

How the Objectives of Arabian Horse Years, and what Opportunities are th

Dr Hans Nagel in an interview with Monika Savier,



NK Hawa by NK Nasr El Dine and NK Alia

Breeding Have Changed in Recent ere for a Turnaround?

Desert Heritage Magazine.



“If we want everything to remain as it is, everything must change”.

Tomasi di Lampedusa

INTERVIEW

Savier: Many see Arabian horse breeding, as we know it, is in danger. You are one of the most successful protagonists of western Arabian horse breeding and surely already have ideas and a strategy for a turnaround in breeding in order to keep these wonderful horses healthy and successful.

Nagel: The man-made crises in the world, especially globalisation and climate change, have also impacted Arabian horse breeding. We should continue to breed, but we should be aware of this and our goals should also include ethical considerations regarding the horses.

It is said that if you want to achieve a certain goal, you should think in 3 steps.

1. you should have a clear definition of your goal

2. you must ask yourself if you can achieve it.

3. you must determine what you have to do to achieve it.

In applying this practical formula as a helpful guidance to Arabian breeding in our times, this would be the following result.

20 – 30 years before, in the 70s and 80s, people would say, “I wish to breed Polish Arabians or Arabians from Russia, others would prefer Egyptians.” In fact, it was easily possible to buy such horses. They were available in sufficient numbers and of good quality; there was enough experience and assistance from each existing stud working in these fields. Today, people would come up with a different question: the one would ask for Show Arabians, the other, how to breed traditional Arabians.

1. The show horse breeder’s goal would be, to breed an Arabian as a standard type determined by the ECAHO Show Organization and as long as such Arabians

are WAHO approved, nobody would care about their historical background or to the fact that such horses belong to the traditional breeding stock as bred in Poland, Russia, Egypt or in the US. Polish Arabians or Russian having their own type, have nearly disappeared. Since there is absolutely no room any more for such considerations, only to match the standard Arabian type, remains as a goal. The management of such studs has decided, for whatever reasons at one time, to introduce several show stallions of other populations into their breeding stock. They promised a better chance, to be successful in the Arabian horse market. Only the Egyptian population remained in principle as it was and any changes, which occurred in the course of time was due to selection or due to the preference for certain stallions originating from their own breeding population.

Other breeders worshiped the traditional Arabian, they liked to maintain the Arabian



El Zahraa Stud, Cairo, famous cradle of the Egyptian Arabians



DNA results have revealed, that most of the present Arabian racehorses are strongly mixed with these fast English Thoroughbred horses in a ratio of 15 – 65 %.

horse as it was bred in history, as an original. The nomination “classical” or “authentic” would describe such a preference. Consequently, two different goals are existing at this time and the directions to go for each one are very clear.

For the reason of good order, great efforts to breed Arabians for performance should be mentioned. It is well-known, that the Arabians bred for long-distance riding have proven, that they are nearly unbeatable in this discipline. This ability of endurance is one of the greatest highlights in the Arabian breed. No other horse breed is equal to them.

Savier: What does the future hold for Arabian racehorses?

Nagel: However, in the racing field Arabians have great competition. The English Thoroughbred is, by all means, the uncontested horse breed in this discipline:

a great temptation! In fact, the DNA results have revealed, that most of the present Arabian racehorses, mainly those in the Gulf area, are strongly mixed with these fast English Thoroughbred horses in a ratio of 15 – 65 %.

It is a vital obligation for the future, to approach these new findings with the necessary diligence, to keep the integrity of the Arabian horse in place.

Savier: What about the 2nd step in terms of opportunities and skills?

Nagel: The second question concerning ability is easy to answer. It is yes. There are already many breeders, who bred into the one or the other direction very successfully, breeders which have proven, that their effort was worthwhile. In major horse shows Arabians are presented, which have all received the same high score and they are



Victor Adam, *Les chevaux des écuries du Roi*, 1843

identical to the required standard. This is clear proof for the fact, that certain breeders were able to reach what they wanted to achieve.

Also concerning traditional breeding, very beautiful Arabians of best traditional type are found in many studs worldwide. However, such success could be mostly attributed to such breeders, who work with Egyptian blood lines. All the other horses which remained from the mentioned traditional former breeders, like Polish or Russian, have great difficulty to reach the requirements, which are needed to bring forward the traditional look and features.

Savier: And the third step? How should it be realised?

Nagel: The third question focuses on what needs to be done to achieve the goal and what methods should be used.

A breeder for Show Horses looks for the fastest and the most efficient way to breed the perfect

Show Horse. There is no doubt, he must breed his mare to the best stallion. One which already has a reliable record as a Show Horse producer. Some stallions are well-known and breeders use them intensively. The shipping of frozen semen, embryo transfer and sales make these stallions internationally available everywhere. No doubt at all, to improve the foal quality, stallions play the greatest role. In addition, two facts should be considered as well: It would be advisable to look at the dam side. Some stallions produce better with certain mares or with mares belonging to a certain family; and, the formula, that stallions give a good result, if they match with a sire of the brood mare, is a promising procedure.

Savier: How important is the influence of the mares?

Nagel: A breeder, who has the traditional

Arabian in mind, would think and act differently. He looks at the mare side. This is his priority. However, he is also confronted with the question of improvement, but he would concentrate again to improve his brood mares. These mares are the ones, which carry the treasure of the past and the future within them. Still, he wants horses of the best Arabian type; maybe they need a better head, a longer neck, a shorter back, a good tail-carriage or a correction in their body size. No doubt stallions are needed to bring such new features into a population, but each population or each mare needs most possibly different corrections and therefore different stallions should be chosen. A breeder who already has a good brood mare group, would not choose a stallion, who is too dominant and would change the whole type. Since only one or a few features have to be improved, he would look for a stallion

that would be helpful only in this respect. The owner of an Arabian stud aiming to breed traditional Arabians, has to make sure that he has solid brood mares in type and productivity, since they guarantee perfect breeding results in the future.

Savier: Even for the Bedouins, the mares were more important than the stallions for various reasons.

Nagel: The Bedouin breeders in history recorded their Arabians according to their origin of the mother line. All the genealogy of the Arabians in the past is built on this principle. Their goal was to guard the Arabians as authentic and they considered this the best formula. Their goal was to keep their herds free from any outside influence. This was their highest requirement. They were proud of their horses and watched with great jealousy that their own breeding



NK Amal El Dine by NK Nizam x NK Abla

stock was kept solidly clean and this should reach far back into the past.

Savier: The famous Katharinenhof experiment is based on 3 mare lines. Using your farm as an example, can you explain your breeding approach with your mares, their role and importance?

Nagel: How strong and potential a female line can be, may be demonstrated at the Katharinenhof Stud. For nearly 40 years, the present mares of the stud are the offspring of three female lines. All these mares are somehow related to each other. Some more, some less; however, even after five to six generations, each female line shows its own characteristics and even when some of them look a bit different, in the next generations the original type will show up again.

Savier: Which stallion currently has the most important influence at the stud?

Nagel: One of the chief stallions in the stud is at present NK Nabhan. An elegant stallion, belonging to Katharinenhof's Hadban family of good type and of solid bay colour. He was stationed several times as a breeding stallion in Kuwait and left many offspring of highly appreciated qualities. Some became valuable brood mares and others became successful in major shows in the Gulf area. Many of these Arabians looked like him or were very similar, no doubt he was their sire. At NK Nabhan's home, at Katharinenhof, the situation is different. He has to deal with a well-bred and settled mare population. Six daughters, offspring of the 3 existing families, are living at Katharinenhof.

Each female family is very strong and developed a high degree of homozygosity in the course of time. It is difficult to overrule such status. Not one has a great similarity to their sire NK Nabhan. His influence appears however, in several areas. He improved the necks, the croup,

the hind quarters, and he lifted them up due to longer legs. He disturbed nothing; all appreciated features of the mares are still as they usually are: their short broader head, their high tail-carriage, their good shoulder, their powerful movement and their fine behaviour.

Savier: Would you say that your horses are close to the original Arabian? Or where is the influence of the original Arabian on breeding?

Nagel: That is a question that keeps people busy and preoccupies their minds since the Arabian horse entered western society from its Arabian homeland, 200 years ago. It concentrates on the question, which is the typical authentic "desert" Arabian and which population - the one in the north of the Arab countries or the one, which lived in the Arabian Peninsula - has a greater chance to be the original? Or is there more than one original which deserves to carry this title?

Savier: Are there any criteria to answer this question?

Nagel: Yes, there are a few points of reference. Some early travellers to the Arab countries in the 19th century have described this, for them surprising, unknown horse. Lady Blunt and William Gifford Palgrave made very clear descriptions about what they had seen. Arabians imported into Europe at the end of the 19th century, have been painted by capable artists as Victor Adam and Charles Vernet, the most prominent ones.

Today the question arises: "Is the DNA method helpful in this argument and can it contribute to clarify what is authentic and what is imagination?" One fact is clear - a pedigree, however far it may be extended into the past, even 200 years - is a very poor source to answer this complex subject. For some researchers it was the only tool on which they based all their findings, but it has become clear that this



NK Lamya by NK Nabhan x NK Lubna



NK Nay by NK Nabhan x NK Nawal



NK Naala by NK Nabhan x NK Nadirah

©onien



NK Amsha by NK Nabhan x NK Abba

The photos show some daughters of NK Nabhan; they are part of the present brood mare group.



NK Nawaal by NK Nabhan x NK Nasli

method was too simple. A complex subject needs a complex answer.

Possibly one will never be able to find a clear and easy definition for the traditional Arabian, as the one which exists in Show Horse breeding. Maybe this might be even a positive aspect, because it keeps the discussion about the true history of the Arabian breed attractive and alive.

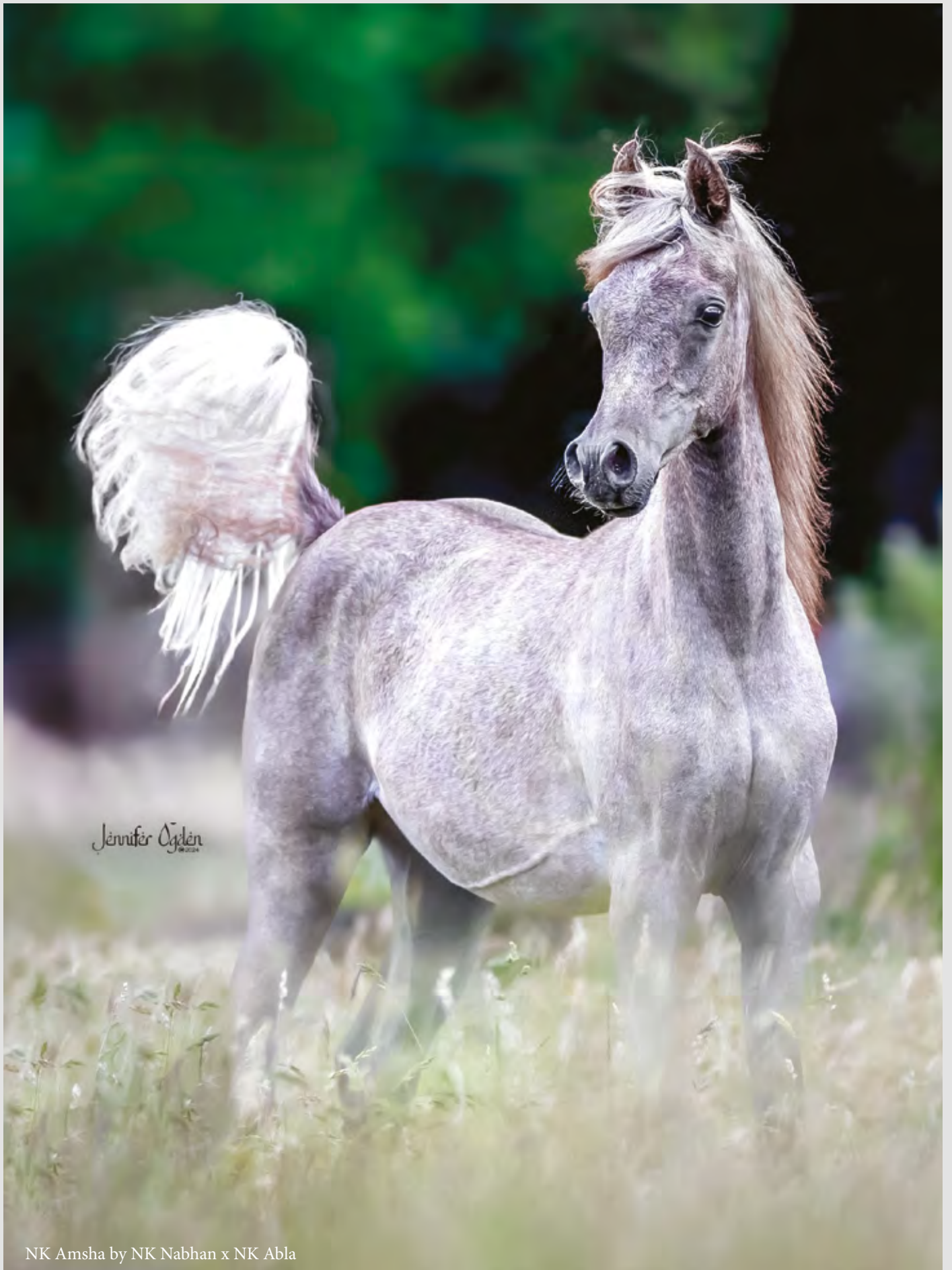
Savier: [Arabian horse shows, what is their real purpose?](#)

Nagel: To show Arabian horses to the public, has a long tradition. One should mention that Arabians were already shown at the end of the 19th century at the World Exhibition in Paris. In 1930 the famous Crabbet Park Stud in England invited the high society of London to their stud, and this meeting was considered a highlight in England's horse world. The Americans arranged major shows in the 1940s and 50s in California.

They became so attractive and well-known that even the Royal Family of Saudi Arabia sent some of their members to attend these events.

In the 60s and 70s horse shows in America reached their highest reputation. These horse shows were designed to present the versatility of the Arabian horses. They were shown in halter classes, in riding shows, such as western, English pleasure or costume style and winners of endurance and flat races were also honoured on such occasions. The Arabian horse was considered as one of the spectacular breeds.

In the 70s and 80s the show idea swapped from the US over to Europe. But it remained only the halter class, which would settle properly and solidly, the other disciplines were ignored. For many years the 3 big shows at Paris, at Aachen and the ECAHO-Show in Verona attracted thousands of people every year. Later in the 20th century, around 1990, the first Arabian horse show happened to be in



Jennifer Ogden
PHOTOGRAPHY

NK Amsha by NK Nabhan x NK Aba



NK Nabhan by NK Nadeer x NK Nerham, leading sire at Katharinenhof



NK Nabhan

the Gulf, in Qatar. It was organized from A – Z by the German Arab Horse Society on the initiative of Sheik Abdul Aziz Al Thani. It was a great success; everything went according to programme. The following ones were then handed over to the ECAHO and soon many others followed: shows in the Emirates, in Saudia Arabia and finally in all Arab countries. To show Arabians and evaluate them according to the ECAHO standard, became for everybody the most practical method of judging.

Until then prizes were given to show winners as trophies or as titles, but gradually prize money became the method to award breeders for their success. By the time, horse shows as mentioned above, changed into the field of professional events, Arabians became highly valued objects. Show champions were sold and traded at high prices never seen before. All possible efforts were made to produce Arabian horses to such a high category.

Regrettably, some of the big shows got the 'smell' that there is too much money on the table, but there is also a lot of money under the table. In spite of all: shows go on.

Savier: With all these developments, many

breeders are wondering where it is going.

Nagel: Quo vadis? It is obvious that the cultural traditions got lost in these shows. They are long forgotten and covered under the dust of the past. Commercial and business aspects are holding present shows strongly in their grip.

This spectacular modern type of show is one side of the story and the other side, the remains of the cultural and ethical aspects, which were previously well-considered in the presentation of Arabian horses. Passion for the Arabian horse was and remains the strongest driving force, to show Arabians in all their beauty, the greatest reward for any breeder. To show Arabians in Open House events, offers a perfect occasion to share the interest and the dedication for the Arabian horse with other breeders, to exchange knowledge and experience in an easy and friendly atmosphere.

Both events, the one arranged as a spectacular, professional, and profit-orientated event and the other organized by private initiative, contribute to the fact that the Arabian breed stays in the focus of the public.

However, there remains a responsibility to make sure that the oldest horse breed in the world will keep its dignity. ■



Dr. Hans Nagel and Dr. Ameen Zaher, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Cairo, in front of the El Zahraa Stud office in the 70thees.

Dr. Hans-Joachim Nagel has had a long commitment to the Arabian horse community, besides his very busy life as an international business man. For 22 years, in the 1980s and 90s, he acted as a chairman of the VZAP (German Arabian Horse Society) and in this time, the establishment of the All-Nations Cup in Aachen took place. For 30 years as its chairman, he built up and took care of the high reputation this international show enjoys. Finally, he was chosen as a Vice President of WAHO (World Arabian Horse Organization) and later became its President. He gave up this obligation after 11 years of service and preferred, as an 80-year-old man, to look after his Arabian horses at his stud Katharinenhof in Germany. Today, he continues to breed a very fine type of Egyptian Arabians, which are known under the name "NK Arabians". Dr. Nagel is a very scientifically orientated person; he has published a comprehensive book about Arabian horse breeding under the title "The Arabian Horse – Natures' creation and the art of breeding".