

# A Visionary Meets an Architect

## The Story of Al Shaqab and Michael Byatt

By Jeff Wallace

There are few relationships in the history of the modern Arabian horse whose legacy can compare with that of Michael Byatt and Sheikh Hamad bin Ali Al Thani of Al Shaqab. Their inspirational story is one for the ages, starting with a chance meeting in 1993 that went on to rewrite definitions about the Arabian horse through a combined effort of talent, wisdom and foresight.

It is difficult to summarize the relationship between Michael Byatt and Sheikh Hamad, manager of Al Shaqab's breeding program and the public face of Al Shaqab, as their roots go deep, their co-founded success shocking, and their professional/personal relationship oftentimes blurred in a way that is rare and refreshing these days.

But one thing is certain: Their first meeting in 1993 was fortuitous to say the least, and the combination

of passion-driven talents has created a dynasty in modern Arabian horse breeding the likes of which has never been seen before. It starts with one recognizable word that unendingly reverberates throughout the Arabian horse world: GAZAL.

Like all good stories, it starts with a seed of passion planted in a young boy's heart.

Sheikh Hamad says that the moment he opened his eyes for the first time, he saw horses. He is a vibrant, affable soul, with an infectious smile that lights up a room when he talks about horses. And not just the likes of Gazal Al Shaqab... the horse that catapulted the Al Shaqab movement.

He speaks just as passionately about the unacclaimed broodmare in his stable as well because, to him, they are all equal beings. He sentimentally recalls earlier days when horse



Michael with Marwan Al Shaqab



**MARWAN AL SHAQAB**  
(Gazal Al Shaqab x Little Liza Fame)  
2000 Bay Stallion



shows were true communities filled with conversation, and horses were not accepted or dismissed based on scores. He is amazingly down to earth, and instantly likeable, with an endearing combination of passion and progressiveness. Optimism and opportunity exist around every corner. It oozes out of every smile he flashes.

He met Michael Byatt in 1993. It was his first trip to the Egyptian Event, and the conceptual birthing stages for a professional Al Shaqab breeding program. Plans had not yet been laid out for what this new breeding program for His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, called "Al Shaqab" could be – not until he met Michael, that is. What

he saw was a stark contrast to what he knew back home, one that ultimately altered the course of their future.

Through Michael, Sheikh Hamad saw stallions that were calm enough for children to feed sugar cubes to. He saw the first pieces of possibility in strategy and planning for a generational breeding program that honored tradition while celebrating innovation. And most of all, in Michael he saw the powerful outcomes of marketing Arabian horses.

The fact that the Michael and Sheikh Hamad found commonality in their intelligence, foresight, and friendship were just added bonuses.

## GAZAL AL SHAQAB

(Anaza El Farid x Kajora)  
1995 Bay Stallion





## AL ADEED AL SHAQAB

(Ansata Halim Shah x  
Sundar Alisayyah)  
1995 Grey Stallion

In that moment, the Architect and the Visionary combined forces, rewriting not just how the Middle East bred their Arabian horses, but how all peoples of the earth would breed them as well.

One of Michael's first major strategic moves for Al Shaqab was a group of auspicious mares he hand-selected in 1994 as foundation mares for its new breeding program. In the group was the incomparable Polish mare, 1982 U.S. National Champion Mare Kajora.

Prior to Kajora, Al Shaqab's self-proclaimed "family breeding program" bred only straight Egyptians – as did most of the Middle East. At the time, it only made sense. It made for a striking sight: Large herds of grey mares in their desert homeland, with shrieks of white stallions echoing from the stallion barns.

But Michael was designing something new – something greater than what the world currently understood. Introducing a bay Polish mare to these







**FADI AL SHAQAB**  
(Besson Carol x Abha Myra)  
2008 Bay Stallion

straight Egyptian herds was a pivotal moment, like providing the pond on which the moonlight will shine.

As history would have it, Kajora was open at the time of purchase. As luck would have it, she was also cycling.

She needed to be bred quickly. Was it fate in that moment that altered the course of history, or brilliance? In either

case, Michael advised Sheikh Hamad that the beautiful straight Egyptian stallion he so admired, Anaza El Farid, would be the perfect choice for Kajora. (This landmark decision would later set in stone the now-famous breeding choice of crossing Polish and Egyptian bloodlines.)

The mating worked. Gazal Al Shaqab, the first major foal / show horse



/ stallion produced at Al Shaqab (and one of the first Qatar-bred bay Arabians, in contrast to their usual greys and blacks) changed the world. His silhouette was distinctive, yet shockingly stunning. His length of leg, back and neck were harmoniously balanced, with a lean athletic hip and shoulder, and a lusciously beautiful face.

That advice likely came from Michael's rooted belief that an Arabian horse – be it halter or performance – be both beautiful and balanced. The silhouette of Gazal became the new standard.

In short order, he single-handedly altered the phenotype for the modern Arabian horse. He and his progeny started defining their empire in both

**HADBAN AL SHAQAB**  
(Ashhal Al Rayyan x Sundar  
Alisayyah)  
2001 Grey Stallion



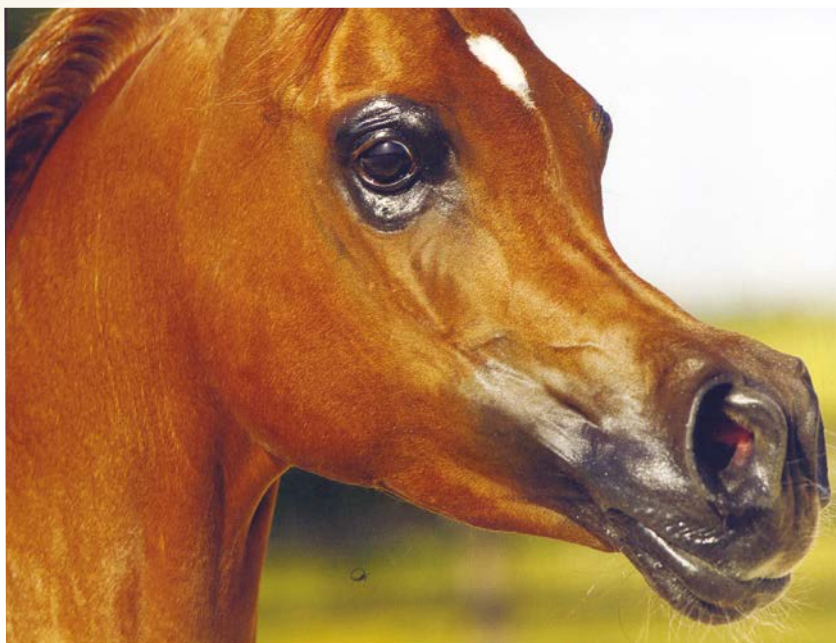
the show ring and the breeding shed beginning with the 2001 World Championships, where Gazal Al Shaqab was named World Champion Stallion and his son, Marwan Al Shaqab, was named World Champion Colt. It was hard to believe that that was just the beginning. A dynasty was in the throes of creation.

While Gazal Al Shaqab established the new silhouette, Marwan Al Shaqab exaggerated it and defined the Arabian show horse. The influence of Fame VF and Kajora can be seen in his stretch and elegance, while his hip, strength, and topline pay homage to his immortal sire.

Unbelievably, Marwan was named the leading sire at the World Championships for an unprecedented five consecutive years. His prominent sons, Khalil Al Shaqab, Hariry Al Shaqab and Wadee Al Shaqab, have created their own significant legacies on the world stage in recent years.

The professional success born out of Michael's architectural design and Sheikh Hamad's largely effervescent and unconventional vision for Al Shaqab is unprecedented. And yet their personal friendship is perhaps the most inspiring.

They have shared laughs, travels, times of success and times of loss together, forever intertwined on this momentous journey. They are like two soldiers who have experienced a chapter of life so deeply together that their bond is cemented in loyalty... to each other and to the Arabian horse. Like all good friends, when things get hard, they are there for each other.



**VENETZIA**  
(Versace x Giavanna)  
2004 Chestnut Mare



**ABHA MYRA**  
(Marwan Al Shaqab x ZT Ludjkalba)  
2009 Grey Mare



**HARIRY AL SHAQAB**  
(Marwan al Shaqab x White Silkk)  
2010 Grey Stallion

Once again, they are both back in the saddle at Al Shaqab: Sheikh Hamad bin Ali Al Thani riding herd, with Michael by his side, as it should be.

For 2017, Michael will unite with another beloved friend: the incomparable white stallion Hariry Al Shaqab (Marwan al Shaqab x White Silkk), whom he showed as a two year old to Unanimous Champion Scottsdale Junior Colt and US National Champion Colt. Michael will also continue to stand the outstanding Fadi Al Shaqab (Besson Carol x Abha Myra) who embodies all the greatness of his extraordinary pedigree.

In every way, the team of Michael Byatt and Al Shaqab illustrates success. And yet, success is not simply what one accomplishes in life; moreover, it's about what he/she inspires others to do.

This story of partnership and leadership transcends Arabian horses. It exemplifies that we are better when we are together. And it shows what can happen when people remain committed to what they believe, have the courage to see it through, and end up changing the world.

This is legacy. This is Michael Byatt and Sheik Hamad of Al Shaqab.



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