



photo by Irina Filsinger - www.filscoart.com

with World Champion Mare Gelgelah Al Badeia

THE AUSTRIAN HORSE WHISPERER

by Urszula Leczycka - Arabhorsepromotion.com
 photos by Erwin Escher, Irina Filsinger, Bert van Lent, Wieslaw Pawlowska

*G*erald Kurtz is a familiar name for those who frequent visit the international horse shows around the world. Many will associate him managing some world prestigious breeding farms. His horse story began in native Austria, in Burgenland, close to the Hungarian border where Gerald grew up. This is a real horse region, where horses have been used for centuries both for pleasure and work. In his school years Gerald used to sneak over the border into communist Hungary where the pastures and horse opportunities were even more interesting and challenging than on the home side. Being close to Babolna he became aware of the Arabian horse and all its qualities. From then on, Gerald's mind and life changed into a lifelong interest of and partnership with the Arabian purebred

horse. When he finished school and college being 19 years old he was already decided to create his future based upon a relationship with Arabian horses. His first visit to a horse show was in Wels, Austria, where he was completely mesmerized by the beauty and attitude of the show horses. From then on it was just a question of when he could get his own Arabian horse. His first acquisition was a young Arabian colt and a broodmare from Dr. Engels, Ramirah BB who was by European Champion - Top. This kick started his interest in show horses and reflections on how to start an activity to train, condition and show horses. Gerald first real contact with the at that time established show farms was the Kossack Stud in Holland, where he discovered Russian bred Arabians. This connection was as love at first sight



with fiancée Gosia, Mila Martensson and Mastiff Gloria

and led to many visits to Tersk stud to study Russian breeding programs. A short time later the sequence of events connected him with the horse that became his first real champion, the legendary Gips (Mashuk x Polinezia by Nabeg). The partnership between Gerald and Gips resulted with many important champion titles, but more importantly taught the young handler a respect for the Arabian show horse. He understood and appreciated that to be successful with a horse you need to understand the specific horse's mentality as well as physical attributes. In order to learn his business Gerald left Europe to stay in the US with Grand Arabian Farm, the Mehney Family - from there the next stop was Midwest Training centre during Scottsdale show.



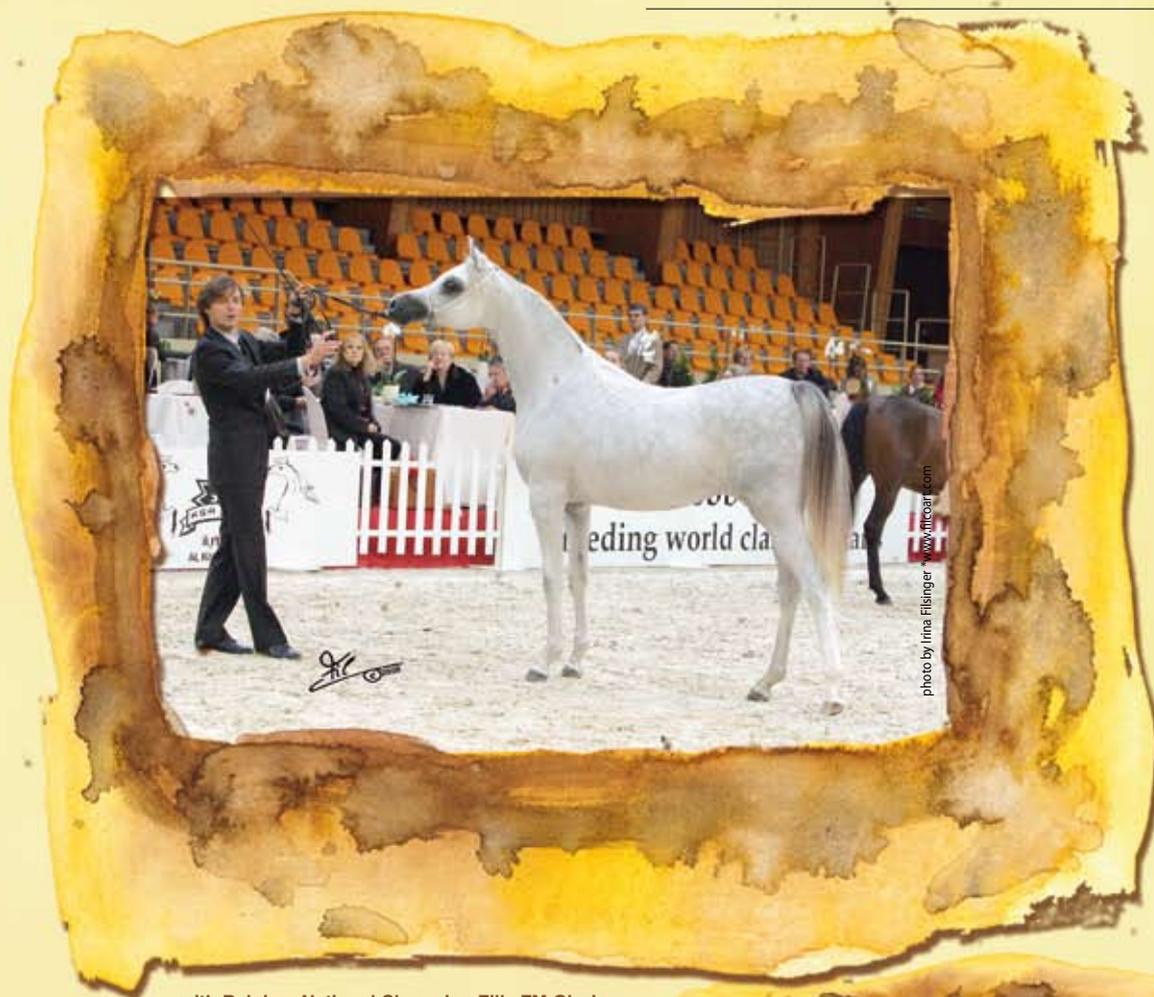
with World Reserve Champion Filly HS Ramira

Returning to Europe in the summer 1994, Gerald started his own training center. He learned the advantages and also all the problems related to service European market still being in its infancy. Almost immediately his training centre produced numerous national and international champions. During this period Gerald focused his attention on a horse psychology and mental training - how could he make the horse best possible be prepared physically and mentally for a show? What were the approaches to make the horses perform their best when needed? Having already visited most of the world's countries Gerald wanted to focus on Brazil, mostly unknown territory for European breeders at that time. He immediately noticed that this country had many interesting bloodlines and its immense pastures and suitable climate was almost perfect for horse breeding. His early visits produced quickly a lot of contacts, again leading to a number of very successful imports - like Dyrochall HCF, More Extacy JP, HVP Laman, Greta, NAG Olla Bez to name a few. Finally, in the beginning of 2002 Gerald got an offer he could not refuse - from Shirley Watts, the owner of Halsdon Arabians in Devon, UK. He became the stud manager of one of the finest collections of Arabian horses in the world, and had the privilege to train, condition, and show many of Halsdon world famous horses. Again Gerald's association with Halsdon led to many titles, including European and World Championships, he was also heavily involved in the breeding program comprising more than 30 foals annually.

In 2006 as an experienced trainer he changed pastures again when Dion Arabians invited him to become stud manager for the new international training centre they wanted to develop in south western Belgium. Again it was an opportunity and privilege of working with world class show horses and breeding programs, achieving several new title championships in turn. Contrary to many of his branch colleagues Gerald has widened his profession in different directions, as artificial insemination and embryo transfer doing many of these tasks and procedures himself graduating several courses in equine and stud management. He got also some experience as a judge.

Tutto Arabi: What do you think about the current state of affairs of the international show scene?

Gerald Kurtz: I feel that today we may focus on pure type too much and too little on the attributes which have made the Arabian horse famous all over the world during the centuries. As horse owners and especially breeders we are responsible to maintain the qualities of breed. We must never forget that the success and reputation of the Arabian horse has been created by its qualities - simply by being the most versatile and best performance horse the world ever has seen. A good reference is the so called desert bred horses that you will frequently find in Saudi Arabia, the real Nejd horses. They may sometimes have heavy heads and relatively short necks, but they have fantastic bodies and great legs - and are probably in general better horses than our show horses!



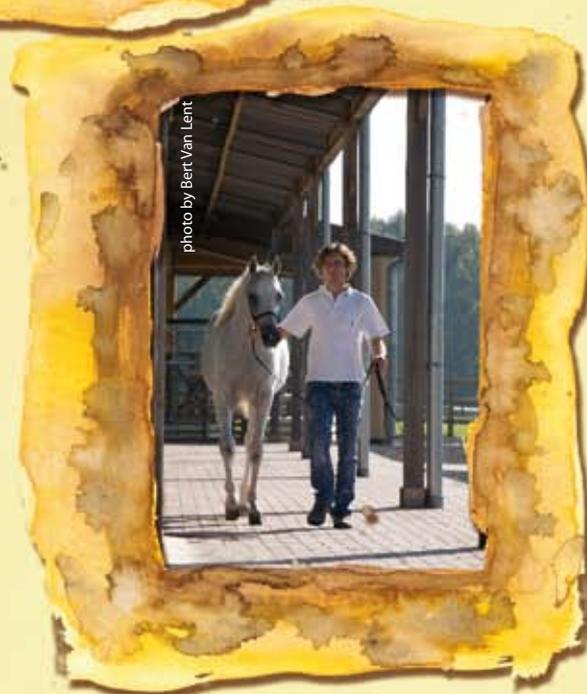
with Belgium National Champion Filly FM Gloria

TA: What do you think about the judging system in the current international shows?

GK: Personally I prefer the 20 point system rather than the comparative one, but considering that half points should be used all over the board. It may be a good idea to give separate points to head and neck with shoulder as the head very often dominates the current head and neck mark nowadays. It would probably also serve the quality of the breed, if judging tasks were better spread between more judges, as I think today's ECAHO favourite judges are far too dominant – both for definition of the horse standard and thus the business.

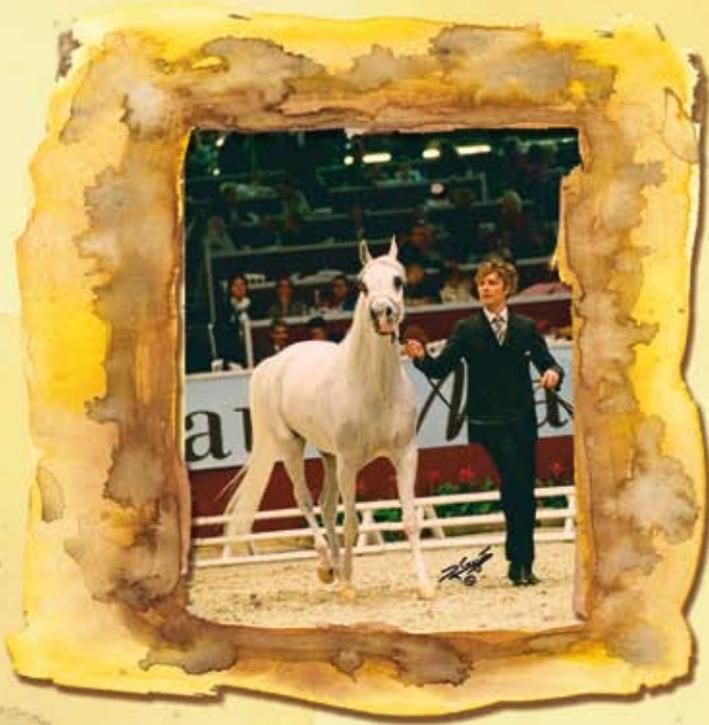
TA: As a handler what do you think of the idea of penalty points for handlers introduced by ECAHO. Do you think it will work?

GK: This is really a very sensitive and political issue, which ECAHO seems to be more concerned about than the majority of horse owners, breeders and show participants. Of course we are all equally concerned about the well being of the horses and against all forms of mistreatment and abuse. I do not think you can be a really good handler/trainer unless you love and respect the Arabian horse. My impression is that stud farm owners, breeders horse owners, i.e.,



on the farm with FM Gloria

my clients, are much more skeptical to the current judging system, and would much rather see yellow and red cards for judges than for the handlers! But just being a handler I will not go deeper into politics which has the potential to hurt many people.



winning Paris with Gelgelah Al Badeia

TA: You mentioned about your judging experience as well, can you tell us more about that part of your activity?

GK: Most of all I wanted to become a judge to improve my quality as a trainer and handler. The first opportunity was to attend a judge course in Babolna in 1996, only as a guest as the ECAHO policy prevents trainers because the inherent conflict of interests. But due to the experience and positive results from the course, I have been invited several times to judge in South America. I will be judging the Inter American show 1 -3 May in Brazil this year, as I did in 2007.

inseminating a mare at the Training Center



photo by Bert Van Lent

TA: How do you feel about being able to judge in South America and not in Europe?

GK: It is obvious that being a trainer/handler and a judge creates a theoretical conflict of interest. But looking closely at ECAHO there are so many conflicts of interests existing already among their representatives. This is really unavoidable in a small community like the Arabian horse world. Knowledge and experience, sense of judgment, honesty and moral should be the most important factors to qualify for judging, not whether you are a trainer, horse owner, a breeder or an agent. I think quite frankly that trainers/handlers are generally the best "judges" of horses. Otherwise we would not have a job! Today's ECAHO policy is thus discriminating and should be reconsidered.

TA: Talking about tastes - which are your favorite bloodlines?

GK: I am totally pragmatic as far as ethnical bloodlines are concerned, meaning that I have no preference for either Egyptian, Polish, Russian or Spanish horses. But, as a good cook, I think that the most interesting horses need some input from many sources.

TA: Can you tell us more about some exceptional horses of Halsdon and Dion that you have working with, or you still do at Dion Arabians?

GK: During my time at Halsdon I had a privilege to work with many worlds class horses. I was involved in buying Shadra NA (El Shaklan x Hal Sheena by Hal Gibby) in Brazil which resulted in the European Champion Mare title. I had also a pleasure of working with the homebred stallion HS Etiquette (Simeon Sadik x Etenta by Monogramm) that became European Champion stallion in 2005, after a period spent on the race track in Poland and a breeding season at Janów Podlaski. I assisted Halsdon in the purchase of Straight Egyptian mare Gelgelah Albadeia (Imperial Madori x Anbar Albadeia by Ameer Albadeia), which led to both the European and the World Championship mare titles. Also I had the honor to show the legendary Simeon Sadik (Asfour x Simeon Safanad by Sankt Georg) to the reserve Championship title at All Nations Cup in Aachen. All in all, the opportunity to work as stud manager at Halsdon gave me privilege to indulge myself in perhaps the most amazing private collection of worlds class horses on Earth. Apart from the countless regional titles and class A shows were accomplished during my time at Halsdon (comprising all European class A show), the professional experience was awesome. At Dion things have been a little different. We have had less horses, but some really worlds class individuals. I have had the opportunity to assist in the sale of the homebred colt Fever Ibn Eternity (Eternity Ibn Navarrone x Marissa Rose) who became European Champion Colt, and then his full brother Hypnotic who I showed to the European Reserve title the following year. I also had

the privilege of winning the All Nations Cup Champion Stallion title with Dion's foundation stallion and multiple World Champion Eternity Ibn Navarrone. During the last couple of years Dion Arabians have developed a brand new 100 horse stud farm and training centre near Langemark-Poelkapelle in the west part of Belgium, setting a new standard of farms in Europe for Arabian horses.

TA: *What are the most important points of being a handler today?*

GK: *There are initially many important factors: of course you need to have a source of good horses, a good and professional team around you, including vets, ferries etc, also you need to have a good and functional installation and infrastructure, the ability to build and operate a team which performs well... Obviously you also need financial resources to make it all professionally. After all this, I believe that the most difficult task is to create a successful environment.*

TA: *What is the biggest advantage of being an Arabian horse trainer?*

with Double World and All Nations Cup Champion Eternity Ibn Navarron D

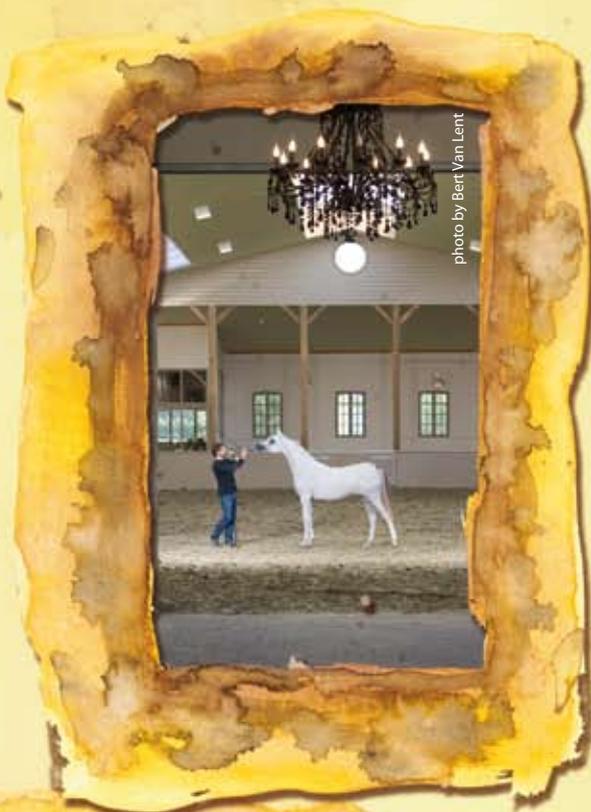


photo by Bert Van Lent

working with Miss Navarrone



photo by Erwin Escher - www.erwinescher.com



photo by Wiesław Pawłowska

Gerald at phone when he bought Kwesture for 1,2 mil Euro

GK: For sure the privilege of being able to indulge into your lifetime passion and hobby – i.e. working with worlds class Arabian horses. Being a trainer/handler gives you the opportunity to travel around the world, from stable to stable, farm to farm, seeing Arabian horses on different continents and in different settings. I also appreciate the opportunity to meet so many interesting and nice people from various countries and various cultures. The Arabian horse ties humans together like nothing else. It doesn't matter what colour you are, nor what religion you belong to, but what kind Arabian bloodlines you are focusing on!

Gerald judging Class A-Show in Brazil



TA: Last year you appeared in many worlds leading magazines as the main actor of 2008 Pride of Poland sale bidding for Sheikh Ammar bin Humaid Al Nuaimi, Crown Prince of Ajman winning the battle for Kwestura – finally the highest selling Polish horse since famous Penicylina at Polish Ovation in the US. How did you come to be the successful bidder of this famous mare?

GK: You can probably say that I was at the right place at the right time. However, I am really pleased and proud of having had the opportunity to be of assistance to the Sheikh Ammar bin Humaid Al Nuaimi, Crown Prince of Ajman to purchase Kwestura, who simply wanted to acquire the fantastic world champion mare! Everybody was happy to be part of this historic event. Sheikh Ammar has got now one of the finest Arabian mares in the world. The bidding was a thriller and in such a moment seconds seems to be like an eternity. I wish to repeat that one more time in my life.

TA: Do you plan to make it happen this year and come for bidding on 2009 Pride of Poland auction?

GK: Pride of Poland auction is surely the most prestigious sales auction in the world of Arabians horses. I would like to come and be a part of it again, but for the “bidding side” – we will have to see...

TA: Are there any other business contact and friendships made thanks to Arabian horses that you especially admire in your life?

GK: The Arabian horse has brought me most of the really good friends I have today. There are many deep friendships and people I appreciate and Im even not able to mention them all here without missing anyone. As a breeder I can say I admire Lenita Perroy more than anybody else. You can see creations easily there, and her horses are in a huge influence today. Her work as a breeder is a work of art and will influence the Arabian horse breed for a very long time to come.

TA: What are your dreams and ambitions for the future?

GK: First of all that I can maintain the opportunity and privilege to work with world class horses. Working in this context, means training, feeding, conditioning and showing the horses in the title shows around the world. I prefer a small number of top quality horses and a small numbers of owners to larger set ups. Being totally pragmatic as far as bloodlines are concerned I have an ambition to develop some specific crosses which I for the moment will keep for myself. I look forward to indulge into the friendship that I have developed with so many people spread all over the world – all sharing the love and passion for the Arabian horse. □