

ARABIAN AMBASSADOR

AM SHAHRAZAD: CUTTING HORSE

BY KATHY LACHAINE

ARABIANS ARE WELL KNOWN FOR THEIR PROWESS IN ENDURANCE SPORTS AND FOR THEIR GRACE IN THE SHOWRING. LESS FAMILIAR ARE THOSE DISCIPLINES WHERE ARABIANS ARE QUIETLY COMPETING IN OPEN VENUES, DEMONSTRATING THE VERSATILITY THAT IS A HALLMARK OF THE BREED. IN THIS SERIES, WE MEET THOSE AMBASSADORS OF THE ARABIAN BREED.

THIS MONTH WE HEAR FROM NAVID KHARRAZI WHO CURRENTLY COMPETES WITH HIS PUREBRED ARABIAN MARE, AM SHAHRAZAD (AM GOOD OLDBOY x VESELKALUVTOPOLKA), IN OPEN CUTTING COMPETITIONS.

HOW DID ARABIAN HORSES COME INTO YOUR LIFE?

Both my wife and I love horses, and one day we were babysitting our nephew while the rest of the family went to an event. We did not know the event included a horse auction by Al-Marah Arabians for the benefit of Therapeutic Riding of Tucson (TROT). My wife received a phone call from her aunt telling her that she had bought an Arabian horse for her. That was our start. We still have that gelding, and we consider him the king of the barn – he is 26 years old now.

DESCRIBE CUTTING EVENTS. HOW DO THEY DIFFER FROM AN ARABIAN BREED SHOW?

Cutting is a cattle event based on ranch work. You must separate one cow of your choosing from a

herd and your horse has to keep that cow from returning to the herd. You have 2.5 minutes to show the judges what your horse can do. The idea is for the horse to have full control of the cow. Usually a competitor can cut 2.5 cows in 2.5 minutes. That means two cows that you work fully and a third cow that is a bit rushed. Once you cut the cow out of the herd you are not allowed to cue the horse with your hands, and

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cueing with legs is limited as well. Once you give the cow to the horse, the horse takes over and you lock yourself in the seat and do your best to stay out of your horse's way. I have heard it said that cutting is the only equine discipline that the horse does all the thinking. It is the most exciting ride anyone can ever have.

HOW DID YOU DISCOVER CUTTING?

For long as I can remember I always wanted to be a great

rider. One day my trainer, Lee Bolles, a long time Arabian cutting trainer and Al-Marah Arabians head trainer asked me if I wanted to try my hand at cutting. He warned me that cutting is addicting, and I might not want to run alongside my horse or go around circles anymore. I gave a halfhearted 'yes' while we were going into Al-Marah's enclosed arena. We put my halter horse on a cutting flag for the first time. A cutting flag is a training tool that helps teach the horse to follow a target. Needless to say it was not a pretty sight, since neither one of us knew what to expect. My halter horse turned tail and bucked all the way to the other end of the arena. I was hooked. After that I immersed myself in anything and everything cutting and have not looked back. I have to say, getting a halter horse to cut taught me a great deal about horses and cutting. He had a heart of a lion but not the equipment/conformation for that level of athletic work.

Today, my National Champion mare AM Shahrazad (AM Good Oldboy x Veselkaluvtopolka) has only competed in cutting, and I have never seen any reason to ask her to do anything else. My first Arabian did more traditional events; I showed him at halter in



local shows at first and then the Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show. Our results were not too bad for an amateur. We also competed in some of the western pleasure events locally as well.

HOW EASY IS IT TO "TRY OUT" CUTTING? IS THERE AN AVENUE FOR NOVICES TO PARTICIPATE?

The best thing to do is to watch a cutting competition, like at the Scottsdale Show, so you can see what the goal is, then contact a cutter who uses Arabians. There are few of us around, but most of us are very willing to let you try out one of our finished horses or let you bring your horse for an introductory session with the flag. At our farm (On A Wing And A Prayer Fine Horses) we usually let folks come out and try the cutting flag to get a little better feel for what the ride is like. Clinics are always a good idea because you get to see different levels of abilities.

Cutting competitions are normally based on a horse's winnings and the rider's winnings, and that levels the playing field. For example, a class called \$5,000 novice horse is for horses that have not won more than \$5,000 during their time as a cutter, so you won't compete against

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"The cow has just made a quick, fast turn," says Navid, "and Shahrzad has rocked way back on her hind legs to block it. I am thinking, 'Oh..., stay with her, stay with her – Push, Push!' Push is because of how you ride a cutting horse with your stirrups home and short, sitting all the way back, pushing on the horn to avoid interfering with the horse. **AM SHAHRAZAD** (AM Good Oldboy x Veselkaluvtopolka) is great at reading cows, much better than I am, even overriding my cues if necessary to catch them."

an open-class horse or a horse that has won \$25,000, which means he/she has had more cutting experience. In a normal/usual cutting competition there are many divisions to keep the playing field level for everyone from beginners to advanced.

HOW COMMON ARE ARABIANS IN CUTTING? AT THE LOWER AND UPPER LEVELS?

WHAT TYPES OF HORSES DO YOU ROUTINELY COMPETE AGAINST?

Quarter Horses are the common breed these days, but there used to be many Arabian horses that competed in cutting. In my local shows, where I usually participate, I am the only person that rides an Arabian. So, I guess the answer is NO, they are not very common.

HOW ARE ARABIANS SUITED TO CUTTING? ARE THERE ANY PARTICULAR CHALLENGES THEY FACE?

This depends on the Arabian. Even in the Quarter Horse world not all horses make it as a cutter. It is a very intense discipline, and the horse must be very athletic, physically durable, and mentally strong. I have had a few horses that I started in cutting training that I ended up selling because they showed that it was not for them. They are not able to handle the mental side of working cattle at that level. Like all other disciplines there is a type of conformation that suits this discipline as well. You want an Arabian with a short back, good and strong hind quarters to be able to stop under him/herself. The advantage I see with the Arabians is their smarts.

WHAT KINDS OF COMMENTS HAVE YOU GOTTEN FROM THE QUARTER HORSE EXHIBITORS AND JUDGES?

I've received all kinds of comments about riding an Arabian – some good and some funny. The one I loved was from one of the herd holders at one of the local shows. We were looking to breed Shahrazad to a Quarter Horse cutter, and they knew the stud, so I had asked them questions about him. I overheard him and his wife talking, and he said, "that little grey is very cowy." I enjoyed that coming from him. He is also the president of that club and a long-time cutting trainer. Of course, I have to say, you get looks when you are the only Arabian rider and the only grey horse in the crowd, but this club that I cut with is full of very nice folks. Always helpful and kind. That is one of the reasons I go back every chance I get.

Another comment that sticks in my head was the first time I went to another cutting club in Phoenix. I was nervous about being in a new place. It happened that the cattle were very runny that day, and my first cut was no different. The cow ran hard and fast, and Shahrazad matched her. She was fast with huge stops to the point that I had to stop her which made me lose some points, but I was worried she might hurt herself. After the run, I had multiple people that I did not know come

up while I was cooling her down saying things like, "I thought to myself what is that guy going to do on an Arab, and then she started. WOW, I have never seen

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an Arab move that fast and go to the ground that hard." I was also told, "you got cheated – she should have received a better score." That made my day.

Of course, these groups are affiliated with the National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA), which is not a breed group. You can cut on anything, almost, and they are okay with it. I like that it's about doing the job, not how your horse looks.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT CUTTING?

There isn't a ride like it, especially when everything falls into place. It has all the elements of all other disciplines rolled into one, no two cows are the same. You must be at your best, and sometimes that means just sit quiet and let the horse do his/her thing. Once in the ring my mare and I are a team and she knows exactly what to do when facing that cow. That is an awesome feeling and I can tell that she is enjoying the challenge too.

DESCRIBE YOUR MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE WITH AN ARABIAN HORSE.

Little did we know that our first Al-Marah Arabian foal would become a Champion cutting horse and spur the creation of On A Wing and A Prayer – Breeders of Fine Horses. Fast forward to 2007, and we entered AM Shahrazad into her first Nationals and ours. Our only expectation was to make it through the classes and do the best we could. AM Shahrazad proved herself as a cutting horse that year by taking home a National Championship and Reserve Championship in cutting. It was a fantastic feeling to see and feel Shahrazad cut that well and with that much confidence. Since then she has proven herself repeatedly. Her accomplishments include two more National Top Tens in 2014, five Region 7 Cutting Championships, and four Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show Championships. Her most recent accomplishments include Reserve Championships in the Open and Non-Pro Cutting classes at the 2019 Scottsdale Arabian Show. AM Shahrazad has also competed against Quarter Horses and won. She is proof that the Arabian horse has the versatility to do anything.

People live a lifetime waiting for a horse like AM Shahrazad and we consider ourselves fortunate that she has been a part of our life from the day she was born. ♣