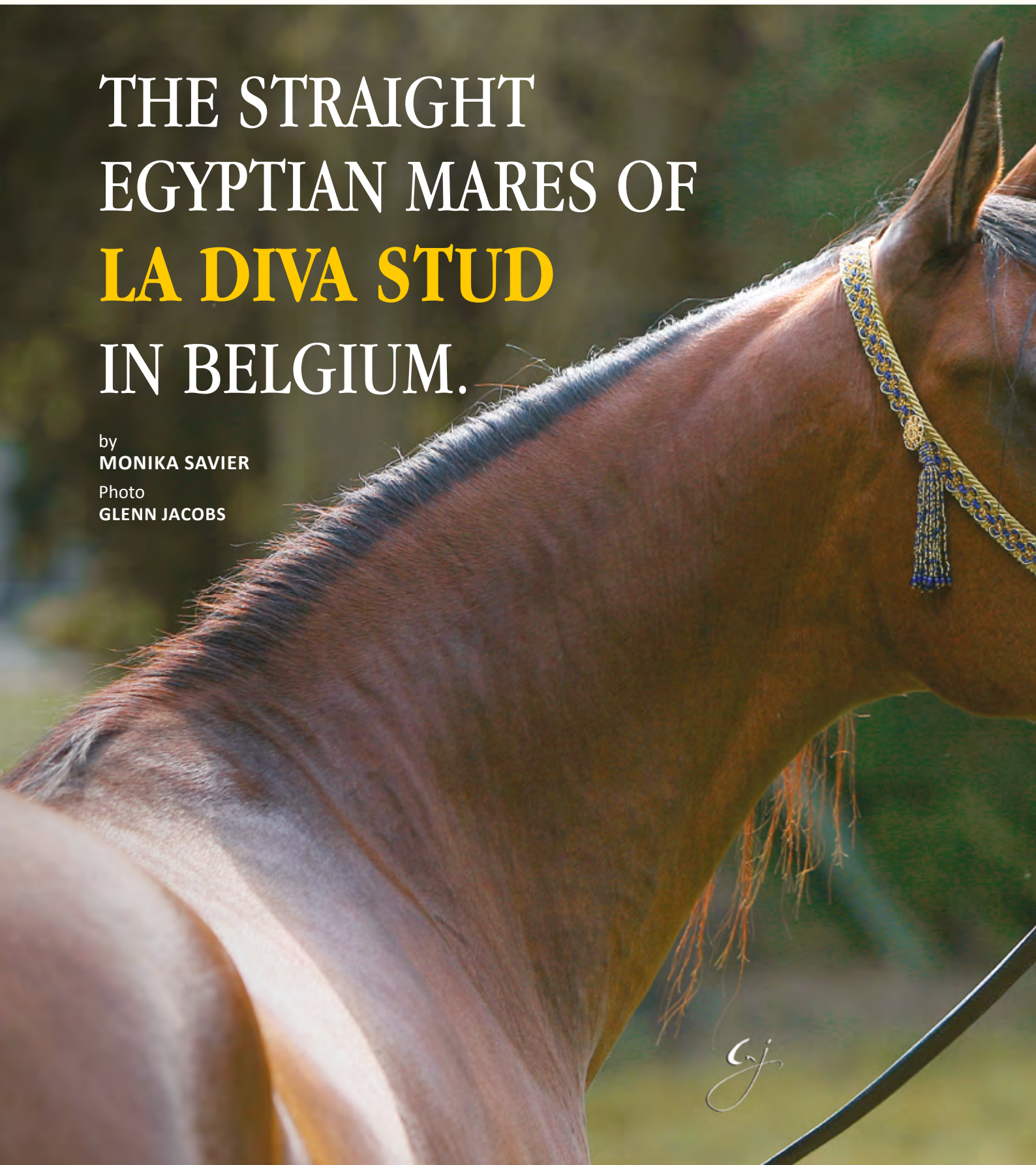


THE STRAIGHT EGYPTIAN MARES OF **LA DIVA STUD** IN BELGIUM.

by
MONIKA SAVIER

Photo
GLENN JACOBS



“After all, breeding is also a bet on luck.
That's what makes it so exciting” *S. Lens*

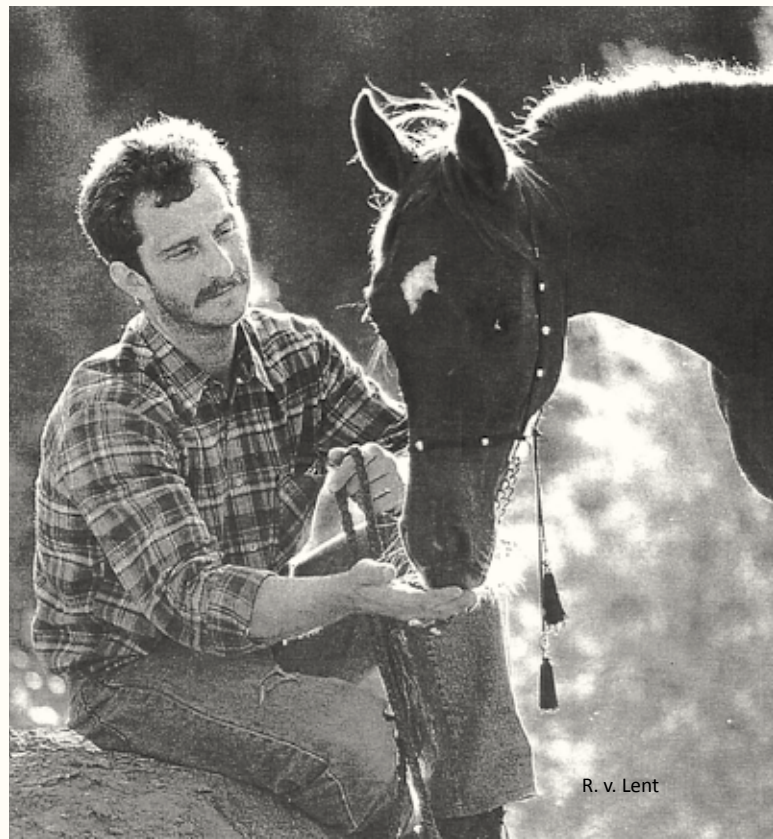
The pastures by the small lake in Halen in the Flemish part of Belgium held a surprise for me when I visited the stud farm for the first time. A herd of noble mares were showing off all their charisma in front of Paul Lamers and Sabine Lens, when they saw them arriving.

CD Anasta (Safeen x Qubla) and a few of her excellent daughters briefly showed floating gaits before enjoying the carrots that Paul and Sabine had brought with them. The beautiful Johara Al Naif and Nardene Al Naif, both guests at La Diva Stud for several years, were part of the outstanding mares, I saw.



Paul Lamers can be described as Belgium's veteran of the Arabian scene. Even as a young rider, he proved his empathy for horses. Together with his partner Sabine Lens, Paul founded O.O.X Training Stables back in the 1990s. She mainly presented Straight Egyptians, which in turn had a special type and finer conformation than the Russian and Polish Arabians that were relatively common in Holland and Belgium at the time. Paul: "I love these fine elegant Arabian horses, they are more intelligent in training and if you treat them like a partner without pressure, they are loyal and co-operative."

Their training centre was successful and Sabine and Paul left the world of amateurs to dedicate themselves fully to professional show training and presentation. Their love was unreservedly for the Straight Egyptians. "We accompanied the horses everywhere to the shows. Back then we slept in the service boxes next to the horses, for us it was not an option to retire comfortably to a hotel in the evening. It had something of a modern nomadic feel to it. The stables were open



R. v. Lent

PAUL LAMERS



SABINE LENS and **PAUL LAMERS** with **IBN BARRADA** (Gad Allah x Barrada) and his owner **BERNARD VAN DE PUTTE** in 1998.



SABINE LENS with **LA DIVA NOOR**



LA DIVA NILE-LA
(Ansata Nile Echo x CD Anasta)

to everyone during the shows and visitors came to have a coffee with us and discuss the horses. We were a community and although there were also conflicts, we had something in common that created a strong cohesion, namely working with the horses, which we all enjoyed," says Sabine Lens about the 90s show scene.

The situation has changed since the 2000s. The breeding show became a beauty contest, a catwalk for horses with panda-eyes and pearl halters. The participants increasingly came from the Gulf region, which provided the show business with new money and the European Conference of Arab Horse Organizations (ECAHO) adjusted the selection criteria accordingly.

The breeders of Straight Egyptians mostly did not want to jump on this bandwagon and parallel to the new show world, an attempt was made to organise events where only Straight Egyptians could be shown and judged according to criteria that were not subject to the ECAHO. The "Egyptian Event Europe" took place for many years in Lanaken, a place in the neighbourhood of la Diva Farm. This meant that the Straight Egyptian show was particularly focused on the tri-country region of Belgium, Netherlands and Germany.

Ten years later, the Egyptian Event Europe was also dominated by international super studs from the ruling families in the Gulf.

After 20 years, Paul and Sabine were tired of the show circus and no longer wanted to show horses themselves. In the meantime, they had founded La Diva Stud at home with the kind support of their foundation mare CD Anasta.

Qubla, the dam of CD Anasta, embodies the Who's Who of American Straight Egyptians. She was imported to Texas in the 1960s by Douglas B Marshall (Gleannloch Farms) from the EAO, El Zahraa in Cairo. Qubla's sire Soufian, a Moniet El Nefous son, was also imported by Douglas B Marshall, as was the later world-famous stallion Morafic, whose son Ibn Morafic was the sire of Qubla. Anasta's dam line goes back to the influential



SERENE ISIS
(Ibn Nejdy x Serene Carima by Salaa El Dine)

mare Rodania and therefore belongs to the Kuhaylah Rudaniyah line. She was born in 1869 to the Ruala Bedouins and was one of the Root Mares of Lady Blunt's Sheykh Obeyd Stud in Cairo.

CD Anasta's sire, Safeen, was the stallion who won the most shows in the 90s and also presented himself as a top show producer through his offspring. His sire Ibn Safinaz, who was imported from Cairo to the USA by the EAO in 1982, was also an extremely successful show champion in the USA,

Paul and Sabine covered Anasta several times with the stallion Ansata Nile Echo, as this combination had proved to be particularly successful. La Diva Noor and La Diva Nile-La were born from this breeding and remained at the stud as root mares.

A few years later, the impressive mare Pashmina (Salaa El Dine x A Little Passion) came to the stud and produced the beautiful filly La Diva Naseema with Naseem Al Rashediah and the colt La Diva Jawhar with Ezz Al Rashediah. Unfortunately, Pashmina died last year but Glenn Jacobs left her beautiful daughter GJ Amira Deenaa (Naseem Al Rashediah x Pashmina) to

them. She belongs to the Dahman Shahwaniya strain and goes back via Farida to the famous El Dahma by Abbas Pasha. GR Amira Deenaa is in foal to Majd Al Qusar for 2024.

Two years ago, Paul and Sabine added the typey NK Nizam daughter Al Qusar Madiba out of Masara Al Qusar, bred by Robert Schlereth, to their mare line. Another Dahmah Shawaniyah mare thus moved in with La Diva.

Last year, the broodmare Serene Isis (Ibn Nejdy x Serene Carima by Salaa El Dine) came to the stud. Her pedigree comes largely from Dr Nagel's Katharinenhof. She has a beautiful type and represents at La Diva the mare line Siglawiya Jedraniya Ibn Sudan via Moniet El Nefous from El Zahraa in Cairo. Serene Isis is in foal to Al Ghazi Al Rashediah for 2024.

La Diva's offspring are now in Saudi Arabia, Israel, China, Albania, Italy, Pakistan, the Netherlands and Belgium. However, Sabine and Paul agree that the next fillies should remain at the stud to be integrated into the breeding programme of La Diva stud farm.



GJ AMIRA DEENAA
(Naseem Al Rashediah x Pashmina)

"An Arabian stud is not a pony farm."

Interview with Sabine Lens and Paul Lamers *by Monika Savier*

You both used to be show professionals, but you have turned your backs on that world. Is beauty no longer so important or are you looking for other forms of beauty and togetherness with Arabian horses?

Paul: Beauty is certainly important, but functionality, a correct conformation with good proportions is also important to us. We have trained horses for many years and trained them for showing. Showing horses was our great passion and our love for Arabian horses meant that we travelled a lot. But today it is a hobby.

Sabine: The professional beauty industry no longer does the horses justice. The selection criteria have standardised the Arabian horse too much. Most show horses look the same. Regional differences have disappeared.

Why do you breed Straight Egyptians? That is rather rare in Belgium.

Sabine: We decided for ourselves to focus on Straight Egyptians. With them, nothing is predetermined according to ECAHO show standards. As a result, individuality is still



possible in breeding. It is more important to create a typey overall picture than to breed only extreme heads with long necks. In addition, the loving and



AL QUSAR MADIBA
(NK Nizam x Masara Al Qusar)



LA DIVA KALIL
(Al Ghazi Al Rashediah x El La Diva Nile-la)



GJ AMIRA DEENAA

(Naseem Al Rashediah x Pashmina)

co-operative character of most Straight Egyptians plays a major role, which we want to preserve. Overall, our Arabians should be beautiful but have the character of a Bedouin Arabian that you could take into your tent during a sandstorm without panicking.

We are also both interested in the pedigrees of the horses. They bear witness to the history of this breed, which came to Europe from the Orient. Some of the ones we have bred have returned to the Orient. But it is with regret that we see today's mass production of show horses, which we would like to counter with the individual class of our small farm.

What is different in the international breeding world today compared to 20 years ago?

Sabine: The small farm in the countryside with a herd of mares and one or two of our own stallions, which we showed to interested mare owners after work, is history. Today we hardly meet any breeders because many traditional stud farms have closed down and the younger generation of horse lovers watch the horses or shows on live stream or YouTube.



SERENE ISIS

(Ibn Nejdj x Serene Carima by Salaa El Dine)



LA DIVA NILE-LA

(Ansata Nile Echo x CD Anasta)

Paul: The invention of frozen semen catapulted Arabian horse breeding into the middle of the globalised world. Stallions could be used from anywhere. There was hardly any experimentation with own horses, because the superiority of the global show champions was too great. In principle, the whole reproduction process has changed. This also includes embryo transfer and in-vitro reproduction. Today it seems as if nothing is impossible any more. There is a technical or hormonal solution for every problem with mares or stallions. This is very expensive today, because nature has been largely replaced by veterinary medicine in breeding over the last 20 years.

You no longer have any breeding stallions yourselves, what criteria do you use to select the stallions for your mares?

Paul: I take a very close look at the stallion, type

and conformation must suit the mare and improve her in weaker areas if possible. But the stallion's family is also important to me, because it is said that 80-90% of the foal's phenotype comes from the parents and grandparents. In addition, we usually never have more than 8 mares. We prefer to select the most suitable stallion for each mare individually and customised, instead of covering all the mares with one stallion. In this way, we also minimize inbreeding in the 2nd and 3rd generation. This is important to me as a preventative measure to avoid genetic defects.

Sabine: It is also exciting to look at the stallions at the stud farms in spring, to talk to other breeders and to make new decisions. A stallion must also express his Arabian type through good movements, he must have charisma and a friendly character and of course big

black eyes... but I know you can't have everything. We know our mares well and we know the characteristics they normally pass on. If the stallion has a few big points that he passes on to the foals, then we have achieved our goal. After all, breeding is also a bet on luck. That's what makes it so exciting. At the top of the wish list is of course a healthy, beautiful foal, preferably a filly.

What about the colts?

Paul: Nowadays, Arabian horse breeding is like nature: only the best stallions prevail over hundreds of competitors. The only difference is that evolution is based on the concept of: *who wins can cover*. This relates to health, strength and intelligence. In the Arabian show world, it is mainly about beauty. However, selection for beauty harbours many dangers. Nowadays, the selection of stallions takes place mainly and effectively at shows, there are no longer selective breeding shows. Practically, this excludes many good stallions from the breeding market. After all, here in Europe at most 10% of breeders take their horses to shows. Something must change if we want to preserve the diversity of the breed around the world.

Should there be any reason for you to carry out an embryo transfer?

Sabine: For us, there is no reason for an embryo transfer. Mass production is out of the question and when a mare is old or sick, she no longer needs to be covered. Her daughters will have long since taken over the role of broodmares. That's the way it is in nature. I don't believe that it benefits the breed to reproduce in an expanded way through recipient mares. We let nature take its course, a horse is made to give birth to 1 foal a year, manipulating that doesn't benefit the horses or us, not even economically if you look at the overall costs.

Paul: I wouldn't buy a B foal from an embryo transfer myself and fortunately that's how most breeders see it.

Many small stud farms no longer see any chance of surviving financially with Arabian horse breeding. Is that true? Are the golden years over? Is Arabian horse breeding just an expensive hobby? What needs to change?



Sabine: I don't know if the golden years are over, the financial side hasn't affected us much so far. For us, Arabian horse breeding is a hobby and a passion. We are one of the stud farms that want to continue. We enjoy working with them every day and discovering new things. Every horse has a different character, it's interesting to watch the interaction between mares and foals and their herd behaviour in the pastures. I enjoy all of that. One problem I see is that it's difficult to find qualified staff. These days, there are hardly any people who want to work seven days a week, even if it's only for a few hours. Most of them also lack qualifications and experience. An Arabian stud is not a pony farm. You have to know the horses and their social behaviour in order to know how to handle stallions and mares to avoid problems and injuries.

Paul: The whole reproduction process is also becoming increasingly complicated, bureaucratic and expensive. A lot needs to change, especially with regard to the possibilities of small private stud farms in Europe. We also need new real and not just virtual forms of show events. The Egyptian Event Europe in Lanaken, for example, was always a great meeting of enthusiasts and breeders from many countries. There was discussion, an exchange of knowledge and experience and buying and selling. It was a social marketplace that had its sustainability. We have long been wondering where and how such activities can be organised again. Perhaps the Arabian horse associations in Europe should also become active.

Many thanks for sharing with us your experience.