


EXPLORING THE HERITAGE

A Journey Through Qatar's Straight Eg

by JENNIFER OGDEN and MONIKA SAVIER

Photo: MONIKA SAVIER



Undoubtedly, the importance of the horse runs deep within the Qatari culture, with a rich ancestral history intertwined with the Arabian breed. Horses have long been an integral part of their early life and cultural identity, and in the last 30 years many Qataris are now enjoying a newfound interest in their heritage, particularly with the Straight Egyptian Arabian. In recent years, Arabian horses have increasingly come to represent their cultural identity. They stand for authenticity and the preservation of the nomadic history of their ancestors.

Events with Arabian horses, whether at shows or in sport, have been important for centuries for social cohesion among breeders. The

exchange of ideas, experiences, and results is necessary because the breeding of horses takes years and generations before realistic results can be generally accepted. This also includes celebrating together, doing business and much more. The straight Egyptian breeding community is a large international family in which social differences hardly play a role when it comes to the horses. It's all about a shared passion for horse breeding and riding.

Today, this analogue world of "come together" has largely been replaced by digital communication via live streaming and social media. This makes it all the more important that the culture of real-life get-togethers continues to

Egyptian Arabian Horse Breeding Farms



"After 50 years in this Arabian Community, I have seen valleys, plateaus and peaks in the breed. The straight Egyptian Arabian is holding its own, but it is in need of serious leadership and breeder education worldwide, as well as some non-competitive activities that can bring people together. The show ring isn't everything; winning isn't everything. The relationships between people are everything! Without people who get along and are like-minded, the breed cannot prosper"

JUDITH FORBIS, 2013

be facilitated and cultivated in the Gulf States. The connections made with fellow horse enthusiasts from many countries, sharing stories and experiences, and exemplifying the renowned hospitality of Qatar, created unforgettable moments of socialising and cultural exchange.

Following the Peninsular Horse Show for Straight Egyptian Arabians held at the Katara International Horse Festival in February, guests from around the globe enjoyed not only this spectacular event showcasing horses from the region, but also a journey into Qatari hospitality and the opportunity to visit some of the renowned breeding farms.



Through time and tradition visitors embarked on a captivating farm tour, beginning with the open house presentations in the following outstanding studs.

**AL NASSER STUD * AL RAYYAN FARM * AL HAMAMA STUD
AL WAAB FARM * DOHA STUD**

From the mists of the past, the contours of the Arabian horse began to emerge as it gradually found a home back on the Arabian Peninsula. When Al Nasser Stud was founded in 1990 by Sheikh Nawaf Bin Nasser Al Thani, the new era of straight Egyptians had already begun to take root in the Middle East. At that time, the major studs in Qatar were on the lookout for Arabians with a noble heritage in order to preserve the history of the nomadic desert Arabians and to continue the breeding of these Arabians in their stud farms.

The famous Al Rayyan Farm is owned by HH Sheikh Hamid Bin Khalifa AL Thani. Being the oldest Straight Egyptian breeding establishment in Doha it was established by Sheikh Abdulaziz Bin Abdulla Al Thani more than 30 years ago, and now stands at the forefront of Straight Egyptian breeding, with many Al Rayyan bred horses forming the foundation for breeders within the region and worldwide.

From there, the journey meandered northward to Al Hamama Stud, a relatively new breeding program owned by Sheikh Abdulaziz Bin Saoud Al Thani, his attention to detail was obvious, guests were treated to amazing hospitality and the horses were a true insight to Sheikh Abdulaziz foresight and quest for the highest quality.

The following day guests enjoyed the splendour of Doha Stud presentation, owned by HE Sheikh Thani Bin Hamad Al Thani, this was an evening that many will never forget. The audience was completely captivated by not only the quality of horses but the presentation and magical atmosphere. No one wanted it to end.

The tour finished with Al Waab Farm, owned by HE Sheikh Abdulla Bin Khaled Al Thani, it emerges as a beacon of excellence in the world of Straight Egyptian breeding. Renowned for their meticulous dedication to preservation breeding, Al Waab Farm holds a prestigious reputation as the home of several of the famous Straight Egyptian Arabians.

Under the azure skies of Qatar, it became abundantly clear to all those that visited, that some of the world's finest Straight Egyptian Arabian horses grace these shores. Each a testament to the dedication and reverence for the breed that permeates every aspect of Qatari equestrian culture.

There is no doubt that the Qataris love their horses and they have a long ancestral history of life with the Arabian breed.



AL NASSER STUD





AL RAYYAN FARM







AL WAJBA STUD

Nasser Al Mansouri, General Manager of Al Wajba Stud, invited me to visit this new hotspot, a centre of Arabian horse breeding at a high level. After a drive to the north of Doha, we come across an oasis, belonging to Sheikh Al Qaqa bin Hamad Al Thani. Paddocks shaded by trees with mares and foals impress visitors. Noble stables with large boxes and green pastures make this place a feel-good gesture for the horses.

In addition to a few world-famous Show horses from the Open Show scene, the stud has up to now six excellent Straight Egyptians, which I was happy to see.

"There are still too few for an Open House," says Nasser. I asked him which of the famous studs in Qatar has the strongest influence on Al Wajba Stud's goals. "Al Rayyan is the oldest and has a strong influence, but the young Sheikh Thani, founder of DOHA Stud, is the one whose expertise influences us the most," says Nasser Al Mansouri.

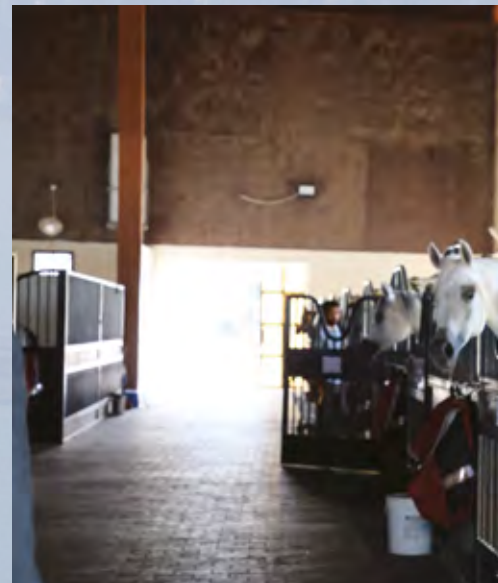
When I ask him how he envisages the future of Al Wajba and what the breeding goal is, he says: "Nice horses first of all. We don't look much to the pedigrees. We started with four mares from Al Rayyan stud, one from Al Nasser stud and one from Al Waab stud. I know that out of these bloodlines, many good horses are coming, but I want to do something new with many out-crosses. Of course you can make mistakes sometimes, but breeding is when you try something new. My goal is to breed the perfect horse".

The Straight Egyptians in Qatar are exquisite horses. The root mares and stallions have been selected and imported from the best stud farms in Europe and the USA. It is hard to imagine that the young, wealthy breeders still have goals and are looking for even more perfection.

Nasser adds: We have many beautiful horses with nice heads, but in my opinion the straight Egyptians in Qatar are losing movement and neck. I am looking for stallions that can improve our mares. We recognise the efforts of the previous breeders who gave us the foundation mares. Now we want to continue the legacy of these horses and breed even better".

I asked him: "Do you prefer to present your horses at horse Shows or do you like showing them more at home in an Open House with lots of guests?"

"I prefer the outdoor Show because I like the competition. Nevertheless, I also like the Open House at home, but I still need some judges to teach me about our horses," says Nasser, "but I hope that one day I can participate in the Open Shows with our straight Egyptian horses and win."





AL HAMAMA STUD





Jennifer Ogden interviewed Sheikh Abdulmajeed Bin Abdulla Al Thani from Al Waab Farm, and Sheikh Abdulaziz Bin Saoud Al Thani from Al Hamama Stud, with some thought-provoking questions.

The Al Waab stud has a big name in the world of straight Egyptian Arabian breeders. What is the importance of Arabian horse breeding for the royal house in Doha?

Sheikh Abdulmajeed: Arabian horses are treasured for their heritage and history that have been passed down to us, and it has always been our goal to preserve them for generations to come.

How and according to what criteria were the foundation horses selected?

Sheikh Abdulmajeed: At the beginning of establishing our breeding program, an extensive study was conducted on a worldwide level to reach the best of the best mares and stallions from distinguished pedigrees and families. My father Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalid saw to it that Al Waab gathers the finest mares to build our breeding program. The same not only goes for mares, but also for the process of selecting our stallions. After acquiring them, it has been our goal to prepare an environment where these precious gems will be living and to build a team of professionals that will take care of them.

Sheikh Abdulaziz: Our foundation horses were selected based on a set of stringent criteria including their lineage, conformation, temperament, and performance records. The primary goal was to ensure that these horses not only had impeccable bloodlines but also exhibited the characteristics that epitomize the breed's beauty and resilience. We conducted extensive consultations with breed experts and utilized detailed genetic and health screenings.

The stud presentation was enormously important for the guests from all over the world to see and learn where the breeding of Egyptian Arabians is kept at a high level today. Isn't a stud presentation with mare families much more informative than the show presentation of the individual horse competition?

Sheikh Abdulmajeed: The Al Waab Farm's presentation in my view has more than one goal, the first one is it being a meeting place for the best Straight Egyptian horses in the world. A place where upcoming breeders and veterans to meet and exchange ideas and experiences, all whilst enjoying the beauty of purebred Arabian horses. A second aim is it being an opportunity to showcase the way generations of Straight Egyptian horses have developed in Al Waab and showcase how they will serve breeders around the world to maintain this rare breed at its best levels.

Sheikh Abdulaziz: I believe that the stud presentations featuring mare families provide a deeper insight into our breeding program, more so than individual horse competitions. It also allows the guests to observe the consistency of the family traits within the pedigree. It helps our guests to understand the importance of preserving and enhancing the bloodlines of Egyptian Arabians.

Preservation Breeding: What criteria do you use to select a stallion for your mares? Do you primarily refer to the pedigree? Or do you also consider the health and functionality of the stallion to match the mare, to keep the breed healthy in the long term?

Sheikh Abdulmajeed: The selection of stallions is subject to more than one criterion. It is a large and deep topic, but there are several points that should be considered. There are main stallions that are integrated in body form and muscular strength and structure all whilst presenting the breed's Arabian identity in the face. Also, there are sub-stallions that have strong genetic imprint in specific points. They are used carefully to develop certain generations to achieve a certain goal.

AL WAAB FARM



Sheikh Abdulaziz: In selecting a stallion for our mares, we consider several factors. The pedigree is crucial as it helps preserve the lineage integrity, but equally important is the health and functionality of the stallion. We aim for a balance that ensures genetic diversity while also minimizing health risks, we believe this will promote the long-term viability and wellness of our horses.

In the Middle East and especially Qatar there are many and mostly very good straight Egyptians. Communication and trade with Europe and the USA, has come to a standstill, with a few exceptions. How will the many social contacts and friendships between the studs in the East and West be able to continue?

Sheikh Abdulmajeed: The relationships formed and built throughout the years between the breeders from the east and the west is a vital one. It is essential that communication never comes to a halt across, so the new generations can benefit from this long connection.

Sheikh Abdulaziz: I believe that despite the challenges in direct trade and communication with Europe and the USA, we will continue to maintain and build international relationships by using digital platforms. Virtual conferences are a great idea, and of course social media, such as Instagram are an integral part of communication

Will the stud presentations remain the only possibility for a "come together" or are there new ideas for a worldwide co-operation and friendship?

Sheikh Abdulmajeed: There many more ideas that can be beneficial to breeders than a stud's presentation. Unfortunately, the goal of most breeders has been to win and participate in shows, which has led to a breeder's narrative being limited to one direction. I agree that shows should be a goal and motive in a breeder's aspirations, but there are also other factors to grow. Educational forums should be created in regard to correct nutrition for the Arabian horse, appropriate medical care, and creating lectures and meetings with distinguished educators to gain experiences and knowledge.

Sheikh Abdulaziz: While stud presentations are a cornerstone for gathering and sharing knowledge, we are exploring new avenues for international cooperation. This includes virtual stud tours, global webinars, and cooperative breeding programs that can be managed through digital platforms, allowing us to maintain and expand our global network in the Arabian horse community.

Will you be experimenting with a broader blood base, and if not, why do you choose not to include other blood lines?

Sheikh Abdulmajeed: Here in Al Waab Farm, we are dedicated to Egyptian Arabian horses, which are the rarest bloodlines in the world, as they represent less than 3% of the world's Arabian breed, this means that you have a special and rare creature. So how can I mix it and make it like all other ones? I think it is a mistake, and this is not a question of the beauty of the other Arab breeds. But for me, I love to preserve this rare breed developing them to compete with the large number of other breeds worldwide.

Sheikh Abdulaziz: Our focus remains on breeding Straight Egyptians, a decision that stems from our commitment to preserving the unique attributes of this line. While broader genetic mixing can introduce variability and vigour, our priority is to maintain the historical purity and distinctive qualities of the Egyptian Arabians, which are valued both culturally and aesthetically."

Why do you breed Straight Egyptians; do you believe in showing them or do you see them as preservation breeding of the Bedouin breed?

Sheikh Abdulmajeed: I think I answered it in a previous question. Behind each Straight Egyptian horse is a



story, because every horse has a true trace in history that dates to the Arab tribes from a long period of time. As I explained earlier, it is an honour to be able to breed such horses and it falls upon us breeders to maintain this history.

Sheikh Abdulaziz: We breed straight Egyptians not only to preserve the historical lineage of these magnificent animals but also to showcase their unique traits through competitions. These horses are a living link to the Bedouin breed's heritage, and our breeding program is as much about preservation as it is about celebrating their enduring elegance and resilience in modern displays.

What are your thoughts on embryo transfer (ET,) do you see it as an essential part of the future of the Arabian horse breeding.

Sheikh Abdulmajeed: It is essential with special cases for mares and stallions with certain health conditions that prevent them from producing, if the horse's health comes first of course. It is a privilege to have such technology. But only in these certain circumstances and nothing else.

Sheikh Abdulaziz: I believe that Embryo transfer is a valuable tool, it offers us numerous benefits and opportunities particularly allowing us to breed our exceptional mares to a broader range of stallions. It is particularly useful when mares cannot carry due to health problems and or injury. I believe it is indeed a pivotal part of the future in Arabian horse breeding, ensuring the continuation of high-quality lineage while safeguarding animal welfare.



DOHA STUD

Sheikh Thani Bin Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani's passion for Arabian horses and breeding has been a lifelong journey. Following the tradition of the Qatari royal family, who began importing Arabian horses to the Arabian Peninsula in the 1980s, Sheikh Thani has carved his own path. In 2020, he established the esteemed Doha Stud, focusing on Straight Egyptian Arabians of the highest quality. With twenty young mares, two stallions, and ten offspring, the stud embodies his commitment to quality.

Sheikh Thani's dedication extends beyond borders as he scoured renowned stables from Europe, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar, including Al Rayyan Farm and Al Waab farm for the finest broodmares for his modern breeding program. His approach blends established bloodlines with Straight Egyptians of various origins, showcasing both tradition and innovation. The initial success of his offspring in shows is a testament to his vision and perseverance.

When discussing the role of shows in educating and supporting breeders, Sheikh Thani offers an insightful perspective. While he's no stranger to the show ring and has enjoyed success, he prefers to evaluate the horses in their natural habitat on the breeder's or owner's farms.

There, he can observe the sire and dam, even, study progeny, and gain a deeper understanding of the breeding program. However, he doesn't discount the potential of shows to serve as platforms for celebrating breeding achievements, to promote the ideal horse, and to recognize excellence.

In crafting his own breeding program, despite the impossibility of perfection, he emphasises the significance of conformation, pedigree, and form-to-function, always striving for continual improvement despite the inherent challenges.





