



Aja Arabians
A SYNONYM FOR QUALITY



A SYNONYM FOR QUALITY

Aja Arabians

*text by Talitha Bakker, design by Eyecatcher Advertising
photos: G. Aymar, I. Filsinger, G. Grasso, A. Visel*

During the Elran Cup in Hasselt, we had the privilege to speak with Malcolm Hickford of Aja Arabians.

We asked him a few questions.



TA: *How did your passion for Arabian Horses started and when?*

Malcolm Hickford: *Both Jane and I loved animals in general. Our shared dream was to live in the countryside on a farm. Jane spent all her spare time from the age of twelve horse riding. As a young girl Jane and some friends were horse mad, all meeting up at the local Livery yard, one of the livery yard clients owned an Arab Gelding, although she never actually rode him, it became an ambition to one day purchase and ride her own Arabian horse, I suppose this is where the 'aribitis' started. When we eventually managed to buy a small farm, one of the first items on Jane's 'wish list' was an Arabian horse to ride. We purchased our first Arabian from a local breeder Joyce Greenwood, the breeder of world champion Camarque. Joyce suggested we might enjoy going to an 'arab show' we were hooked and became very quickly obsessed. Initially through Joyce we were definitely Camarque fans after all he was a locally bred World champion. One of our first serious purchases was the Camarque daughter G Estarreja (out of Estasha bint Masri) from the Paolo Gucci herd. Incidentally she went on to breed Aja Beneja, the mother of Aja Justified and several other champion offspring.*



TA: What is your priority when you look on the Arabian horse – whether to buy for yourself or while estimating your own horses?

Malcolm Hickford: One word comes to mind when evaluating horses "balance" this is the "holy grail" for us as breeders. When a horse is balanced everything is in the right place; the angle of the shoulder, length of back, neck, leg, croup, forearm, nice short cannons, everything must work together in harmony. Also for us movement is essential, an Arabian horse must move in that prancing style that only an Arabian can, although normally if they are balanced, they are able to move. Lastly they have to have an unmistakable Arabian head, this should not be too large, and should include large eyes. Essential to us probably the most important feature, reasonable width between the eyes, fine muzzle, a nice curve of the face. For us it doesn't need to be extreme. Also nice tippy ears complete the picture. We also think the neck is very important. The length and more importantly the shape which is preferably hooky, go a long way to create a balanced overall look.



Bronze of Aja Aphrodite (WH Justice x Lovin Psyche SSA)



G Estarreja (Carmargue x Estasha Bint Masri)

TA: What is the origin of Aja Arabians? Where did you come up with the name for the stud?

Malcolm Hickford: I've always believed in the importance of a name, prefix "a brand if you like" so gave very considerable thought to the name of our stud. We found the name "Aja" in an Arab name and phrase book, it translates to "a symbol or a sign of something magical". As we believe the Arabian horse to be a very special magical animal, we thought the name, and prefix to fit perfectly.





Lovin Psyche SSA (Padrons Psyche x Bey Shah daughter)

TA: *What is in your opinion the stallion that had the most influence on the breed and how do you emerge these lines into your breeding programme?*

Malcolm Hickford: *The process of breeding is one of , gut feel, genetic experimentation, phenotypical matching, a journey where one occasionally achieves a horse close to ones ideal. For this reason I find it impossible to mention just one stallion, in our early year's, we were fairly infatuated with El Shaklan, but to be a successful breeder I believe you have to have an open mind, to be prepared to experiment with different bloodlines. Stallions that have made their mark over the last 20 or 30 years are many, Bey Shah, Padron Psyche, Versace, Gazal Al Shaqab, Marwan Al Shaqab, Balaton, Kubinec, Fame VF, Sanadik El Shaklan and many more. But if I were to be asked which stallion had the most profound effect on our breeding programme, then it would have to be WH Justice. Interestingly the most successful WH Justice offspring that we bred incorporated the blood of many of the stallions that I listed above, which is what the modern day show Arabian is, a blend of many of the most influential stallions.*

TA: *The most spectacular (the best in your opinion) horses that created Aja Arabians through the years by now are . . .*

Malcolm Hickford: *The first horse to mention in our early years was without doubt FS Bengali, Kubinec x Om El Sanadiva (by EL Shaklan). His selection was a perfect fit for our mares, and he gave us several super offspring, also his daughters went on to be really super broodmares.*

The first internationally successful horse we bred by FS Bengali was Aja Sangali, who achieved the most coveted prize of World Triple Crown Junior male Champion. His full brother, Aja Sanagor was also very successful in the showring. After this period came the WH Justice influenced progeny, the first foal crop included Aja Aphrodite, now owned by Jeff McGlinn of Mystica Arabians, who will be shown in Europe this year, a truly stunning mare.



Aja Aphrodite (WH Justice x Lovin Psyche)

photo: A. Visel



Also Aja Justified who went on to achieve our second World Triple Crown Junior Male Champion, a real all time favourite of ours, and a great ambassador for our breeding programme, he really looks amazing at five years old and we intend to make a presentation in Aachen this year. Also from this foal crop came Aja Angelica, now owned by HH Sheikh Ammar Bin Humaid Al Nuaimi, of Ajman stud, she has been a great show horse for Sheikh Ammar, and her first foal AJ Asyad by Marwan Al Shaqab remains until now, an unbeaten yearling, both in the Middle East and Europe, we wish her every success this year. We also have to mention Aja Angelo last year's UK international Gold Champion, his first foal crop were born this year and they have definitely exceeded all our expectations, he is in our opinion a really serious sire for the future, siring many great physical traits, great necks, pretty faces, strong toplines, good legs and super movement. We have also retained 12 WH Justice daughters who we believe will represent Aja Arabians extremely well as we contemplate our next breeding phase.

At this point I should mention some of the beautiful mares that we have been lucky enough to breed , or purchase:



photo: G. Grasso

Aja Justified (WH Justice x Aja Beneja by FS Bengali)



FS Anastasia (Kubinec x Helaliya by Crusader)

- Aja Beneja - FS Bengali x G Estarreja*
- Aja Estrella - WH Justice x G Estarreja*
- Lovin Psyche SSA - Padron Psyche x Lovin Spoonful*
- Aja First Love - FS Bengali x Lovin Psyche SSA*
- FS Anastasia - Kubinec x Helaliya*
- Aja Aisha - Ruger AMW x FS Anastasia*
- Sanadina - Sanadik El Shaklan x China Moon*
- Sahina - Sanadik El Shaklan x China Moon*
- DG Sahiba - CH El Brillo x LM Sadunga*
- Bey Santeyna - Simeon Sanagor x Bey Teyna*



TA: *What is your opinion about the use of embryo transfer? Are you using this method at your farm?*

Malcolm Hickford: *I wouldn't say that we are ethically against it, but we have tried it and didn't really like it. Firstly it's very expensive, it's stressful, because in our experience conception rates were quite poor. Also in some cases it is possible to mess up a good breeding mare, which did happen to us, and other people that we know. It is kind of messing with nature, and what for? basically "greed", so now we don't do it letting our mares carry their own foal.*



Aja Estrella (WH Justice x G Estarreja)



Aja Angelo (WH Justice x Aja Aishaa by Ruger AMW)

TA: *Do you find it important to have the horses advertised in different ways either in printed or on-line form?*

Malcolm Hickford: *In America they call it "the Arabian horse business" that's because they quite clearly see keeping, showing, breeding Arabians as a business. The Americans are masters at marketing, advertising, promoting. Unfortunately, to survive in the present climate we have to follow their lead. All forms of advertising are important, but still the single most important factor, is good photography, without a good shot it is better not to advertise at all.*



TA: *What future treasures are hidden at the Aja Arabian farm today that no one have heard of yet?*

Malcolm Hickford: *There are several hidden treasures :-)! Aja Justicia WH Justice x Sanadina (by Sanadik El Shaklan), a bit of a late developer but has blossomed into a stunning 3 year old.*

Aja Carina WH Justice x Aja Czarina (by Aja Sanagor), also a slow maturing 4 year old, but well worth the wait as she is also now stunning.



Aja Carina (WH Justice x Aja Czarina by Aja Sanagor)



Aja Justafire (WH Justice x Aja First Love by FS Bengali)

Aja Justafire WH Justice x Aja First Love (by FS Bengali), Aja Justafire is a June born 2 year old, who was also born very dark grey. He wasn't ready to show as a yearling, or this year, but will definitely be ready for next year. He is not typical WH Justice, getting his extreme looks mostly from his mother, Aja First Love, who herself is an extreme headed mare, he is not just a pretty face, he has a super strong topline, good neck, and great movement.



STUD



Aja Estarda Aja Angelo x Aja Estrella, from this years first Angelo foal crop, a pure white fairytale filly.



Aja Guiliano Aja Angelo x Sahina (by Sanadik El Shaklan), a very smooth bodied and complete colt, with a simply gorgeous head.



Lastly our favourite at the moment, Aja Europa, Aja Justified x HB Marais (by Marwan Al Shaqab), she was quite a late born, so it is not going to be easy for her to compete against some of the more mature fillies, but in our opinion she is one of the best fillies that we have ever bred.

TA: Where and when we will see the next Aja Arabians appearances and who will be the new coming stars of the 2013 season?

Malcolm Hickford: Our next show will be the UKIAHS at the new venue, Addington Manor. I think it will be a great show and very well supported especially as it is a new venue.

Aja Europa will be going, it is her first indoor show, so fingers crossed that she can handle it.



Aja Europa (Aja Justified x HB Marais)



*Aja First Blush
(Aja Justified x Aja First Love)*

Next year, 2013, we have some very promising Aja Angelo offspring, which I am sure will be super show horses. Also, Aja Europa will be a 2 year old. Aja Justafire will make his show debut. We have also sold a very promising filly to Al Rashediah Stud of Bahrain, Aja First Blush - Aja Justified x Aja First Love, a very high quality grey filly with super potential. We also wish her the very best of success.



TA: *What do you think about the nowadays shows compared to the old days?*

Malcolm Hickford: *This is quite an emotive subject, as I have said in the answer to the previous question, the Arabian horse has become a business. Some breeders have survived and prospered very well, others have fallen away, which is very sad. The old shows were definitely more fun, had higher enteries, and a more eclectic mix of owners and breeders. We have many great memories of some unforgettable breeders evenings. where win or loose, everybody was up for the party. These days winning or loosing has a totally different dynamic, it matters more, it has just got more serious. It doesn't mean that shows like the All Nations cup have lost their sense of occasion, or that the Arabians are not of incredible quality, it is just that for many of us , the shows are becoming more of a voyeuristic experience.*



Aja Ophelia (Aja Justified x Lovin Psyche SSA)

TA: *Where do you see Aja Arabians in 10 years from now?*

Malcolm Hickford: *We tend not to look so far ahead, a breeding programme can change dramatically over a 3 - 5 year period, especially if we make good breeding choices. So I would say that I believe we will continue to improve. This year we can already see an improvement in the overall consistency of quality of the foals.*



Aja Arabians - United Kingdom
Malcolm & Jane Hickford

*Lipley Hall, Cheswardine,
Market Drayton, Shropshire TF9 2SG
Phone: +44 1630 661209
Fax: +44 1630 661724*

*Email: ajaarabians@aol.com
www.AjaArabians.com*

