



ARABIAN PASSION

DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL
HORSE & EQUESTRIAN EXHIBITION
SYRIA 7 - 10 OCTOBER 2008

By Nada H. Abdelmoniem

▼ *Mahmoud Madkhaneh, Fawaz Ayoub & Sharif Al-Ferm*



Under the patronage of the Syrian Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian reform, the Arabian Passion, Damascus International Horse & Equestrian Exhibition kicked off with the participation of 41 international exhibitors from 12 countries: Qatar, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, France, Italy, the Czech Republic, Argentina, Canada, Poland, Pakistan and last but not least, the host Syria.

With the aim of shedding some light on some of Syria's Arabian horse history along with its current equestrian industry, and to reveal the nobility created with the amazing Arabian horse, the exhibition

was thought of as a national project that was solely built on plans that will be implemented both strategically and vigilantly throughout the upcoming 4 years. The eventual aim of the project is to make Damascus one of the most important cities on the international equestrian scene.

With the diligent efforts of young blood from Profair International Exhibition & Conference Organisers, as well as the full support of Aldimashqeia Arabian Horse Stud and the Syrian Arab Horse Association, the Arabian Passion project has been greatly systematised and

arranged to demonstrate the vision of what Syria, land of Arabian Horses, can bring.

**MAHMOUD MADKHANEH,
ARABIAN HORSE
BREEDER & FOUNDER
OF ALDIMASHQEIA
ARABIAN HORSE STUD:**

What are your thoughts regarding the exhibition?

The fair has preceded lots of expectations considering this is the first time Syria hosts an international equestrian exhibition; it has been a good achievement. Both visitors and exhibitors have shown satisfaction.

Most of the exhibitors are from the Middle East, with a few from Europe; will you be inviting more exhibitors from Europe and the Americas in the 2009 project?

We are looking to make this exhibition more of a tradition rather than a business perspective. We wish to hold it on annual basis, and we wish to make it more international of course. All countries are welcome to join; it would especially be a good chance for many European countries to get an idea about the Arabian horse industry in Syria.

An Arabian horse auction was undertaken in the final day of the fair; what are your thoughts in regards to that?

The auction presented horses only from Syria; furthermore, this was the first time for some of the participating breeders to



▲ *Opening Ceremony*

undergo a horse auction. We expected to sell out 50 horses, and only 9 were sold given the high prices the breeders bided for.

As the owner of Aldimashqeia Arabian horse stud, what can you tell our readers about the Arabian horse in Syria?

Aldimashqeia Arabian horse stud is one of the biggest studs in Syria; we have both beauty and race contests which are held at the same time as contests in Dubai and France for example. We need to change dates and travel with our horses to these shows in order to gain mileage. As for the Arabian horse from Syria in specific, we have pure blood Arabians which have not been inbred and have been kept pure. I am one of the breeders who inbred and produced an excellent French Syrian Arabian WAHO horse. I believe in continuing with trials until I reach a successful phase.

Do you breed Arabians for business or for passion, or for both?

When I first thought of organising this auction, I only thought it would add mileage to the breeders and expose them to what is new. I have around 200 horses, and hence Arabians are simply a passion to me. I grew up loving horses and hanging pictures of them all around my room; I bought a pure Syrian horse 6 years ago and started to inbreed. Thankfully, so far, Aldimashqeia stud horses have won many national prizes. On the same note, we as breeders are very much supported from our government; all Arabian horse breeders are entitled to receive pellets at half price. If a breeder wishes to establish a stud, receiving a licence would be an easy

process. Thus, equestrian and Arabian horse awareness and knowledge is now present, support and willingness to enhance and innovate is also present.

**SHARIF AL FERM,
Managing Director of Profair
International Exhibition &
Conference Organisers:**

What are your comments in regards to the exhibition?

I'd prefer calling it a national project not a show or an exhibition; we really want to put Syria on the international equestrian scene. I am happy and satisfied with this first project because we were able to invite 41 exhibitors from 12 countries which is, in exhibition criteria, a good achievement. The visitors were more than what we have expected, and the visit of Mrs. Manal Al Assad, the honorary president of the Syrian Equestrian Federation, showed significance and support to the exhibition and its organisers.

In terms of promotion, what was required from Profair in order to reach equestrian industries?

It took us about 10 months of hard work; we are a team of about 8 individuals; 2 partners, myself and Mahmoud Madkhaneh, the owner of Damascus & Aldimashqeia Arabian Horse Stud. We persisted on presenting attractive brochures, website designs, art designs, and marketing, along with wanting to be presented in high class mediums such as Horse Times magazine, the Italian publication Tutti Arabi, and the Arabian Dream which is the magazine of the Venice show held on annual basis in June. We collected data of almost 4,000 professional horse businesses from a 9,000 worldwide database, and hence this was an accomplishment to be able to contact and stay in touch with all 4,000. Furthermore, we approached arabianessence.com which is a professional Italian website in which we advertised for our show with a link to our own website. We also used their mailing list services so they helped in sending our newsletter. In Syria we were able to contact companies who are involved in the equestrian industry, along with Bassel Al Assad and Seif Al Sham clubs who we were honoured to have as those are the two prestigious clubs in Syria with very

sophisticated and up to date facilities. We also got in touch with 2 similar exhibitions which was a good channel for promotion; one is the Verona Exhibition held every November in Italy, the other is Al Fares Exhibition which is held every 2 years in Dubai and in Johannesburg. Our cooperation levels with the exhibitions I have mentioned have helped in the participation of a numerous variety of exhibitors from around the world.

Since you have shown positive thoughts about the exhibition, what are the plans for the 2009 exhibition?

We are planning on holding the exhibition on annual basis; we seek to make it an awaited sports, cultural, and trade event. We have even pushed our dates from October 7th until October 16th as The Abu Dhabi Hunting & Equestrian Exhibition is held during the same time, and of course, we wish for many more exhibitors to participate.

Having mentioned all this, are you willing to invite exhibitors from outside the Middle East?

We do have agents in Germany and Italy who are helping to promote the event throughout Europe.

What are your comments regarding the horse auction?

This was the first horse auction ever held in Syria and we succeeded in presenting 105 horses. However the organisation of such an auction required the presence of highly organised and experienced parties thus we invited the director of Al Zahraa Stud from Egypt whom managed the auction; Al Zahraa is known to breed some of the best Egyptian Arabian horses in the world which added to the credibility of the auction. This was a good chance for the Syrian breeders to evaluate their horses in a correct sense since there is much potential for excellent production. During the auction Syrian breeders were able to acquire the know-how of how to present their horses at a reasonable price.

What do think it would take for Syrian breeders to reach the level of international Arabian horse breeding?

It's quite difficult and we are going to need 3 generations of breeding to reach the top levels of producing Arabian horses; however our horses can compete in endurance. HT