



The Classic Arabian

By Khaled Assem

Once again, international Arabian horse judge Dr. Nasr Marei chats with Horse Times, only about The Body of Excellence: the beauty in an Arabia horse's "movement".



The TYPE of horse was the kick-off article discussed in our previous issue of a series of interviews with internationally accredited judge Dr. Nasr Marei who continues his remarkable transmittance of information on the Arabian horse. In this issue he discusses MOVEMENT and LEGS.

What is movement, and how do you as an international judge and breeder assess it in your judging scheme?

Defining "movement" is easy. Assessing it is more complicated.

By movement we actually mean how a horse moves. When assessing movement you should take these elements into consideration: Balance, Coordination, Animation, Elegance, and Correctness.

When a horse moves at any gate (walk, trot or canter) it must show coordination in limbs and balance where the weight should be shifted and distributed on all four legs. It should be a powerful but elegant and animated movement generated from the hindquarters and the shoulders. Finally, it should not be sloppy, but correct movement.

As a breeder and a judge, the criteria mentioned above happens to be my preferable guidelines that I would like to see in my horse or in the show ring. A good movement exemplifies the above mentioned elements. Horses are not just pretty creatures that you look upon, they are surely performing creatures. They have their own events and sport disciplines. They were used in farming, pulling and lets not to forget, they were also war machines!

Hence, in order to sum movement, as a breeder I personally look into the structure and correctness of the horse and how much he confirms his trait as an Arabian horse. However, movement is one of the basic points that I would really go for in breeding, and as I said before it's an important trait of the Arabian to have agile animated movement that is characterised by high kicking when the movement comes naturally from the shoulder, and



when the power comes from the hindquarters. If the movement is initiated from the shoulders then it is flat, and the hindquarters wouldn't be working sufficiently; the power comes from the back.

Shifting from our main topic; why are there shows to judge the Arabian? As to see which is prettier? For the owners to be happy or are you trying to reserve the better and best breeds and improve upon them? As a rider, I would think that some horses are naturally built and apt to be athletic. In reality you could add to a horse that is not talented as a mover; it could be exercised well, as such not make him a great mover, but definitely improve him.

This brings me back to a point about human intervention: are we scaling a natural ability so that we judge horses according to how they were bred or according to the human intervention where they can be improved upon?

(Smiling) I think presenting a horse in a show is part of the education of the owners, to see how well their horses are doing and progressing. Frankly, many breeders will sit at home and think that his/her horses are the best. It's an emotional issue to the breeder. But if one really looks into the quality of the horses and decides to assess them, one way of doing this is to present them in a show and have them judged by different eyes, and not the owner's eyes. If the horse wins or fairs well, then the breeder is on

the right track. Otherwise, the owner should study and learn where the shortcomings are. The intelligent and good breeder would do that and will get reassurance about the quality of his horses when they win or get a red flashing light insinuating that he should do better with his breeding. This is the main purpose of going into shows in my opinion. In addition there is a little bit of ego and promotion for the breeding programme.

On the same note, breeding BETTER horses is a GOOD step for the breed itself whether it is an Arabian, a warm blood or otherwise. It is the human selection when done correctly that improves the quality of the breed. I believe that a show is an avenue that helps in improving the breed.

As for improving movement or performance through human intervention, I believe that a natural excellent vs. poor or good movement is a natural thing that

All these factors are paramount. They complete the whole and same picture. The legs have to be proper and sound. In Arabians, "type" as explained in our previous interview is an essential hallmark of the breed.

Each of these factors is an individual CHALLENGE to the breeder. Combining them altogether is even a bigger one as you can imagine.

In regards to LEGS and blemishes, what can you tell the readers?

The legs are the support for the body and means of moving, running and jumping. Legs have to be correct, proper, strong, and with no congenital blemishes. One has to see each of the leg as a whole and then go into a more detailed assessment. There are different parts in the leg; one should start from the shoulder down or from the hip down. Each of these parts

defect that the horse was born with potentially congenital and of hereditary consequences like for example deformed legs, deviation, offset legs, etc. then the horse gets low scores. In any case you do not want to have a horse that is suffering in the show. If you think that a blemish causes a problem for the horse, it should not be entered in the competition, otherwise the horse stands a chance of being disqualified.

Hooves; are any correctional techniques allowed as to adjust the hooves in order to get the correct angle?

Yes, it's allowed. This is already being done whilst the horse is growing up. Allowing that has nothing to do with cheating and it's not against the welfare of the horse. We have to differentiate between correcting the weakness in hooves structure, appearance and cosmetic surgery. In the



horses are born with. As a breeder, I know for sure that the quality of the movement is inherited. Some stallions or mares just consistently pass it on to their foals. Horses that are not born with "excellent" movement can be improved by training to some extent. Human intervention, as mentioned by you can be important in a different way; breeders can concentrate in their own breeding on individual horses that already have excellent movement.

Back to movement, is it difficult to correct movement in a breeding programme in order to come up with better movement, or is it more difficult to come up with better legs, or improve the type? What is it that is extremely challenging? Or are all those factors homogeneous?



has its respective measure of correctness to be evaluated. For example, from the shape to the size, shape and uniformity of the hoof, the legs from the front side whether they are parallel or their lines are broken, any deviation from chest level or from knee level, the direction where the hooves are pointing (toe-in, toe-out), as well as the back legs whether they have the hocks inside or outside, and whether they are parallel or not, or have any deviation at any joint point. All the above are being examined while the horse is standing.

Now to complete your evaluation, you have to do the same whilst the horse is walking and trotting. Other problems can arise, such as dishing out or in, sloppy movement, lack of coordination and imbalanced movement patterns. The fact is that in every show the legs are always the lowest score in the total evaluation of the horse and that's because there are so many details in each of the legs. The horse has four legs and you are bound to find incorrectness somewhere.

As for blemishes, if it's an acquired blemish it doesn't count in the evaluation in the show ring. However, if it is a blemish or a

past there were reports indicating that surgery was done in many areas in the body of the horse for correcting defects. These procedures are banned worldwide.

Your experience in the influence of a mare vs. a stallion in the breeding programme; when a lot of people sell horses today, they say that this horse was the son of the son of the stallion that won that specific Olympic Games for example. But the true breeders know that it's the mother's side that is more important. It's an interesting controversial issue that comes only with a pool of experience.

Both the mother and the father have their input. Genetically speaking, in some of the lines you will clearly see that the mother's genes are very dominant. A mare that was bred to different stallions will produce a foal that one would immediately recognise its close resemblance to the mother; likewise for a stallion. Basically, each of the parents contribute. In some cases the dominance comes from the mother, and some cases from the sire. There is no fixed equation. **HT**