

# When *Royal* is NOT just a title...

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Her cheerful smile, welcoming voice, and modesty reflects her heritage of nobility; her Royal Highness Princess Alia Al Hussein Al Saleh, is her title and she sure is royal. It was my first time to meet a prince and meeting princess Alia made it quite a lovely first experience. Although it was a long tough day of judging in the competition Princess Alia agreed without hesitation to meet us for an interview. She even answered all our questions with deep insight and details, and a delightful smile on her face. I would like to cease this opportunity and thank the Princess for her time, effort, words, and above all her royal friendliness.

**What is the first thing that comes to your mind when the word "Arabian Horse" is mentioned?**

I have a slightly visual memory, so I think I just see one. But I think it is something closely related to history, it's something positive and nice. It's beautiful, it's clever, and it's like a good force.

**How many horses do you have?**

Well in the national stud we have around 140.

**Do you have a special horse?**

They are all special; I suppose the present world champion, which we bred and his great grand mother was my great grand father's mare probably is the most special, his name is "Helayl Ramada" he was the reserved champion last year; then sadly the champion was disqualified and he became champion. It's not a very nice way to win, but I was very proud that he was reserved champion anyway.

**How old is he?**

He is seven this year.

**In your opinion, what is the significance of this festival?**

It is very important because I think it's a good chance, and it's really nice also that it's international this year, because it's very important for us as breeders to be able to assess our horses against other competitors, even here there are horses from abroad that all show recently. It's also good because you get a different perspective; i.e. it doesn't really matter what you do on the day, as long as the horses look good and show well because it could be first one day, it could be champion the next, it could be tenth the day after with the same group of horses. A lot of it depends on the mood, how well they go and also the eyes of different judges. Judges have different priorities, obviously it should be basically a good horse, a pretty horse and a sound horse that move well, but everyone has a slightly different taste. This difference is nice because it also makes you realize it's not conclusive, it just means that hopefully it's a good opportunity to try again and just to grade yourself among the other competition, but it really shouldn't mean that one takes it too seriously.

**What makes the Arabian horse superior to other horses?**

Well, its beauty that is most obvious, and quality; but it's also extremely intelligent, brave and very good with endurance and long distance. This is the reason why people, from Europe and from all

over the world, through out history have been wanting to get Arab Horses and to mix them with the breeds they had; even if they weren't pure bred, they always add the qualities which they have. They add quality without distracting anything, so they've always improved other breeds and that is another reason why the breeders use them because they add quality, beauty, and courage.

**Are there any differences between the Egyptian and Arabian horses?**

Well, Egypt had obviously its sort of group of horses for many years which are registered and internationally accepted and they have been reasonably in a quiet tight circle, that they have a certain type now that people recognize. Mainly they are not being extremely pretty, but I believe also that they are good long-distance and race horses which is nice maybe a left hand side of it. I think the danger with shows sometimes is that people just care for a horse to be pretty and stop being a functional animal, but I think he should be both. It's nice to see athletic animals here as well and be able to always see that in shows all over the world.

**Could you rank the Egyptian Horse with other Arabian blood lines?**

It's hard to say the rank of the Egyptian horse abroad, there are clubs here to straighten this up. But I think the main thing is that they are all Arab horses. The Egyptian horses do have a kind of look that people tend to recognize, but I think a good Arabian horse should have the same qualities; so I am not very much pro saying Egyptian or Jordanian or whatever and they all really come from the same "Manba'a" or origin. But Egypt obviously has a wonderful place and has its standing internationally, when you say Egyptian there is a certain type of horse that people think of; it has a very extreme kind of head, a lot of personality, and I think also it has a strong character.

**How does the Arabian horse bred in the Arab countries compete on the world level?**

Oh, I think they can compete easily; the nice thing is that now I think most of the Arab part of the world really established themselves on the world scene and we are able to compete in Europe and in America. This is because now we have our own shows and our inhandlers and people are getting much better and starting to be able to really condition the horses, take them abroad and compete on other people's terms and still win; I think that's a notion we should be proud of. Like Dr. Marei have a wonderful Mare "Gelgelah Al-

Badeia" who did fantastic on the world's scene last year and it's really something we should be proud of. It's great when you go there, ok it's all the Arabian horse but it's nice to see the Arab horse that has been bred by Arabs, not just bought by them, actually doing nice. We had a couple of shows together and you know we kind of support each other, and even when each of us had only one horse left still competing and we actually get results with that one; its fantastic, especially when it's a horse that your family bred; its lovely.

**During a certain time in the USA all the Arabian horse breeders were tax exempted so as to encourage them, why don't we apply this in the Arab world?**

You should speak with the ministers about that, I wish it would happen, because it is obviously rather expensive, you know horses are expensive to maintain, obviously it would be great. But in a way it wasn't so good also abroad because the prices went up astronomically. It wasn't realistic and a lot of people went into it as an investment but not for the good of the horse. So maybe this is in a way for the good of the actual horse so that the people, who own them, would really want to work with them and it is not just a play thing. But everything has its good and bad side.

**How would genetic engineering affect the purity and originality of the horse?**

I don't think it should affect the purity because they are all pretty much documented now, and I think no matter how much we try to Engineer things "Rabena" (God) has his own plans of nature or whatever you want to call it. I think no matter how clever we try to be, God is going to step ahead; he is the creator. I am not very much for fuddling around with things. However, I might say that now, but maybe if I had a mare that I want to get a particular foal from and she had a problem maybe I would resort to it. So it's easy to talk but sometimes we don't apply it in life; but I think the less we mess around with things the better.

**Could you rank all the countries that breed the Arabian horse?**

I think every country has good quality horses, now its becoming so international, but really it's hard to say that because there are also artificial insemination and its really difficult. I mean America has the largest number, but when they are not necessarily winning and again they have a certain different kind of an eye. Really it's hard to say. I think Jordan and Egypt were the first to have their stud books accepted within certain indigenous horse's records. Now I think almost most if not all the Arab countries have Arab horses and they did great in that. Most of Europe, Eastern Europe, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand have very good horses. Australia used to have a reputation that "the English took their bad horses to Australia"; but in fact when we went there we were pleasantly surprised. They had beautiful horses, and also very athletic because they use them, they still use them to work with cattle and so they actually are very good physically as well, they are not just pretty. Obviously America, South America

have been to really interesting places in Arabian horses. In Argentina once, I had an Arabian horse and the guards were like "what is this pretty little horse" but when they rode it one day, the next day they asked "could we ride the Arabian again?!" And know there are a lot of cattle farms in America, in fact, just drive Arabian horses. They say when you are on the saddle, you want a horse that would help you and do part of the work for you and the Arabian horses Anticipates and are able to take a lot of the load off and the stress off the human beings. They do what you want; they are clever even when working with other animals.

**Are you with or against cross breeding?**

As long as you don't try and pass off a non-pure bred as a pure bred, its fine. I think on the contrary you add quality and the genetic rule is widened, I don't have a problem with it, as long as you don't try to say it is Arabian or it isn't - that's fine.

**How different do you find this festival from last year's?**

This year it is slightly more organized I think. The handlers this year are much quieter, much calmer with the horses. I wish they could be still a bit calmer and just let the horses understand what is it they want from them. But maybe it's hard for them because they haven't been to a lot of shows themselves. It's different because they see professionals coming from abroad and doing certain movements and they don't know why they should do them; that could confuse everyone. I noticed yesterday, I was trying to explain to one of the jurors, that some of the handlers who obviously maybe just had one or two horses and they really didn't think they knew what they are doing. They were much quieter and in fact they got a better performance out of the horse because they weren't confusing it. The ones who thought they knew a lot were really actually just confusing everyone. Really it is a very clever animal and it could do what you want if it knows what the message is; but when you run one minute and pull it the next, they get confused. So I think they should just take it slowly, but it's difficult when the pressure is on and everyone is excited, I understand.

**What do you think of the media coverage of this festival and of horse back riding events in general?**

In fact I think it is extremely important, because we noticed at home that when the media started covering it properly and putting it on television, people started enjoying it more and understanding what it is about. Even sometimes when the media cover such events, they didn't actually know what they are talking about very well, so they just get statements from someone and print it; sometimes though I attended an event, I don't understand what they say about it later on T.V, so it's difficult. I think that the media should attend more, and then they will get more of an eye themselves, they would start enjoying it more, and they would be able to relay it much better to people. It will really have a big impact on how much people like to go to shows and enjoy them; it becomes much more interesting for everyone to follow the news and to get involved in it ■



Her Royal Highness Princess Alia with the international Judges during the 6th international Championship for Arabian Horses.



Her royal Highness with one of her horse in Jordan.