

interview to BARRY

Barry was riding before he could walk and spent much of his younger years riding show ponies for various people at the top shows in the United Kingdom. Today he is the headtrainer at the well known Albidayer Farm in the UAE. Time to ask him some questions!

by Talitha Bakker ■ photos by TuttoArabi archive



TA: Tell us, who is Barry Shepherd and how and when did you get involved with Arabian Horses?

BS: As a young child I would spend many evenings after school trotting around in circles in the pouring rain and this in turn schooled me so much about understanding and reading the ponies minds. At the age of 5, I won the Leading Rein class at the Horse of the Year show, the championship show that people from across the country would travel miles in the hope of gaining the golden qualifying ticket to compete with the cream of the crop. It was the hours of hard work that paid off, and at such a young age you are like a sponge and soak up all the information that you are provided with. In those early years I was surrounded by true old school horse people. I would ride for long time breeders who would walk through the fields in springtime and explain to me about their recent crop of foals and their breeding choices to achieve the look of a pony that they wanted to breed. Looking back, this was a priceless experience. My parents bred and showed Welsh Cobs in halter. I was always in their company and the next step was for me to have my own pony to show in hand. I had ponies to ride at home and then when i was 7 i got my first Welsh Mountain Pony, a little dun mare called Pontylls Celest. I showed her both ridden and in halter and i found a new direction to go in. No more hours of getting drenched riding in the wet and cold, halter was much easier. At 10 I was taken to visit the Bengad pony stud and I chose a filly foal that I named Bengad Red Nerine. As a yearling, on her

debut outing, she won her yearling filly class and went reserve youngstock champion. I was hooked. I still have ponies with my parents registered under my Vervale prefix and together we have won every major show in Great Britain.

TA: When and how did you change to Arabian Horses?

BS: My neighbour and great friend, Kerry Wilson, was one of the first people in the UK to import Russian Arabians and I was mesmerized by their ground defying movement, beauty and overall balance. I remember on cold, frosty mornings helping to turn them out and watching them walk out of their stables with tails in the air, snorting and then trotting off with such power and cadence bowing their necks and driving off their hocks. I can still see it now, never had i seen such majestic horses.

TA: How did you start training and showing Arabian horses?

BS: With Kerry, I started to go to some Arab shows and those

SHEPHERD



Age 7 with Pontylis Celeste my first pony



Vervale Gift of Gold



Age 10 with Bengad Red Nerine Reserve Champion



Winning out of 83 entries at the Royal Welsh Show

beautiful garden party shows at Ascot for the British Nation Arabian Horse Championships and also where the All Nations cup was periodically held. I remember sitting by the rings, enthralled by these horses, and saw the first Russian horses presented by Robbie Den Hartog of the Kossack stud and watched in wonder as these horses exploded into the arena, trotting with this amazing energy, an imprint in my mind and it was then I realised I wanted to be able to do this for myself. I showed the foals for Kerry at shows and was 3rd at Kempton Park show with a Prononce filly out of her Mag daughter. We bounded around the ring, both having lots of fun, and getting a prize was a bonus. It was very different from my regimented ridden outings. Time passed, and slowly I was asked to show horses for other people that watched me at shows. I would go once a week to get to know the horses at their home and so started on my road to becoming a handler. In 1999, after a very successful show at the Middle East Championships in Jordan showing the horses for the late HH Sheikh Zayed, founder and ruler of the UAE, I signed a contract and have loved living in the Gulf ever since. Upon his death, i was asked to take the best breeding and show horses and continue his legacy for his son and so Al Aryam burst into one of the premier stud farms of the region. Three years ago after seven years with these amazing horses I moved to Albidayer Stud as head trainer and I couldn't be happier. The Stud is managed by Dawn Martin, a lady that I have long respected since seeing her showing in Qatar many moons before.



at Babolna



with Faridah Albidayer



Mozn Albidayer, Ajman 2015 Gold champion, Dubai 2015 Gold champion and Chantilly 2015 Gold champion.

TA: What is the key to get the show horses in show condition?

BS: I love the conditioning of horses, and with a wide knowledge of many different equine fields to tap into, I hope I am able to condition them to the best of their ability. Firstly, I evaluate the horse and make a program to develop muscles and fitness depending on their various needs. I have an ideal in my mind's eye and try my best to achieve this look within each horse. They are worked in different ways on different days to build muscles and keep tone, the same way you would if you were training to be an athlete. As with the ponies I used to ride when I was younger, the muscles develop the way they are worked, so I make efforts to ensure the horses are worked in the correct way.

TA: How do you train the young horses? Do you give them a different approach than the older ones?

BS: The younger horses obviously have less work and therefore less stress on their joints. In the UAE, the yearlings are at their first show at barely 12 months old. They have

the rest of their lives to be show horses so keeping them fit but happy and wisely knowing how much you can work and feed them is so important. Working for such a wonderful owner as Sheikh Mohammed Al Qasimi, we are under no pressure to bring out a horse until its ready, both mentally and physically, and this makes my job so much easier. We have some three year olds that still are waiting in the wings to be shown. Seeing them now as mature horses, I am so excited to bring them out, now they are a little older and wiser. That's the theory anyway..... Heehee!

TA: What do you think is most important when a (young) horse enters the showing for the first time.

BS: For me, taking a yearling to its first show can set it up for life. A good, calm and fun experience is paramount and for them to leave the show with more confidence and a happy outlook is my main goal as a handler. I have the luxury to be able to spend many hours working with these horses from the time they are weaned, building a bond with each horse, teaching them and allowing them to develop their own character so when we enter the ring, they know me as a friend and work as a team. Some years back I watched the dressage finals at the Salon du Cheval. To watch a horse and rider competing at high level dressage with the horse completely trusting his rider and coming together in unison to create poetry in motion makes me look at halter showing through different eyes. This is the bond that i am trying to develop with my horses.

TA: What are the characteristics a showhorse must have?

BS: The modern day show Arabian is a very beautiful animal. Refined with beauty beyond compare and poses a trait that is so extreme, it maybe labelled as freakish. I'm not sure whether these horses are so much better than say 15 years ago but they are certainly better presented and conditioned. Throats are finer, legs are longer and bodies are smoother, but with every plus come a negative. Eyes are now higher and smaller, legs because of the length of the cannon are getting weaker and I think overall movement has rapidly declined. Gone are those days of Aachen when those big trotting horses came into the arena with no need for bagging to get them to put on a show that would raise the roof off the place. To breed a horse with the best of both worlds is an art form.

TA: What are your favorite features of the Arabian Horse. Do you have an Arabian that comes closest to your ideal?

BS: To show a horse that still has that same charisma and energy and with modern day beauty is a dream for many and one that I personally, along with Dawn Martin, stud Manager of Albidayer, take very seriously. The breed is ever evolving and the horses are now truly some of the best that I have seen in the show rings. Marwan Al Shaqab made a huge difference with his overall structure and smooth bay curves and this became the new benchmark and one that we became accustomed to seeing. When El Nabila B was named



with Djoonam OS



Raoud Albidayer Gold Champion Yearling Colt Ajman 2015



Bronze Champion, Mayadah Albidayer



HC Francisca



2005 in Qatar Showing for the Royal Stables

US National Champion a few years ago, the breeders of the world famed Babolna stud invited me to assess the horses and try to guide the new managers onto a more un-blinkered path. When I passed through the iron gates surrounded by yellow walls and into the fairytale delights of one of the most beautiful stables in Europe, which was partly destroyed when set ablaze by Napoleon's army in the 1700's while they were looking for fresh horses that happened to be a few miles away, hiding with the villagers in the woods, I felt a huge sense of honour. To see these horses which have never heard of WH Justice or Marwan Al Shaqab in their royal pedigrees, it was another learning curve for me and a real eye opener. I was given access to historic records, where I was enthralled to read of Hanan being exchanged for chickens from Dr. Nagel to keep the money rolling into Hungary, and excursions to the Middle East. I read it all with such vigour. In my two months in Babolna I had a rare glimpse of a heritage that has founded some of the best breeding farms around the globe. Having infused rarely any new blood within the last 20 years, it was like looking at echoes of the past as we saw many generations of dry, ethereal white mares grazing together, family after family in silently fading grandeur. I spied a young El Nabila B son in the riding school and took him to the main stable for the grooms to practise some show training on and then off to Wells we went and was garlanded top 5 senior male a month later.

TA: Tell us more about your work at Albidayer stud.

BS: My schedule is varied at Albidayer, in the last of the summer months things get crazy busy. It's my favourite time as the foals are being weaned and so the slow process of schooling, conditioning and getting to know them starts to evolve into making up a new section of the show team. I devise a conditioning program for each horse and I am constantly monitoring the horses and change their feeds accordingly. I spend many hours going through pedigrees for the breeding horses in the hope of finding the next "golden cross" and I like to use a lesser known or young stallion to experiment with. This is how I was involved with Babolna as I had been the trainer and the breeding manager for Al

Aryam and had used El Nabila B some 6 years ago after I saw some progeny of his in Brazil. This year has been fantastic with so many wins with the first foal crop that I was involved with here at Albidayer and have shown in Europe the first time in many years and have loved every minute of it. I hope that the rest of the shows go so well but as I was told once when I was younger, if you want something bad enough it usually happens, only time will tell.

Breeding is something that fascinates me and 11 months of waiting, wondering if decisions will become dreams and dreams become reality, it is a very slow process. After joining Al Bidayer, Sheikh Mohammed joked that I had better breed him some champions and so along with Darwn, we started to devise a program and both bringing new knowledge from opposite sides of the Atlantic. The following year we walked away with Gold, Silver and Bronze with all of our yearlings that we showed and my personal favourite, Mozn Albidayer, took me to new heights winning the Gold yearling filly title firstly in Ajman, then at the Dubai International Horse show and more recently in the AHO World Cup in beautiful Chantilly. She went from the darling of the Emirates to the darling of Europe, stealing hearts and smiles from all who see her. To me, Mozn is that special horse that only comes along once in a lifetime and I feel privileged to share this adventure with her.

TA: Do you have any advice for the young people out there who are dreaming about doing your job?

BS: I wake up every morning and count my lucky stars to be paid to do what I love. Arabian horses have enabled me to meet a whole host of wonderful people from around the world and to be in an industry that has its flaws, but the horse is still the catalyst. If anyone wants to become a trainer, I would tell them to watch, take note and find a person who you really admire and train with them. Hard work always pays off and quick fixes never last so do things right from the beginning. And most importantly, enjoy these wonderful horses. □



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