



# The Road To

# U.S. Nationals

by Colleen Scott

From afar, those who aspire to enter Tingley Coliseum wonder who are these people with such incredible horses and talent that they are able to compete at the national level? Who are their trainers? How long have they been riding? What have they sacrificed to get there? What challenges do they face in their riding?

As it turns out, they are just as human as the folks sitting in the stands wishfully thinking they were in the saddle. We talked with just a handful of amateur riders preparing to compete at the 2007 U.S. Nationals. For some, this will be their first foray on the national stage. For others, it will be one of many times they have competed under the spotlights and on the green shavings.

Regardless of their experience showing at U.S. Nationals, they have many things in common. They have aches and pains, dreams and disappointments. They win ribbons and get the gate. They save money, work hard and sometimes don't believe in themselves. Their experiences are much like those of any other amateur rider who will pin their season's hopes on 20 minutes in October.

Every horse and rider has a story. We're going to tell just a few. Watch for these contenders at the show and check the January issue to read about their experiences at the 2007 U.S. Nationals in Albuquerque.



my rides with Sunny. I am sure he was very confused and frustrated!"

Between now and the U.S. Nationals, where she will show Sunny in the Arabian Hunter Pleasure 55 & Over class, Ferguson will be working on following Moffatt's directives, which include keeping her heels down, balancing evenly on the horse, keeping her heels back and underneath, and not leaning over during the canter cue. "My riding is better at home, because I can focus more on myself instead of showing the horse."

She'll also be working hard to get ahead of the game in her profession. An attorney, Ferguson is able to take off as much time as she needs. "The catch is that I am expected to work a certain number of hours each year; so, any time I take off means I have to make up the hours by working harder other times. Taking 10 or so days off for Nationals also means that I work almost around the clock for a week before leaving so I can get all of my work to clients before I go."

What does she think of her chances with her new partner? "While Sunny has his quirks, he is basically an honest, well-behaved horse who I think is very pretty and talented. Thus, while I will always be nervous when I compete at Nationals and always understand that we could have a bad or unimpressive class, I feel like he and I have the potential for doing well. That gives me a bit more confidence than in some

other years when I have competed." Moffatt will also show Sunny in the Arabian Hunter Pleasure Junior Horse class.

Ferguson is looking forward not only to the competition, but also to time away from her daily routine. "I love watching all the great horses show, and because being at Nationals is so different from my day-to-day life, I end up very refreshed mentally. Finally, Trace's other clients are great, and we have become good friends who really support each other. I love spending time with them."

### *Gift Horse Ignites Passion*

It's the call many wish for, but few actually receive. "I bought you a horse," said Christine Kharrazi's aunt, who was attending the well-known Therapeutic Riding of Tucson (TROT) auction and happened to have the winning bid on the purebred Al-Marah gelding, Trots Captaintsee (AM Sea Captain x Al-Marah Tsee). "When she called us from the auction 11 years ago, we were living in a 1,600 square-foot house with a dog," recalls Navid Kharrazi. "We definitely weren't prepared for a horse."

Christine's aunt hadn't acted entirely on a whim when she purchased the gelding for the young couple. Navid had been interested in horses since he was a child. "My father put me in a riding school that was a pretty military-oriented place. We did some jumping and all wore the nice shirts and hats," he



Navid Kharrazi of Tucson, Ariz.





says. Christine had also grown up with a love of horses. Both were excited about finally pursuing their childhood passions again. They boarded their new gelding at Al-Marah, spending as much time as possible riding with and learning from then head trainer Lee Bolles.

The following year, Navid and Christine attended the TROT auction themselves and purchased another Al-Marah purebred gelding, MegaDream (Al Marah Garcon x Dreamazan). Wanting to be as close as possible to the two horses, they soon moved closer to Al-Marah and became fixtures at the farm. Navid showed MegaDream in halter, capturing a Top Five honor at the Region 7 Championship Show in 1998. However, it wasn't enough, and he was soon exploring other options, including cutting. Once Navid tried it, there was no turning back. The stage had been set for what would eventually lead not only to riding competitive cutting horses, but also breeding them. "I was bitten by the bug," he says. "Cutting is the closest thing you can do on horseback to a dogfight with an F-16," he says. Christine, on the other hand, turned her sights to dressage, taking lessons from Donna Bolles on AM Captaintsee (renamed Shiraz by the couple).

When Lee Bolles retired in May 2001, moving from Al-Marah to Tucson, Navid and Christine were in a quandary. "Lee had always been there for us, always open to helping," says Navid. The Bolles departure from Al-Marah, combined with Navid and Christine's desire to pursue breeding, prompted them to move yet again, this time, to be closer to Lee and Donna Bolles.

"We asked ourselves if we just wanted to play at the horse thing or if we wanted to start pursuing it seriously and doing some breeding," says Navid. The couple moved right next door to their friends and mentors in 2002, continuing to seek their counsel and expertise on a regular basis. "I don't know where we'd be without them," says Navid. "We definitely wouldn't be where we are today," he says.

Where are Navid and Christine today? Having won the Arabian Cutting Novice Horse Non-Pro title at Scottsdale this year aboard AM Shahrazad (AM Good Oldboy x Veselkluvtopolka), Navid is currently preparing to compete at the U.S. Nationals. Their gift horse, Shiraz, will serve as turn-back horse during the competition. Is he nervous? You bet. "I sent my entries in and that made it real," he says. "I was nervous by the next morning."

Between now and mid-October, Navid will continue working with Lee, fine-tuning his partnership with Shahrazad. "The hardest thing for me is to slow down and wait," he says. "Shahrazad will do anything to keep her cow, I just have to sit tight."

Navid's other challenge is continuing to get his seat back following surgery in April. Due to missing cartilage in his right hip, riding was often painful. After exploring several surgical options, Navid decided upon a relatively new procedure called Birmingham Hip Resurfacing. Traveling to Madison, Wis., for

the procedure, he was riding again within a month, but still experiences some soreness.

Besides spending time in the saddle for what he hopes will be a good run in Albuquerque, Navid is busy working with the nine horses the couple now owns. A mechanical engineer by trade, he is able to work a flex schedule. "I'm going from 4 a.m. until 7 or 8 p.m.," he explains. "Being at the office by 5 allows me enough time in the evenings to get all the horses taken care of."

The two have named their farm "On A Wing And A Prayer," a name, Navid says, that fits their foray into the Arabian industry. Their goal is to breed quality Arabian/Quarter Horse crosses suited for cutting. "We don't care what the head looks like. We are interested in the feet and hind end," he says. "We also study what the horse's ancestors did when we make our breeding decisions," he explains. With their first foal crop on the ground this year, they are excited about what the future holds.

Sadly, this year's trip to U.S. Nationals will be bittersweet. The couple lost MegaDream in September, and his absence at the farm is still palpable. Yet, one of Navid's dreams will be coming true as he takes a shot at the roses in honor of the first horse the couple purchased a decade ago.

### **Back On The Circuit**

When Deanna Biles, Greenwood, Del., left the Arabian show ring some 20 years ago, she was slightly disenchanted. "There were some things going on that put me off a bit," she recalls. Even so, having been to U.S. Nationals to watch, Biles decided then she wanted to return some day and make a run for the rose garland.

At a seminar given by Cathy Vincent of Adandy Farm a couple of years ago, Biles decided the time was right to dive back in. Vincent was a big part of that decision. "I have a lot of respect for Cathy and her methods. She doesn't try to grind a horse into the ground, and she's willing to listen to and learn from her peers."

Biles is fortunate to live just minutes from Adandy Farm. So, soon after Vincent's seminar appearance, Biles was back in the saddle. She hadn't forgotten her goal from two decades prior and found herself searching for a mount to take her to U.S. Nationals.

"Cathy and I went to a Tattersall's sale and bid on a Gitar daughter. We were outbid and walked away without a horse. At dinner that night, Cathy made a suggestion," Biles recalls. "She said, 'There is a horse in the barn that would be perfect for you, but she won't be easy.'"

Vincent was referring to the then 3-year-old Expressive Fire (Justafire DGL x Bey Fire Express). Biles soon purchased the mare, and they've been working out the bugs ever since.

"Cathy was correct; she isn't an easy mare," says Biles, laughing. "It is like she wakes up every morning and immediately starts thinking about what twist she can throw at



is one of her weaknesses. "I thought Sunny was doing really well. In fact, I only rode him a couple of times between my cut and the final."

Moffatt's final ride in the junior horse class came first, and the two did not make the top ten. When Ferguson and Sunny took to the ring on the last day of the show, conditions were not ideal. "It was the second class of the morning and it was really chilly, so Sunny was pretty much of a handful. And, I think he was allergic to something—his mouth was swollen like he'd been stung by a bee. He wasn't bleeding and didn't seem to hurt at all, but the swelling felt odd to him and he was fussy. In the class, he didn't pay attention like he usually does and we made some mistakes and didn't make it back."

Although pleased with their cuts and disappointed with the finals, Ferguson plans to go back. "As usual, it was inspiring to see the other amateur riders—there are so many good ones. I love to watch all of the hunter pleasure classes since I feel like I have a better chance of picking out the winner than in the English classes. In a lot of the classes, I end up liking about half of the horses and then just confuse myself trying to decide who the judges will pick as the winner!"

## The Surprise Of A Lifetime

"I still don't think he realizes what he's done," said Lee Bolles of client Navid Kharrazi's national championship and reserve national championship titles in cutting. Kharrazi and AM Shabrazad (AM Good Oldboy x Veselklutopolka) had captured the Arabian Cutting Novice Horse Non-Pro title at Scottsdale earlier in the year, but winning at the U.S. Nationals, especially both a championship and a reserve, was more than Kharrazi had imagined.

"Two weeks before the show, I would have told you I didn't think we should go," said Kharrazi. "Our practice rides were horrible. I was nervous, tense and intense. I was trying to do my best, but I was overriding and over-controlling."



Navid Kharrazi, center, pictured with his wife, Christine, his horse AM Shabrazad, and his trainer Lee Bolles.

Bolles concurs and says it was a challenge not only at home in the weeks leading up to the show, but also at the show. "We spent a lot of time trying to get him to stay out of the mare's way," he says. In fact, things got so bad that Bolles videotaped Kharrazi riding, a tape Kharrazi hopes he's thrown away by now. "I saw it, and thought I shouldn't even be riding, much less going to U.S. Nationals," said Kharrazi. An engineer by trade, he admittedly has a hard time "just riding." "I analyze things to death," he says. "That's how I'm wired. It is hard to just let the horse do its job."

The videotape strategy worked and Kharrazi's rides and confidence improved. His combined point totals would garner him and AM Shabrazad the Championship title in the Arabian Cutting Novice Horse class and the Reserve Champion title in the Arabian Cutting Novice Horse class.

Kharrazi credits Bolles with their success, calling the former head trainer for Al-Marah his "secret weapon." "He is my ace in the hole—my top secret weapon." The two have worked together ever since Kharrazi and his wife, Christine, received their first horse as a gift from Christine's aunt. That was more than a decade ago, and the couple has since immersed themselves in the Arabian horse industry with their farm, On A Wing And A Prayer.

With trophies from Scottsdale and U.S. Nationals already on his mantle, Kharrazi has a tough legacy to continue. Look for the two at the 2008 Scottsdale Show, defending their title.

## Rides Of A Lifetime

Stand next to trainer Cathy Vincent as she watches a client show a horse and you'd best be prepared to be pummeled, squeezed and exposed to an impressive whistling talent. That's just how it was as she watched client Deanna Biles, Greenwood, Del., navigate her way through the I, II, III sections, then the A, B sections and ultimately, the finals. When Biles and the mare Expressive Fire (Justafire DGL x Bey Fire Express) were called to the Top Ten in the Arabian



Deanna Biles with her horse Expressive Fire.