

Breeding Like 50 Years Ago



for Preserving Tomorrow's Straight Egyptians



by Monika Savier ■ All Pictures by Joanna Jonientz

On Katharinenhof Stud in North Germany, a lot of legendary stallions were born and raised. Jamil, Salaa El Dine, Adnan, NK Hafid Jamil, NK Jamal El Dine, NK Nadeer and others are stallions, and Hanan, Ghazalla, Nashua and Mahiba are mares, who stamped SE breeding globally. Katharinenhof breeding products continued to be sought after and all crises were weathered smoothly. The „Nagel stallions“ have a reputation as modern „type improvers“ and have been instilling their refinement in many a more heavy line in the course of the generations. Big black eyes, small ears, a fine muzzle, high tail carriage, and powerful flying gaits are genetically consolidated in the Katharinenhof stock. However, there is something almost nobody will talk about, but something that needs just the same amount of appreciation for being another important Big Point: all of them are friendly horses willingly cooperating with humans. They learn quickly and they love to learn, and despite their markedly hot temperaments, they are ideal pet animals who will treat humans as their family. All of these are traits that will unfortunately get hardly any attention in today's industrialized show world.

What are the reasons for the success of these horses? Certainly, the scientifically based and developed breeding concept plays an important role in the background. However, it is not only the genetic approach that counts – furthermore; there are the





NK Nadirah, one of the corner stones in the farm

surroundings the horses grow up in, and the way they can do it, and know-how about reproduction. All of them are key elements for the worldwide success.

Katharinenhof is not a business model; so much is for sure, but rather a cultural contribution towards preserving the Straight Egyptians. This preservation has been a success for decades now, and came associated with distinct breeding improvements in the course of the generations and with an ever-increasing fixation of the NK type in the breeding stock as a whole.

There is another example of how Katharinenhof stud takes its own unorthodox path. For generations now, the digitalization of horses has made effective advertising possible, by way of social media. Public relations work underwent a structural transformation,

and in that prevailing urge to be digitally visible, there is a certain desire that particularly wants to establish itself: to display horses, highly trained and artificially beautified, on the occasions of shows; to win titles. That is quite obviously also a kind of self-presentation of the horse owners, and makes a rather marginal contribution towards improving the breed. However, Katharinenhof has been taking another course: no participation in shows, no internet presence, no Facebook entries, and no photos uploaded to Instagram. Social media remain mostly unused, except for occasional publications in printed media. Interested breeders will visit Dr Nagel for a cup of tea; horses will be presented, if so requested, with minimum preparation; and the breeders will shortly learn what they always wanted to know about breeding.



While in the show breeders' world, „natural foals“ have been a thing of the past for some time, Katharinenhof is among the minority of horse people who grant their breeding stock natural freedom in reproduction and successfully resist the dominance of Biotech in their barns. Modern reproductive technology has not been assigned

a place in Katharinenhof stud, stallions do their covering naturally or in pasture only – which is sure to benefit their mental balance and relaxed friendliness. Mares are not abused for stressful procedures such as embryo transfer. The only foals to be found on Katharinenhof stud are „class A foals“, true offspring of true dams, which is epigenetically speaking sure to have beneficial effects on the development of the foals and the minds of their dams.

Dr Nagel turned 90 years old this year, however, his „old school“ approach to breeding is everything but outdated today. Nothing slips the attention of this ever-curious breeder, nothing that may make for new understanding or may earn practical application. The breeding operation for straight Egyptian Arabian horses on Katharinenhof stud with its almost 40 horses is, today, an innovative experiment, basically mimicking historic Arabian



The NK Boys Group



Young NK Mares



breeding as it was usually done in the closed Bedouin tribes of the countries of origin. Katharinenhof 's studbook is closed as well, meaning that for about 35 years now, no outside horses have been included in breeding – all matings are generated among the breeding stock of the stud. To do this, extensive know-how in genetics is required, so as to avoid the risks presented by overly narrow inbreeding; as well as a foundation population of stallions and mares that is as solid, healthy, and correct as possible. This concept has been extensively discussed, and not every breeder would like to adhere to it. However, regarding the physical appearance of the so-called NK Arabians, the success proves him right in many respects. The Big Points of these horses are genetically consolidated, and weaknesses that had originally been put up with have vanished in the course of time. How can that be?

I asked Dr Nagel himself how his breeding concept works, and why it's a fact that even in the year 2020, there is, playing on the pastures together with their dams, a generation of foals whom everybody would like to take home at once?





Interview with Dr. Hans Nagel, Katharinenhof stud

Monika Savier: Dr. Nagel, that offspring really made an impression on me. Who are the stallions that sired the 2019 and 2020 foals?

Dr. Nagel: Right now, the active sires are the two stallions NK Nabhan and NK Nizam, with occasionally our senior stallion NK Nadeer being used.

Monika Savier: Can they be used for all mares?

Dr. Nagel: They can be used for all mares, yes – however, we adhere to a mating plan that's drafted anew every year. My stock comprises mares by NK Nadeer, NK Jamal el Din and NK Kamar el Din, and will before long also include mares by NK Nabhan and NK Nizam.

Maternally, these mares tail back to 4 important mare strains of El Zahraa Stud in Egypt, which are the Obayan, Siglawi, Hadban Enzahi, and Dahman Shawan strains.

The biggest group among the 20 mares are the Hadbans, the smallest are the Dahman Shawans. There is a simple explanation for this difference: if there are many fillies born into a mare group, it can grow quickly; however if mainly colts are born, a closed population in particular is susceptible to problems as to maintaining these groups. This fact also influences, of course, how strict selection can be and what progress can be made in particular families.

Monika Savier: How narrow are your matings, on a percentage basis, with respect to possible inbreeding?

Dr. Nagel: There are two answers to that.

For one thing, on Katharinenhof stud half sibling

matings are done as the most closely related matings. All the others are combinations involving (male) cousins and nieces. It should be mentioned that in most technical writing, half sibling matings are not included in the „inbreeding” category.

And for the other thing, I don't deal in percentages. They are a purely mathematical point of view and give no more than a crude reflection of the biological dimension. My approach is getting to know the true genetic composition of a breeding horse, which is possible and feasible via DNA analysis. For my most important breeding horses, these analyses have been done and are an important basis for the yearly mating plan. In addition, I have done my breeding work on a closed basis for 35 years, and the data accumulated from that ideally serves to complement the data from genetic analysis.

Monika Savier: Are there more reasons, apart from the number of colts being born, for the smaller size of your Dahman Shawan family group – in other breeding operations, this strain is given quite a lot of particular attention and they go to pains to make room for these horses?

Dr. Nagel: My Dahman Shawan group is something special, as all of the members are derived, on the paternal side, from the Nazeer sire line. No stallions from other lines are represented in my Dahman family group. This fact in itself is enough to limit their numbers, as horses qualifying for that are rare. In other breeding operations as well as in El Zahraa, such mares are not to be found any more at all. The family is a bit short-legged overall, some foreleg weakness is to be found, and swaybacks may be associated with this group; and all of that is known

to interested breeders. These are, however, traits of their outward appearance which are not recessive. Anybody who wants to change that can do so, as traits such as these can be changed or eliminated, in the course of time, by way of systematic selection. They may reappear in their offspring, at a rate of 2 to 3 percent, and can be controlled by giving strict consideration to further matings. None of these reasons contributed to the fact that on my stud, the Dahman Shawan are the smallest family group; that's really a matter of many colts having been born for so many generations.

Monika Savier: A short question: Because of your closed breeding system, with the other strains you have, their original family traits should be discernible, too – are they?

Dr. Nagel: That's a rather long story, for in the first place, there would have to exist a respective definition or description of the original family strain, such as has been bred in El Zahraa for 100 years. Such definitions, however, do not exist. There are, here and then, rudimentary beginnings to be found, such as a description of the most important foundation mares written by different experts, on horses such as Moniet el Nefous, Bukra, Kamla, or Yashmak. Some of these opinions are well known to me and I much appreciate them, however, I made a definition of my own in the course of the years. This approach is necessarily subjective and offers lots of topics for discussion, however it's probably the only possible source. It's quite astonishing anyway that without a lot of input, certain family images have survived and been formed. It means that certain family traits must be well consolidated in the dam line. - With my own approach, I add another element, which is that I only use stallions from a single sire line, the line of Nazeer, which is probably somewhat

of a correcting influence without becoming really dominant or altering the type.

Monika Savier: What is the Katharinenhof position on embryo transfer?

Dr. Nagel:

Reproductive methods such as these should be applied in farm animal breeding only. That is where they are highly effective and successful, such as in cattle breeding. Maybe in crossbreeding for sports horse production, which also aims to generate utility animals for special purposes. Regarding the breeding of Arabian horses, I am opposed to using such methods and tried, when I was one of responsible persons in WAHO, to keep the excessive use of this method at bay. This was partly successful; the majority of WAHO member countries today will only permit the registration of a maximum of two foals per mare and year. Some countries ignore the WAHO recommendations, and much to my regret, there are some Arabian countries among them.



Mrs. Nawal Nagel and Dr. Hans Nagel in their home office at Katharinenhof.

They will not see reason at all, despite the fact that the negative results and the reservations regarding this kind of reproduction are commonly known. I envy the situation in Thoroughbred breeding, which is a major and the first breeding association founded worldwide. For the good of their breeding population, they strictly prohibit the unnatural high-tech embryo transfer method, and even artificial insemination.

Monika Savier: Globally available frozen semen, very convenient as it may be, has a highly problematic side effect: since frozen semen is available worldwide, our colts have unfortunately much declined in worth. Are there countermeasures? Is that a part our breeding associations may have to play?

Dr. Nagel: As to my personal attitudes on that topic, I just outlined them, and the consequences are contained in your question. I fail to recognize, on the part of our officials, a general prohibition or just more lenient measures for curbing the excessive use of doubtful methods. So, how to deal with this topic is up to the sense of responsibility of individual breeders. Personally, I decided to breed according to the principles that nature specified.

Monika Savier: Did showing operations promote this development?

Dr. Nagel: Without any doubt: Yes. Be that as it may, however, the clock can't be turned back. Things can only be changed by decisions and measures taken in the future. Grumbling about the past is pointless. Shows, with all of their positive and negative aspects

included, are an important part of dealing with Arabian horses, and of course they serve advertising purposes and marketing as well. They ought not to be the only part. I would like to mention the "Noble Show" in the Netherlands as an alternative for a show circus that is partly out of touch with the real world. The event as well as the idea itself are capable of lots of development. Events such as these serve to bring back into the foreground the whole spectrum of breeding activities and the unclouded joy in Arabian horses. The attraction of winning prizes is not for everybody, and without some control imposed, it involves quite a few negative aspects. Why don't more breeders decide to invite for "open house" events? Maybe in combination with seminars on interesting topics, for there are enough topics to choose from.

Arabian horses, with their great past and their versatile disposition, are already on their way to falling as low as they have never before to be show horses first and foremost. That is so little to be, so very little

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– however, it may be meaningful for those who try to find, within these surroundings and this spectacle, recognition and approval for their own selves.

Despite all that, I have met many breeders, passionate and experienced people, in Europe, in the USA, and in the East, who are not seized by this inclination towards the showing circus. They just love the breed, and for many, handling their horses is the loveliest pastime there is in this world, a refreshing counterbalance for today's harsh working environment, which hardly anybody can evade anymore, neither physically nor psychologically.

Thank you for the interview. It was about time that someone like you spoke clearly on the critical issues of Arabian breeding. Many breeders need a reorientation of their breeding approach towards quality and not quantity.

I see that you are personally enjoying your breeding activities very much, and I am sure it is thanks to the

approach of yours that your breeding operation has steadily grown for more than 50 years now, and that with every generation and every foal crop, interesting new individuals are born.

Now it is the turn of the youngest stallions at the Katharinenhof stud , who are NK Nabhan and NK Nizam, to present their offspring from the last two years.



NK Amal El Dine (NK Nabhan x NK Abia) 2020



NK Chehab El Dine (NK Nabhan x NK Nahla) 2020



NK Ayali (NK Nizam x NK Abila) 2019



NK Nawaal (NK Nabhan x NK Nazli) 2020



NK Nassar (NK Nabhan x NK Nour) 2019



NK Hussain El Dine (NK Nabhan x NK Habiba) 2019



NK Lam El Dine (NK Nabhan x NK Lina) 2019



NK Nashmiya (NK Nadeer x NK Bint Bint Nashua) 2020



NK Najdiah (NK Nabhan x NK Nakibya) 2019



NK Labeeb (NK Nabhan x NK Lina) 2020



NK Layal (NK Nizam x NK Lateefa) 2019



NK Leilah (NK Nabhan x NK Larissa) 2020



NK Luna (NK Nizam x NK Lateefa) 2020



NK Naala (NK Nabhan x NK Nadirah) 2017 (2)



NK Nael (NK Nizam x NK Nina) 2020



NK Nahar (NK Nadeer x NK Nerham) 2019



Dr. Hans Nagel and Monika Savier