

# When you have a vision... a vision in white

## The Story of Al Ayal<sup>AA</sup>

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Once in awhile a stallion comes along who is simply a game-changer. Such a stallion is Al Ayal AA, bred and owned by Ariela Arabians. Dazzling snow-white, totally classic, perfectly in balance, and extraordinarily refined, he has raised the standard for what is seen as perfection in the straight Egyptian show horse. Most would agree that this horse was born into royalty: he is the direct son of the universally-acclaimed and legendary black straight Egyptian mare The Vision HG (Thee Desperado x Belle Staar). By the time she foaled Al Ayal, The Vision already was justly famous as the dam of Al Maraam (x Imperial Imdal), and the full brothers Al Lahab, Al Hadiyah AA, and Al Raheb AA, by Ariela's homebred sire Laheeb (Imperial Imdal x AK Latifa); all of the above are universally respected show horses and sires.

Al Ayad (Moheeb x Al Mamunah by Maysoun), Al Ayal's sire, is perhaps less familiar. Al Ayad was a classic 1999

straight Egyptian stallion, the work of veteran German breeder Jack Moritz. His use at Ariela marked a significant change in direction from the mostly American sourced Egyptian bloodlines that had been used at the farm throughout the previous decade.

Al Ayad was certainly not a famous horse in any sense when he arrived at Ariela. Chen and Eliko heard about the horse while in Europe in 2002, but saw him for the first time at the Egyptian Event Europe in 2005. As is typical for them, they took a chance and 'went with their gut', leasing the horse from owner Monika Wenzel for the 2006-2007 breeding seasons, in spite of the fact that no one in Europe had ever given him a chance; he had yet to sire even one foal. Their thinking was to go backwards in order to move the Ariela program forward by re-introducing rare yet proven Egyptian foundation blood from Germany into the herd.



photo by Kelly Campbell



photo by Emma Maxwell

"I never forgot the outstanding quality and classic look of the progeny that Malik (Hadban Enzahi x Malikah) sired here in Israel during the mid-1980s," she explains. "Al Ayad reminded me of Malik, and he had even better conformation. He was heavily linebred to Malik's sire, the very important Nazeer son, Hadban Enzahi, and he carried forward the rare blood of several other valuable Egyptian-born horses that were imported into Germany or bred in Germany early on, including the important foundation mares Mahameh and Mona III and the stallions Machmut, Ibrahim, and Mohamed." "Al Ayad was certainly not a perfect

horse," Chen recalls, "but where he was good, he was excellent. We especially loved his tremendous refinement, his shoulder, and the way he always carried himself. His show attitude and tail carriage were exceptional."

"What most people don't know is that Eliko and I went to the Egyptian Event Europe in 2005 specifically to see Al Ayad. The day before the show we had our first look at him, but only inside his stall. That was more than enough to convince us to lease him for two seasons. The deal was made before the show began."

Eventually Al Ayad left eleven foals for the Ariela program, and a total of



photo by Kelly Campbell



photo by Bar Hajaj

*Sajda AA (x Safiyyah AA)*

thirty registered purebred foals in Israel before his return to Europe. This was unfortunately followed by his tragic and untimely death in 2009. Three Al Ayad foals from the Ariela program, Al Ayal AA (x The Vision HG), Nashwah AA (x Insha Sha Latifah), and Baha AA (x Baaraaqa AA) have since become highly-acclaimed international halter stars and have helped to create an outstanding legacy for their sire.

#### **The Vision Meets Al Ayad**

The Vision was bred twice to Al Ayad which resulted in two excellent colts, Al Ayal AA and Al Amir AA, both foaled

in 2008. But from early on it was Al Ayal who exhibited the exquisite quality, extreme type and intrinsic charisma that made him seem too good to be true, almost an archetype of the ideal modern show colt. As a weanling he swept the Futurity classes at the Israeli National Championships as well as the Israeli Egyptian Event, capturing the Gold Champion Colt Foal titles at both shows. All who follow the Ariela program recognized that this colt was the farm's next candidate for star billing, and Al Ayal received much attention and intense scrutiny from all over the Arabian industry from very early on.



Even before he was a year old the “Al Ayal Leasing Group”, managed by Frank Sponle and Elisa Grassi, arranged to lease him for three years on behalf of the Ajman Stud in the Emirates, campaigning him first in Europe and later in the Arabian Gulf. This lease quietly made history, as there are still no formal diplomatic relations between Israel and Ajman, UAE, and supports the truth in the old adage that a common passion for the Arabian horse will easily transcend even the most insurmountable barrier. During that first season in Europe Al Ayal won five highly-regarded championships. The next stop was the Arabian Gulf,

where he was first Junior Champion Colt at the Egyptian Event of Sharjah and then continued over the next two years to win several championships at some of the region’s most important shows, including the 2011 International Gold Champion Colt title at the prestigious Dubai Championships, the region’s most important title show.

Arabian showman Frank Sponle, who handled Al Ayal during those years recalls, “Al Ayal struck my attention when he was still just a little foal. His type and perfect head made him such a unique baby. At the first show he was a bit shy but his beauty was outstanding.

photo by Stuart Vesty





photo by Stuart Vesly

“With some practice and experience he turned into a charismatic young stallion. He gathered several show successes for Ajman Stud and Ariela, the most important being the title of Dubai Gold Champion Colt.

“Al Ayal’s success is clearly written in his pedigree. His mother, whom I always loved and showed a few times in Israel, has proven to be one of the most successful producers in the world, being herself a mesmerizing beauty. His sire, Al Ayad, has been a great stallion, unfortunately gone too soon. Al Ayal carries an important history in his pedigree. His success as a show horse as well as a sire has simply fulfilled our expectations.”

### **Siring Potential**

While on lease to the Ajman Stud Al Ayal sired his first foals and these soon

proved his mettle as a show sire, as all the foals shown were extremely competitive in the show ring, whether in Europe or the Gulf.

Now that the ‘proof was in the pudding’ regarding his siring ability, the entire industry was buzzing about this young superstar. Back in Israel the Arabian horse community took advantage of Al Ayal’s return to Ariela in March 2012 and wasted no time in lining up their best mares. He stood in Israel for two breeding seasons and his book filled so quickly both years that many mares had to be turned away. Eventually Al Ayal left over one hundred registered foals in Israel over that same period.

Chen and Eliko look back with satisfaction. “Al Ayal’s first Israeli foal crops were amazingly consistent in quality, type, and show ability and have absolutely





photo by Emma Maxwell

photo by Shalom Nissim



dominated the junior classes at our local shows these past few years, whether bred by our clients or homebred. In Israel and around the world he has sired over thirty foals who have won championship titles,” Chen recalls. “Now that his first colts are of breeding age, we shall soon see how the second generation compares. A breeder couldn’t wish for more.”

“Eliko and I take great pride in the fact that four of our homebred Al Ayal foals are of such outstanding quality that they have been leased by leading international farms to campaign at major shows.” These include the colt Shaheen AA and the filly Turkiz AA leased to Ahmed Talawy of the

Al Baydaa Stud in Egypt, and the fillies Sofiya AA leased to Aria International in the USA, and Soraya AA on lease to the Hanaya Stud in Switzerland.

They are particularly excited about the colt that Al Ayal sired out of their key broodmare Saniyyah RCA (Mishaal MP x My Shooting Star); this is the stunning yearling, Shaheen AA, 2015 Silver Champion Colt Foal at the Israeli Egyptian Event. Shaheen represents a breeding ideal for the farm, as not only does he share and perhaps transcend the physical attributes of his sire, he has also displayed ideal Arabian courage, character and nobility, even as a very young foal.



"In our experience, it is always our best horses who get hurt or sick," Chen explains, "and Shaheen broke his back leg in a freak accident while very young. As a result he had to remain very quiet and contained, and was confined to his stall over many months to allow the fracture to heal properly.

One month before this accident, Ariela had signed a three-year lease for Shaheen with renowned breeder Ahmed Al Talawi of the Al Baydaa Stud in Egypt. Shaheen seemed a colt of such exceptional promise that Ahmed decided not to cancel, and instead waited for the colt to convalesce. He brought the colt to Europe for 'the

season' just a few months after Shaheen's cast was removed.

Ahmed confides, "I first heard about Shaheen from my trainer, Raphael Curti and then heard that it might be possible to lease him from Chen and Eliko. It took a few months before I was able to see him in the flesh, and the colt was everything I expected and wished for, and even more. It is hard to find such qualities in a straight Egyptian yearling. I was literally blown away the first time I laid eyes on him."

In June 2016 Shaheen represented Al Baydaa at his very first European show, the West Coast Arabian Show

photo by Emma Maxwell







*Afal Aljassmiya (x Athena Al Zobair)*

in Belgium, where he won the titles of Gold Champion Colt and Best Head in the Egyptian section, as well as Reserve Yearling Champion Colt honors in the open Arabian section.

Ahmed shares his hopes that Shaheen will become a major foundation stone in the Al Baydaa breeding program. “My deepest wish is that he will be able to breed our mares in Egypt one day. I am extremely grateful to Chen and Eliko for their trust and friendship, and allowing us to care for such a young superstar.”

Shaheen AA is the next homebred horse slated to be campaigned heavily by Ariela and will be back in Israel in a few months to start his career as a junior sire. “We are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to

see Shaheen’s first foals because of the valuable blood he carries through his dam, the peerless broodmare Saniyyah RCA, who has been such an important foundation mare for our program.”

Shaheen will return to Europe in 2017, again on lease to the Al Baydaa Stud.

### **An Outstanding Opportunity**

One of the industry’s most astute international breeders who closely followed Al Ayal is HE Sheikh Jassim Bin Khalifa Al Thani, owner of the influential Aljassimya Farm of Doha, Qatar.

Aljassimya boasts a program of such all-encompassing scope that Sheikh Jassim established a second major farm in Santa Ynez, California, USA. In November



*Ayyar Aljassmiya (x Jade Lotus SMT)*

2014 Al Ayal traveled to California to serve as guest herd sire at Aljassimya, where he delighted the exceptionally professional staff by exceeding even their highest expectations. His two years breeding some of Aljassimya's most important mares passed very quickly, and in early October 2016 Al Ayal returned back home to Israel.

Aljassimya farm manager Bart von Buggenhout grew tremendously attached to Al Ayal from the moment he arrived in California, and the two formed a special bond. Bart was eager to share his personal evaluation of the horse: "Al Ayal AA is unmistakably an Arabian in the mould of the Carl Vernet engravings. For this reason he was an obvious choice for the

Aljassimya Farm program to assist in our goal of breeding the true Arabian; the type of Arabian that has held the attention of horse lovers since the first Arabians came from the desert and which will never go out of fashion because it is, quite simply, the classic version. In pedigree Al Ayal is undoubtedly not a 'one off', he is the son of The Vision HG, a mare who may be mentioned in the same breath as Hanan as the producer of breeding stallions with a global impact.

"He has been a special experience for Aljassimya Farm. When the idea to lease him came forward there was little thinking about it for Sheikh Jassim to lease this exquisite straight Egyptian stallion.



photo by Chan Noff

*Sofiya AA (x Saniyyah RCA)*

“Al Ayal’s arrival was at first a bit confusing, the stallion did not travel as happily as one should. But soon he settled in and conditioned up beautifully. So well, in fact, that we decided to show him at Scottsdale where he won Senior Straight Egyptian Champion Stallion unanimously. His presentation was handled to perfection by Giacomo Capecci. Al Ayal seemed to know that he was gaining in respect from all of us and totally came into his own with his role as herd sire.

“His lease has proven to be a fruitful one. Earlier this year I put all his foals in one field together and the stamp was remarkable. Incredible shoulders balanced by equally impressive hips, and

all with short dished heads and upright fronts; there could be no doubt of his prepotency. At the moment there is a 2016 colt and a filly, both from our own broodmare supreme RP Miss Surprise by WH Justice, who perfectly exemplify what we hoped to get from him, even as recent weanlings who lived at pasture they immediately catch your eye with their balance, charisma and superb type. “Al Ayal has also been a cool customer to have on the place, not permanently on fire; he saves his best for the important moments. For our Darryl Larson video he walked so calmly into our special ‘tree pasture’ I wondered if we were going to get what we needed! There was no need to worry, he was dynamic and extravagant



*Soraya AA (x Saniyyah RCA)*

just the moment we asked it of him, a characteristic that is always of value in a horse. In Scottsdale his timing was right on the mark, and we were very proud of his Unanimous Champion Stallion performance. It was a sad moment to see him go, but on the other hand his stamp on the Aljassimya program is clearly engraved on his foals who will carry his memory into the future.”

Bart adds, “I have been asked about the political complications around this lease. It is very simple: There were and are none, and there should be none. Politics need to be handled by politicians, we are horse people and we need to stay clear of politics by only keeping our eye on our job — breeding — to improve and promote

beautiful and functional Arabian horses. This Al Ayal has done for us and we have been most glad about this lease.

“We wish Al Ayal safe travels back home and a fruitful life, and we kindly thank Ariela Arabians for the opportunity of the lease and their trust in us to make it as good as we possibly could, a win - win situation for both parties.”

#### **Another Expert Opinion**

Another veteran breeder and international judge upon whom Al Ayal has left strong impressions is Dr. Nasr Marei of the world-famous Al Badeia Stud in Egypt, who shared, “I was always impressed by the quality of Al Ayal as portrayed in pictures and video clips. He struck me



photo by Gregor Aymar

*Shaheen AA (x Saniyyah RCA)*

to be a very complete straight Egyptian horse. However, when I saw him for the first time at Aljassimya in California last April, I discovered that, contrary to most cases, the images I have seen of him did not reflect the whole superior quality of this stallion. He was even better in real life than in his pictures.

"Looking at him and taking my own photos proved how refined this horse is. I could actually find no major shortcoming. True, I did not see him moving at the Aljassimya open house, but I can only imagine that with this conformation he can only have great movement.

A beautiful most exotic head, well-shaped upright neck, excellent short-coupled

back with a perfect tail set and terrific shoulder angle. His croup is strong and well formed. All of his attributes come together in impressive harmony and balance.

"I also saw some of his get. These were very refined and promised to develop into outstanding horses. In my opinion, Al Ayal is a stunning stallion -- the epitome of an Egyptian horse."

### **Home Again and off to Europe**

During his very short stay at Ariela, Al Ayal will again have the opportunity to cover Israeli mares. Following this, he will head for the famous La Movida Arabians stud in Austria.

photo by Gregor Aymar



*Nardin AH (x Nijmat Al Sachra)*

photo by Kelly Campbell



*Tubfet Aljassmiya (x Psynderella)*

International judge and La Movida owner Ferdinand Huemer is intimately familiar with the Ariela breeding program, and especially with The Vision HG, and for this reason Ferdinand has been watching Al Ayal closely from the time he was foaled and patiently awaiting the chance to use him in his own program. He was happy to explain his reasons for leasing Al Ayal: "The Vision is, in my humble opinion, one of the most influential mares in Arabian horse breeding history. The combination of the highly talented breeding skills of Chen and Eliko on one side - and the spectacular genetic power of The Vision on the other side - gave our breeding community an impact which is nearly unreal. Even more when we consider that all this impact is coming from 'only' one mare in so many variations of bloodlines. With nearly every stallion Ariela carefully chose for their treasured mare, she created some special and unique offspring of the highest quality and beauty. Even more importantly, nearly all her sons and daughters were able to produce again something on an even higher level. And all this not only within the straight Egyptian lines but also - and perhaps even more importantly, - with 'so-named' outcrosses.

"I already liked Al Ayal AA very much as a young horse when he spent his first time in Europe. But his value is much higher than 'only' being a successful show stallion. In breeding you don't always get only what you see in beauty and quality of the stallion himself, but Al Ayal is one of those very very rare stallions who, through his offspring, is able to lift the level of a mare in a way for which you normally need several generations. The sons and daughters he sired which I have had the pleasure to see (and often also to judge) all over the world, are all unique and special in many points. Nearly all of them have this great touch of beauty,

they have an unbelievable percentage of high quality, and most of them are really very modern horses and should be a guarantee for future breeding success also.

"In the past I had great results with Al Ayal's half-brother Al Hadiyah AA, who gave me some exquisite foals, such as Rihanna Al Hadiyah. I expect that Al Ayal AA will give his 'extra touch' to my mares, as I have seen it so often all around the world in his offspring. Genetically he fits nearly all of my mares, too, and I think that I will take the chance and breed ninety percent of my mares to him. I am absolutely convinced that something outstanding will show up in 2018."

He adds, "Cooperating with Chen and Eli simply enriches my life. All this has nothing to do with business, but only with great friendship and our eagerness and curiosity, from both sides, to make promising and exciting new steps in our individual breeding programs. I am deeply impressed with the breeding work Ariela Arabians has accomplished over so many years now and I am sure that our slightly different breeding programs can compliment each other in a very interesting way."

For now, Al Ayal is back at home, and the mares are already lining up to be bred.

Chen watches the horse quietly relaxing in his paddock and smiles. "Looking at Al Ayal always reminds me of how humbling, and how exhilarating, it is to be a breeder -- to use your intuition and practical knowledge to bring together a certain mare and a certain stallion in the attempt to bring your own unique idea of what could be to life. Often it works, but just as often it doesn't. With Al Ayal, we have been really fortunate, and we are so very grateful. So far he has been a great success, and he is, in every sense, our own 'vision in white'." ○



photo by Naif Alwasel



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