

The DRESSAGE



by Talitha Bakker ■ photos by Reindert Jansen
Horse pictured: Jazzmeen ridden by Yvonne Herren

The Arabian horse is seen as one of the most beautiful breed in the world. They are also known as the most versatile breed in the world.

They are excelling in endurance, but also a few Dressage Arabians make it to the top.

Dressage has the goal to make the horse more athletic, more strong and obedient. The horse should perform all exercises

correctly. By riding a certain patron of exercises, the horse can earn points. When you collect a certain number of points, you are promoted to the next level with even more complex exercises, keeping it challenging for both the horse and rider. The classes are divided in novice, light, medium, difficult, extra difficult and most difficult. Some countries also build in some classes in between these levels, to make the step up less



difficult. In this way it takes a bit pressure of the horse and rider and they can both slowly get used to the new exercises and the complexity of it.

In dressage it is not just all about scoring the highest points. It is also meant to develop your horse. By performing dressage, your horse will develop a better topline, neck and body as well as extending his endurance and mental strength.

The highest level of dressage asks a lot of this from the horse and rider. In dressage, they pay attention on the rhythm and regularity, relaxation, contact, impulsion, straightness, collection and obedience. The points given are from 1 till 10. With a 1 being very bad and a 10 being excellent.

Also the character of the horse is important to perform well in dressage. The horse needs to be obedient and willingly. This makes the Arabian Horse so suited for dressage. Not only do they have a friendly and a to-people oriented character, they are also studious and extremely intelligent.

An Arabian horse will always do his very best for its rider, trying to please him as much as he can, but only when treated with the right amount of respect. It is therefore important that the horse is trained in the right way with, when needed, professional guidance. Arabian horses are athletic, nimble and energetic horses, which are all preferred characteristics for a good dressage horse.

When starting the dressage training of your Arabian horse, you should keep in mind that the Arabian horse often needs more time to develop mentally and physically. To go slow on the groundwork, the lounching, breaking in and basic training, is essential for a future career. When the horse is



obedient in every gait, it responses to only a small impulse from the leg and hand, you can go to the next level in training. Important is that your horse keeps relaxed and is moving with a constant impulse. (the natural impulse of the horse to go forward). With a young horse, you start to ride forward, offering him to go down and seeks for contact with your hands. When you make contact, give the horse some space, making your hand elastic, while keeping the contact with the mouth of your horse. When the horse knows where to find you, you can work some exercises, making bending exercises to stronger the muscles, making the horse more elastic.

Just like us humans, also the horse can develop muscle pain.



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It is therefore important to do a good warm-up and cooling down, to make a variety of different exercises and to not over ask them. The Arabian horse is a pleaser and you sometimes need to protect him not to work too hard. A horse that is well balanced and elastic, is aware of his body and hind and will find it easier to bend the entire body as well as moving straight.

In dressage it is important that the horse keeps a constant contact with your hand without any interference of the bridle bit. The rider should follow the horse movements and keep the light contact with the mouth, keeping the head of the horse on the same position. In every level, new exercises are added and the complexity increase. The higher the level, the more collection in movement is required. With doing so, the hind legs of the horse are being placed further under the body. An Arabian horse, like other breeds, has the natural ability for this collection. You can see this in exercises they perform themselves like rearing. A good collection takes a lot of strength and endurance of a horse.

That's why they slowly ask more of the horse in each level. When a horse is collecting, the back will sphere and the horse will find it easier to carry the rider. The rider can train this collection by let the horse go sideways or performing transitions in speed. Of course the talent and the body shape are of influence on how much time a horse needs to be able to perform these exercises.





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Generally speaking, with an Arabian horse, it is mainly important to set a step back when they over perform in all their eagerness. It is important to keep rest and consequence during all trainings.

When they are over excited during a contest or show some tension, it is wise to practice at home, asking your friends to make some noise, to put blankets or flags around the fence or to turn on some music. Of course it is also important to keep calm yourself and to give enough guidance to the horse.

Routine and consistency are the key to a successful sport horse. □