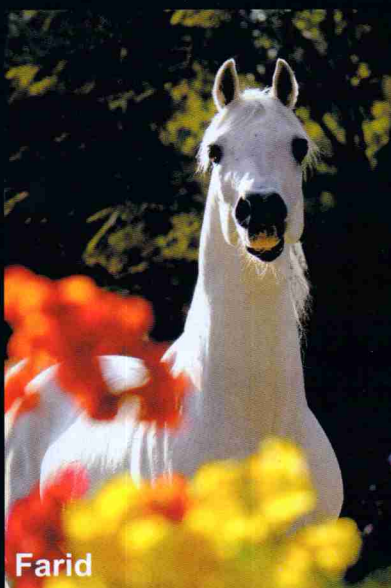


The Classic Arabian

International Arabian Horse Judge Dr. Nasr Marei; Tips On How To Gauge A Good "TYPE" Horse.

By Khaled Assem

Another rewarding interview with Dr. Nasr Marei! Only it's on another concept and another principal; "International Judging". Dr. Marei has been an international judge for the past 14 years, and once again, he shares his views



with Horse Times. He broke down the fundamentals of judging an Arabian horse as well as defined the meaning of a "beautiful Arabian horse" from a stand point of his own personal views as well as the international perspectives.

How did you get the interest for being an international judge? And what kind of qualification is needed in order to become one?

It seemed to be a normal progression of my hobby and passion for horses. I have been breeding horses all my life and I was actually born within a breeding programme initiated by my father and grandfather. So, I am a 3rd generation breeder. The natural step forward seemed to me was to take my experience and continuous learning process to a new level by becoming an international judge. I started 14 years ago by developing an increased sense for the beauty and appreciation of the horses, studying their habits & qualities, attending more shows, seeing more horses, speaking to people & international judges. To be qualified, there are so many ways to do so, however here in Egypt, and the Middle East, we follow the ECAHO (European Commission For Arabian Horse Organisation) system. It is an organisation that is joined by national organisations all over the world and has established show rules, show conduct, judging systems and certified judges. ECAHO would agree to affiliate and supervise shows in any country of the world that complies with its regulation. To qualify, the organising committees need to furnish certain criterias that need to be implemented during a show and thus be able to get the affiliation. As a new judge I went through the whole qualification; tests, seminars and workshops until

I got to where I am now; I am an A-List judge. That is a very exclusive group of around 20 judges to judge all international shows. There is a B-List, a National-List, a Probationary-List, and one has to go through all these lists until he reaches the A-List. It takes years and it needs a certain degree of credibility and experience. It's not easy because the machinery of being a judge is monitored very closely by the ECAHO. If the requirements are fulfilled, one becomes a judge and joins the list, and if for any reason the judge's credibility or efficiency is in doubt by the ECAHO Show Commission, he/she will be dropped from the list. So, I am one of the lucky ones who are still in the A-list for the last 4 years doing a great deal of annual international judging from Australia to Brazil, South Africa to Sweden, all the Arab countries, the USA & Europe of course.

Did this have an impact on your local breeding programme?

Definitely. I've been bragging that I have been breeding horses for the last 50 years, but believe me, it is a different experience every single time I see or judge a horse. It's an everlasting process of learning. It's an evolution. As a breeder you have to be truthful with yourself and be able to recognise the shortcomings in one's own programme and rectify it. Breeding should not be a static procedure. It has to be dynamic.



Horse Times would like to start with you a series of knowledge regarding judging. How would you indicate further to our readers what judging is about?

It will take a lot of time, paperwork and various resources to answer this question. However just to make it simple, I can distinguish between 2 types of judging; judging your own horses as a breeder and judging at the show ring. Judging your own horses within your breeding programme has to do much with the vision and the bloodlines the breeder has; his/her knowledge about the pedigrees and quality of the horse, the vision on what would be the best horse in the breeder's opinion. Breeding I think is an art and can be interpreted in different ways. You may breed a horse that you think is the best in the world, and I may breed a different type of a horse and believe that he is a better horse. Both are considered superb Arabians, but for expert eyes, they can be different. So, in this case, the breeder judging his own horse is a very open category. It has to do a lot with the individual's preferences.

Judging in the show ring is a little bit different. In the ring there are horses from different breeding lines. You can have a show where you are judging Egyptian Arabians versus Polish, Russian, American, Spanish or mixtures of any of these bloodlines. Arabians for example, the judge in this case has to judge with an open mind and look for the correctness and

the best individuals that really reflect the type and characteristics of the Arabian. The judge's special preference to certain lines should be put in mind. The origin of the horse and his portrayal of a certain type should not be used by the judge against this individual horse. They are all Arabians. Judges are entitled to their own taste but there are certain parameters that no one can deviate from. This is one of the main reasons why in most of the shows, the horses are judged by 3 to 7 judges to eliminate the possibility of any prejudice decisions.

Does this mean that during a show, you may have an Egyptian Arabian compete with a Russian Arabian or would each be in a separate class?

The ECAHO does not differentiate between bloodlines. It's open for all Arabians approved by the WAHO (World Arabian Horse Organisation). So all the horses can compete with each other as long as they are certified Arabians. I'm an Egyptian breeder, and of course I would have a tendency to love the Egyptian line. But as I said earlier, in the show ring, you have to be fair and see the correctness of the horse, and how faithful the appearance of the horse is to his breed. And in many cases, I would, as a judge, prefer a non-straight Egyptian Arabian over a pure Egyptian because it is more correct. The secret here is 'comparison', which is better than the other in a particular

category whether it's female or male, fillies, colts or yearlings. Then you apply your knowledge and criteria in order to select the best one of the 20 horses that maybe in one class. As long as you agree that it is a comparative system, you have to develop a certain mechanism in order to apply the comparison itself. So, the ECAHO has several systems; the what is called the 'British system' where there is one judge on the ring judging all the horses by lining them all in each individual category according to the judges discretion, yet the most popular system is the '20 point system'. Here, the horse's quality is divided into 5 different categories where each category is out of 20 points total score, and when all added up will be out of 100 points. The judging panel is formed of 3 to 5 judges in this case to judge the whole show. On the other hand, in the World Championships or the Nations Cup and other Title Shows there are 7 judges in the panel. The advantage in my opinion of this system versus the 'British system' would be that you have several judges (with variable taste) on the ring and each of the horses (no matter what its bloodline is) exhibited have equal chances. The organising committee would usually pick judges with different tastes and inclinations. The second advantage in my opinion is educational. The owners, breeders and spectators follow the scores (that are announced on the spot). Whoever is interested why a particular horse has won, lost or how it scored, can study the score of the judges (which are announced for each judge individually) and knows exactly what are the good and the bad points of this horse. It is an educational advantage that answers the questions of many of the spectators and breeders. In the comparative 'British system' there are no scores neither given nor announced and there is only one judge in the ring.

What are the different basics of judging in this comparative system?

The 5 categories are type, head & neck, body & top line, legs, and finally movement. In each category the points are out of 20.

Will we start with TYPE for this series?

Yes. However it is not necessarily the first category that the judge will give his score according to. Some of the judges prefer to put the score for the type at the end of the presentation of the horse in order to evaluate behaviour, personality and movement.

Isn't TYPE one of the most difficult categories to judge? Because, in a head, you may see an outline, or a default or an exaggeration like a Roman nose. But in TYPE, what do you judge exactly?

It's the most subjective category of them all. As you say, and rightfully so, body, head, neck and legs in particular are also difficult to judge but there are many dimensions, proportions and references that can be employed for assessment. When it

comes to type, it's more about the judge's feelings on the horse's personality and charisma. That is when the judge really evaluates the horse's general and global characteristics and how these qualities project the Arabian, as well as how they should. Now the question is how does one judge charisma or any of the other subjective parameters imposing themselves? The Arabian horse is one of the most beautiful creatures that have ever evolved because it is so agile, pretty, balanced in its proportions, and has charisma, presence and movement. This breed is known to be the most intelligent among all the equines. They are gentle yet strong and enduring. It is an old and noble breed that was subject to literally thousands of poems, painting, sculptures and legends. When you judge an Arabian, you have to put all this into consideration. The bloodlines trace back to thousands of years and are well-documented. And if you look into the strains you will discover that they are thousands of years old and are still being maintained and preserved as tradition, history and wrapped with love and admiration. It is like owning a piece of history

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or an object of living art. Old Arabic literature such as pre-Islamic poems and manuscripts describe the horses and the love of the Bedouins for them. Their horses were mounts in wars and raids as worriers, and even considered to be family members who share their tent and travels during times of peace. The Arabian horse was a major contribution factor in the Islamic conquering of Northern Africa and Spain.

Thus, there is a lot of history revolving around the Arabian horse that makes it extra special.

There are 5 different strains or descendants of Arabian horses. Would a strain be the main subject whilst judging type?

Strains are common in all these groups of horses (Spanish, Polish, Egyptians, etc.) because they are all descendants from the same strains. The Polish breeders had a certain vision and they bred their horses to interpret this vision. The Egyptians, in my opinion and many peers' and scholars', kept the classic Arabian look. The Crabbet bred a stronger different looking horse than the desert like type, such as the ones you can see in the UK and Australia. The American-bred Arabians have another look. However they all go back to the same main ancient strains. But if you look at them critically, members of each of these main strains in each group of bloodlines have deviated not only from each other, but also from the original depiction of the same strain as known classically. In my opinion, which is believed to be not quite right by many breeders and scholars, the subject of belonging to a certain strain or emphasising it in the breeding programmes has become less important and vague than in the past. It has become of academic and historical value only. And so, to sum this all up, I would look for the following in TYPE:

1. How much does that particular horse presents his breed. In other words, HOW Arabian is he according to the established



parameters and characteristics.

2. How do all parts of the horse fall together into a balanced horse. You can have a horse with a 20/20 head & neck, 19/20 body line, good legs, but still the horse does not fall together into a pretty and balanced horse. The harmony is missing!!

3. The presence and the charisma of the horse; it should project its charisma; is it confident? Is it scared? Is it proud of itself? This represents the personality.

Again in judging TYPE we have to recognise the certain criteria that applies to males and to females. A female has to look like a female; some of them develop more of a stallion look. This is a minus. The stallion could be very pretty to a boyish extent; not macho not flamboyant. This also reflects on the type. Also the age of the horse dictates certain measures to be considered in judging type

We all know that a horse is a genetic pool; on the other hand, a horse is what a breeder makes it, such as providing good treatment and a healthy programme. Is there any sort of influence from the breeder or people who look after the horse on how it would present itself?

You have to differentiate between type and condition. Type is all the above, however, if the condition of the horse is not so good, then this will defiantly and naturally affect the score on type. Nevertheless, it's seldom in a show a ring, especially big international shows, that you see a bad conditioned horse entering the ring. Owners spend loads of money on their

horses, and are shown by professionals who are very keen on keeping their reputation by representing a horse that is 100 % in full condition and has a fair chance of winning. Having mentioned that, there is a genetic pool that is responsible for the appearance of a certain horse. This is referred to as the genetic makeup or the genotype. The phenotype on the other hand is the way that the horse looks. The phenotype is the final result of the interaction between the genetic make-up and the environment. The environment is not only weather conditions like temperature, humidity and photo period, but also other factors like the nutrition, veterinarian care, hygiene, training, exercising, pest parasites and micro flora management, etc. All these factors do interact with the genetic make-up. The end result of that interaction is the phenotype of a horse...the way he looks. If you give the genetic make-up its full potential by providing the optimal environment possible, these genes will fully express themselves.

It should always be very interesting for breeders to know these details because a simple point such as human interaction with the horse could give it confidence or none at all. It all reflects on the breeders.

Absolutely, but I think important breeders, local or foreign realise these points, and provide the best care possible. Sometimes we lack experience in the proper feeding process or the proper vet care or dealing with some threatening conditions. It is sometimes difficult to implement all of these measures. ■