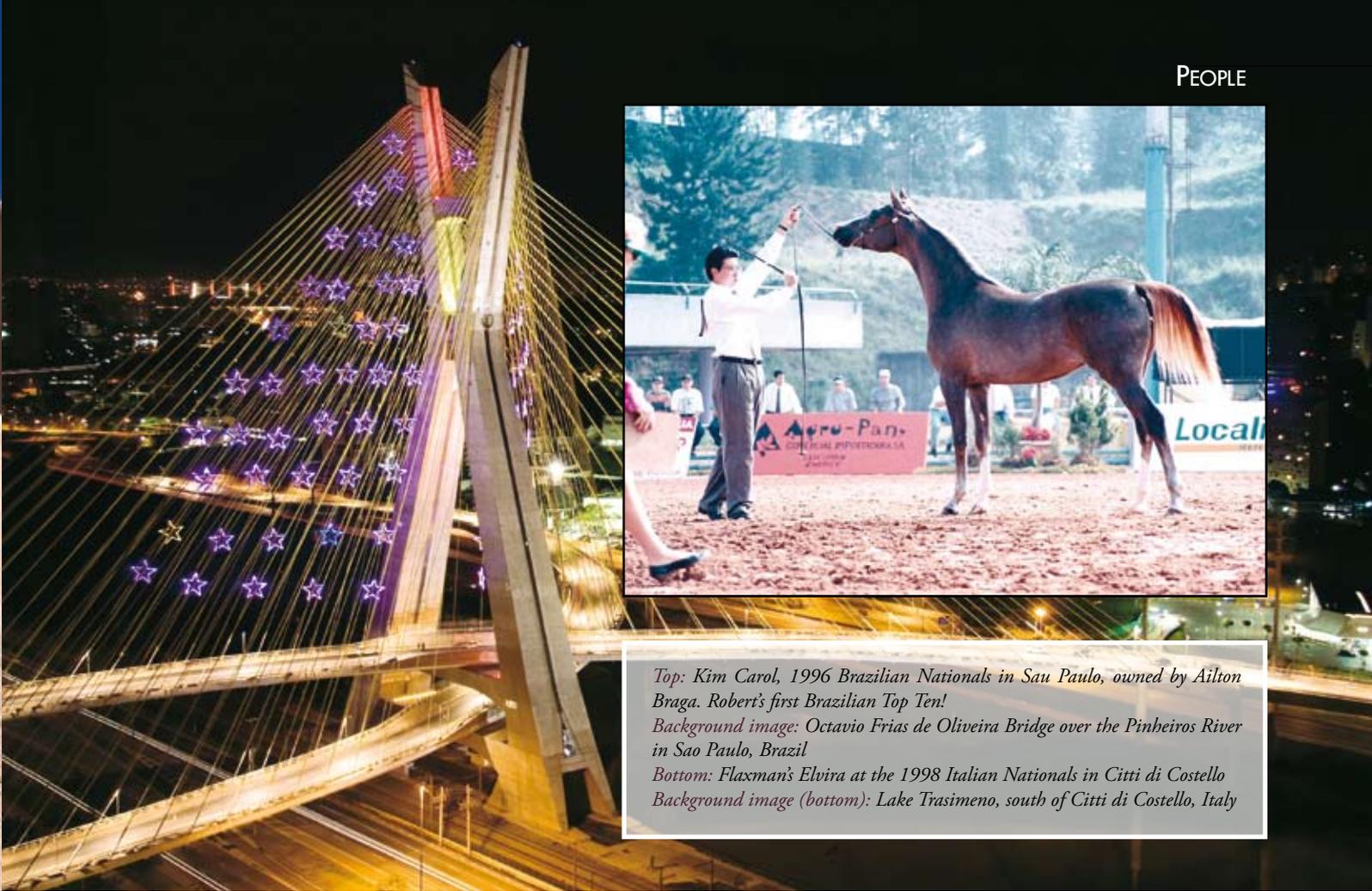
Enchanter Magic FHP was one of those special horses that Robert formed an especially close bond with. The stallion's personality, charisma, and dynamic self-expression made a lasting and endearing impression on Robert that will never be forgotten. Robert recalls "This horse had the most amazing personality, from the first time he got off the transport from Brazil to the day I had to load him back on to leave. He would make your day. He never once had a bad day. He would always want to know what you were doing and be part of it. Watching him in the ring with Michael was always a treat. With his amazing movement, the crowd would go crazy the minute he and Michael came through the gate. He loved every minute of it. And, he passed [his show attitude] down to his kids and grandkids."

The Enchanter Magic influence is still felt today. For example, when Enchanter Magic's daughter Credit to Society was bred to Besson Carol, she produced HB Bessolea, dam of world renowned show stallion Baanderos!

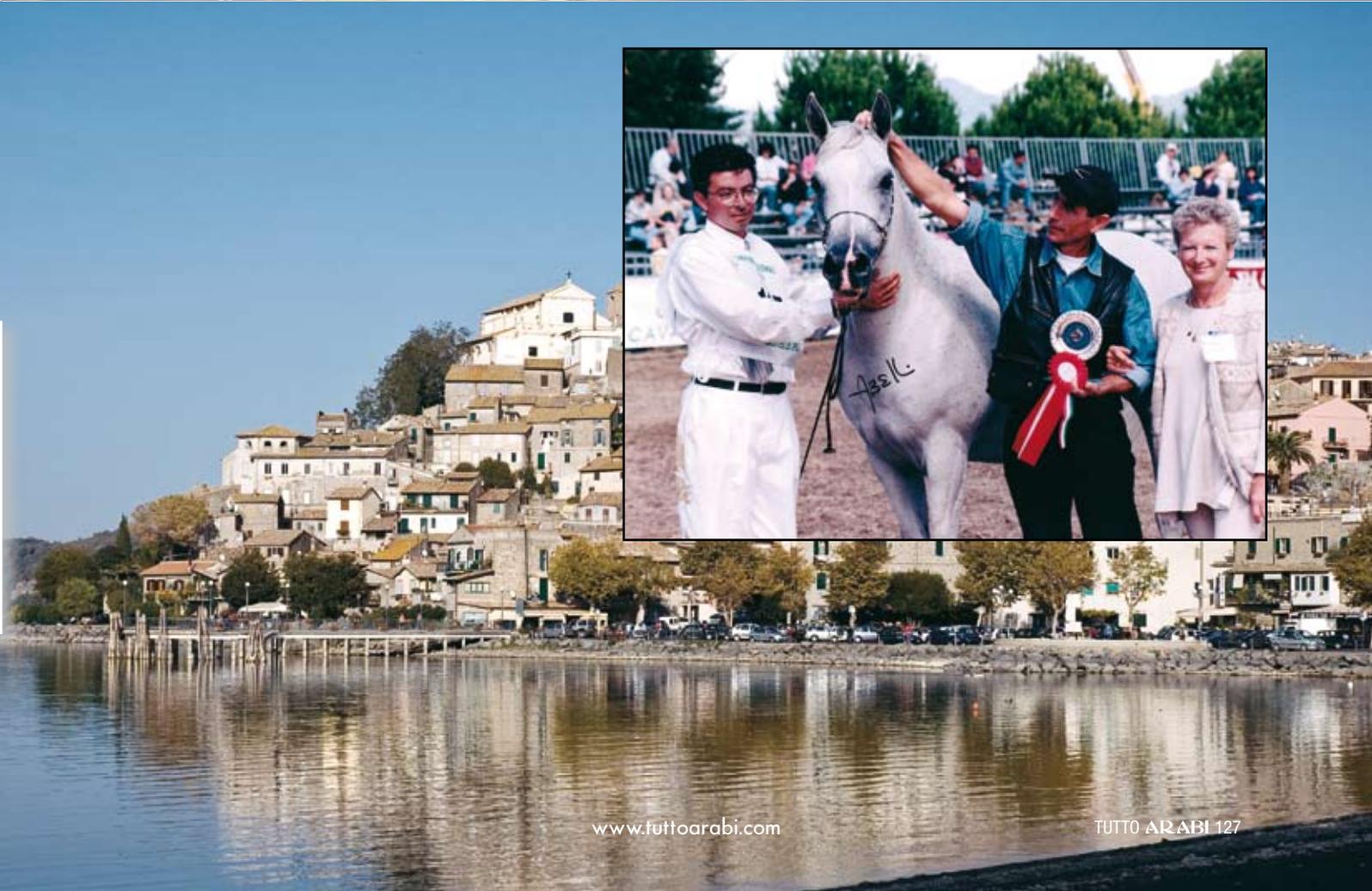
Enchanter Magic FHP
 1994 Canadian National Champion Stallion
 1995 Scottsdale Champion Stallion
 1995 US Reserve National Champion Stallion

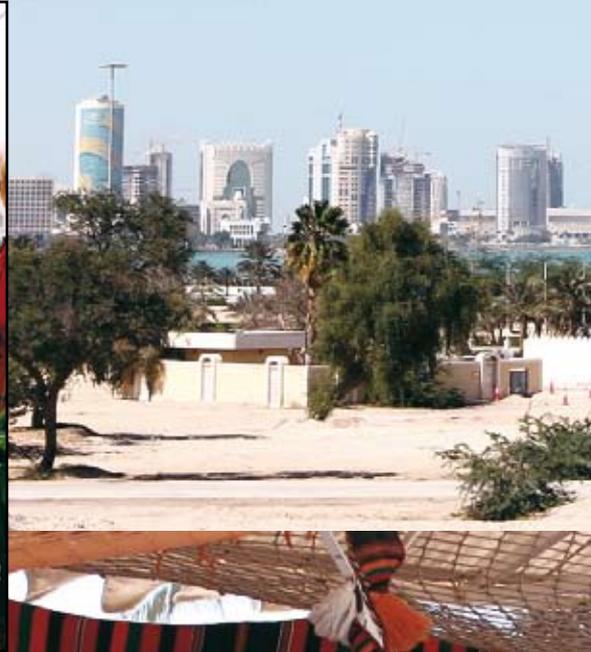
"I call him Mama Cass - He's One of a kind! Robert's dedication is second to none - he's always willing to give more than he ever expects in return, and never complains about going the "extra mile" to get the job done. His sense of humor rivals mine - it's a great gift to make someone laugh - and he always does! He's a great friend, a true horseman, and an incredible person. He is creative and visionary, and if you haven't been surprised or intrigued by him lately, you need to know him better - I wish him success, always!"
 - Stuart Vesty, Photographer

*Above: Enchanter Magic FHP, captured in all his glory by Stuart Vesty
 Background: An Adobe style building in New Mexico, site of the 1995 US National show*



Top: Kim Carol, 1996 Brazilian Nationals in Sao Paulo, owned by Ailton Braga. Robert's first Brazilian Top Ten!
Background image: Octavio Frias de Oliveira Bridge over the Pinheiros River in Sao Paulo, Brazil
Bottom: Flaxman's Elvira at the 1998 Italian Nationals in Citti di Costello
Background image (bottom): Lake Trasimeno, south of Citti di Costello, Italy





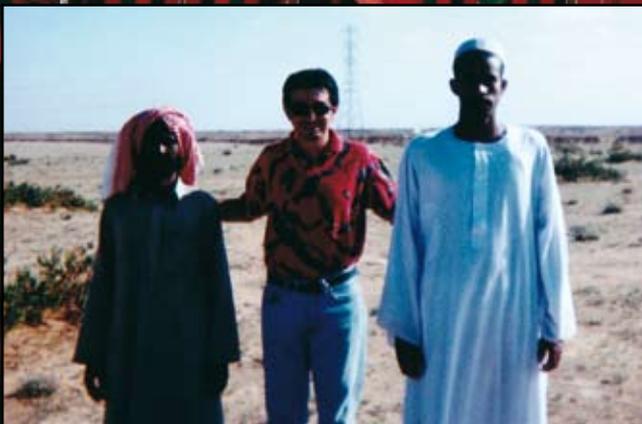
Top: Om El Abadan, Doha, Qatar in 2000, owned by Al Khalediah

"An amazing horse to show....he received several 20's and 19.5's on movement." -rc

Bottom: Europa Al Jamaal, Doha, Qatar in 2000, owned by Al Khalediah

"When Europa hit this ring she thought she owned it. I kept running as long as she wanted to show herself off!" -rc

Background: (upper) Doha, overlooking the Persian gulf; (lower) a traditional Qatari style Bedouin tent



Top: Camels in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2001
“In the States we have to worry about deer. In Saudi, it’s camels!”
-rc

Bottom: Bedouins in Saudi, 2001
“These guys tended to the camels and sheep, so I had to stop and say hello!” -rc

Robert Cass wears many hats at Michael Byatt Arabians but the one the Byatt family considers the most important is that of family.

-Michael Byatt



**Zagrobla (Monogramm x Zguba), 2003 US National Champion Mare*

**Zagrobla was another horse that was very special to Robert. He calls her 'the Polish Princess.' They communicated well, and lucky for her Robert understood. She had Robert convinced that they would do things her way. Robert*

"I have known Robert for many years. Initially I knew him as a halter showman and I took many trophy shots of Robert's wins. He then moved into the management and breeding part of the horse industry. Robert is excellent in a photo session. He can read horses with the best of them. The best part of Robert is his dependability and that great attitude and smile. The way I see Robert is, he's great with people, great with horses, and on top of it all he is smart!"

-Jerry Sparagowski, Photographer

remembers "She loved to free lunge in a big grass pasture so that is what we did, because otherwise it wasn't 'working' according to her. She would trot around the pasture with amazing

had just seen one of their ads. Memphis was only a short drive from Atlanta (the farm's location at the time), and he really wanted to see the horses. He apologized for calling on Sunday, but Robert told him not to worry and invited him out.

The man drove to the farm, and immediately fell in love with and purchased two beautiful grey mares. Since Jerry Sparagowski was there for a photo shoot, the new owner wanted a picture of his two mares together. Jerry decided they needed something really special and Robert, on a whim, decided to make it happen! Robert said "get ready Jerry... I'm pulling the halters off NOW, and you've got two seconds before they're out of here!" Jerry actually got three seconds, and took a 1998 magazine-industry award winning cover shot (pictured

right). The mares were Maraiya and Shameerah, dam of the famous Egyptian stallion Farres!

*carriage, snorting the whole time. She'd stop, take a nibble of grass, and then the show would continue. And, she wasn't too keen on neck sweats... so she didn't wear them. It was almost as if she said 'why improve on perfection? (plus I'll get dirty!)'. The story ends with her and Michael exiting the arena with The Rose Blanket." As Robert led her out of the paddock and back to her stall, he swears *Zagrobla said, "I told you so!" The beautiful image of Robert and *Zagrobla on the left was taken by photographer Jerry Sparagowski. It genuinely captured the close relationship between them.*

Jerry and Robert captured another very special image. One Sunday, Robert happened to be in the office when the phone rang. The gentleman on the other end of the line explained that he was in a Barnes and Noble in Memphis, Tennessee, and





The beautifully presented horses ABHA Palma and ABHA Qatar, shown by Michael Byatt at Scottsdale recently, were both prepared by Robert. It can possibly be said that Robert has taken this craft from proficiency to 'art.' Michael would sometimes find Robert perfecting the fine details of the same horse for hours. Stopping in contemplation, Michael would look at the horse for a while, and just walk off nodding approvingly.

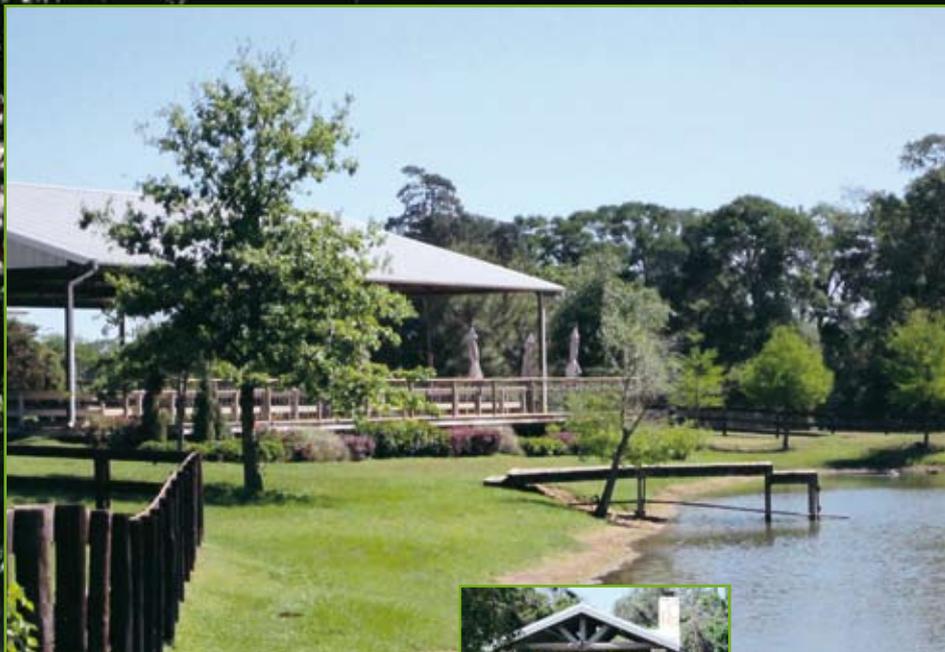
Top: ABHA Palma, Scottsdale, February 2010
Bottom: ABHA Qatar, Scottsdale, February 2011
Background: The expansive Scottsdale desert



As the 2000's drew to a close, Robert showed horses less often and concentrated more on other aspects of the business where he was needed most. Robert, adept at many individual skills, proved to be just as good at managing multiple projects at once. Regardless of what Robert is doing, however, he brings to the task some form of artistic creativity, along with a good dose of his quick wit and humor. Seeing Robert at work brings life to Goethe's observation that "The man who is born with a talent which he was meant to use, finds his greatest happiness in using it."

Top: Candid image by Suzanne

Opposite: Robert doing one of the things he especially enjoys, coordinating the music for the open house



article by Laurie Schmelzle of al badia arabian stud
 layout & design www.evenstarenterprises.com

"It takes many spokes to make the wheel go 'round. It is the exceptional individuals involved with Michael Byatt Arabians, and the great horses like Besson Carol, Gazal Al Shaqab, and Marwan Al Shaqab, that have made us a great team. Additionally, without Ann and Michael Byatt, this journey would not have been possible."
 –Robert Cass