

Arabian



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■ *by Hans J. Nagel*

Horse

It is quite natural that every horse owner likes to know and be assured that his horse is appreciated. In the first place, it should be appreciated by himself, otherwise why has he chosen it? But to receive also a confirmation by somebody else that he made a good decision would even increase the new owner's stage of happiness. Nobody is so independent of his surroundings that he does not care about other opinions. There might exist very few breeders who do not care at all and decide their own way. Most people ask questions, and the more they are looking for answers, the more it becomes evident that there must be a common understanding or knowledge and a general consent, why some horses are better or higher evaluated than others.

When it comes to the Arabian horse, this subject remains quite complicated. Arabians are known for their versatility, as riding, racing, show or just as hobby horses. These different disciplines require different abilities and consequently different horses. For some of these purposes, it is not too difficult to make a clear evaluation, if one looks, for example, at the following order:


1. If an Arabian horse is kept for racing, its value and appreciation is determined by its ability to race and its chances to win. The answer is very easy and objective: One can measure the time and count its victories.
2. If an Arabian horse is used as a distance horse and in endurance riding, also in this case its value is determined by its capacity to compete with others at a certain distance. The result is again measured in time.
3. And when it comes to sport horses, to jumping competitions, time factor is second, meters and centimetres come first, but again an objective measurement is at hand. Arabian horses in dressage may be more difficult to evaluate. But there is huge activity in horse dressage, nearly all warm-blood breeds compete in this field, and the standards for evaluation are obviously very professional and accepted worldwide.

However, not more than about 2% of the Arabian horse population world-wide participates in such events and competes in these disciplines. 98% of all Arabian horses are in the hands of owners who apparently like their horses for some other reason, and it would be of great interest to know why this is the case. In visiting such breeders and in going through all the different journals appearing in the most important breeder countries, as in America, Australia, England, Germany, Italy or wherever, the most obvious observation is the fact that one is confronted with very different types of horses, but most of them are described with similar comments or even the same overloaded words, when it comes to praise their quality and appreciation.

Could it be true and possible that a majority of Arabian horse owners are not able or even willing to know about the quality and value of their horses or they like them so much that the expression "Love is blind" applies to a human-horse relation.

In introducing the time element into these considerations, it is evident that in the last ten years a change could be noticed. Publications and advertising descriptions became more precise, points of differences are better. The degree of exactness has increased, in total, a better consensus has developed as to how a good Arabian should look like and which one could possibly receive the highest evaluation. There must have been a learning. It is a known fact that never in history there was one single type of an Arabian horse. It should be remembered that the Arabian horse is an old, historical breed; it can only be an Arabian horse if, earlier or later, his ancestors originate from the Arabian countries. Their history is recorded in the so-called pedigrees which at some stage has to refer to the Bedouin breeders in the Arabian Peninsula.





Arabian horse shows were the ideal experimental field to establish a kind of standard which could give a proper orientation to breeders

Even at this early time in their own homeland, Arabian horses in the South or North of Arabia, in Saudi Arabia, Iraq or Egypt, always looked different from each other. The stronger ones lived in the North, the smaller and lighter ones possibly more in the South.

Environment, availability of food and definitely the preference of their breeders, altogether created such differentiation. When those Arabians came into the hands of European educated breeders, European methods for evaluation were applied. Here it is a habit and useful in many respects to create standards.

During the last 30 years, the Arabian horse breeding activity nearly reached the status of an industry, and kind standardisation had to be expected sooner or later. The arena where this happened was the show ground. When Arabian horses are presented to the public, they appear in great numbers in these horse shows and in a higher volume than in the other disciplines mentioned before.

To improve breeding of animals for whatever purpose, evaluation standards are needed as a basis for selection. This is the way selection works: a clear description of the envisaged goal. As an example, the great State Studs in Eastern Europe collected once or twice a year their horses in one location and all the foals born in that year were properly examined; at the same time an evaluation was given to their parents in order to understand and to evaluate their breeding potential.

Stallions which gave unsatisfactory foals were taken out of breeding and those ones which produced a wonderful crop were more employed and again chosen for the next season. The same applied for the mares. And not only their features, but also the behaviour and character entered into the evaluation records. This early kind of breeding inspection, which was used later on by different European Arabian horse associations, changed and developed into the horse shows of today. These horse shows finally created their own life, they became disconnected from the previous wider aspects of breeding considerations and each animal as such received only its value and appraisal, as it was presented. History and breeding background as well as mental and behaving aspects were omitted.

Show organisers, breeding experts, judges, finally arrived at a kind of consensus, how to run the shows and how the horses should be judged.

There remained a certain difference how the Americans chose their way of judgement and by what judging system the Europeans preferred to separate the good ones from the ones of minor quality, but a certain unanimous opinion is evident.

A further reason for a difference in evaluation and appreciation lies in the education and background of earlier judges. It was interesting to note in Europe that many officials in traditional horse breeding, like certain managers of state studs or of governmental horse organisations, involved with Arabians and took part in Arabian horse breeding organisations. Most of them showed in their judgement the tendency to look for a stronger horse.

For a long time, Arabians were used as improver horses, but still with the purpose to breed a horse stronger in substance than the original Arabian breed. For example, the so-called Shagya-Arabian breed was such a product. It was greatly appreciated by European horsemen. Many of those officials were highly attracted by this type of Arabian, since it was maybe in all its features closer to the general European warmblood-type, which had a solid place in agriculture, transport and not to forget in the army.

The Shagya stallion "Ghazal" was the embodiment of the Shagya breed, highly appreciated by most of the professional horsemen



Many of the pure-bred Arabian stallions showed a strong and perfect conformation, as it was highly appreciated in Europe



Also in the States, many of the early Arabian breeders appreciated their Arabian for their ability as a useful horse and not just an animal for enjoyment and personal entertainment.

It is very obvious that many of these professionals put their stamp of opinion very early also onto the show judging of Arabian horses. They were considered by the majority of the new Arabian breeders as experts and experienced horsemen. Their advice was highly appreciated and many of them were invited to judge. Later on, non-professional horsemen appeared more and more as prominent breeders of Arabians. They gained their own experience and were finally considered as experts as well, but their knowledge was possibly not

so much oriented along European developed professional horsemanship, but focused more on features which describe the Arabian horse as an exotic animal, a horse which came as a foreigner with its own history from the Arab countries into the Western hemisphere. There is no doubt that both schools were instrumental in forming and fixing a standard for the Arabian horse, as it can be seen today.



The WAHO-logo could be considered as a standard. It was designed by Mrs. Brown Edwards, one of the most knowledgeable persons in the US. influence on the show ring gave without any doubt a direction to the future

If the Arabian breed and its evaluation is at present more determined by orientally inspired breeders or by those ones which represent the official horse breeding profession in the West is an open question. Both of them created a common standard of evaluation in their mind, but the ranking of features in the scale of appreciation might still remain different.

With the creation of the ECAHO, European breeders decided more or less for one single judging system. This judging system divides the criteria to be judged into 5 categories and is now the most common practice. It replaces the previous type of judging, where normally one judge was asked to put a class of horses into the right order, from the winner in the first position to the loser in the last position.

This system is still widely applied in Great Britain and has also elsewhere many supporters, even on the continent, but the point system, as mentioned above, is the official ECAHO-standard.

Whatever is the education of a judge, he has to follow in ECAHO-Shows this point system.

This point-judging system had a fantastic by-product: it was teaching people. They started to learn how to evaluate their horse and they were now able to follow the judgement in shows and could even apply this system on their own horses at home. Evaluation became easier, since there was now a formula how to do it.

It has led to a better and more precise understanding in all levels of Arabian horse breeding and left clear traces in advertisement and the general publicity.

The above introduction and historical discourse was written in order to understand why there were and are still some basic arguments about a proper evaluation: First, nature and men created by selection different types of Arabian horses, and secondly, a difference in education and background of previous and present breeders and judges has led to differences in preference and ranking.

The five well known categories, as type, head and neck, body and topline, quality of legs and movement are the cornerstones of judging today. Nearly every Arabian horse breeder in Europe knows about them and even when it comes to buy a horse, most of the buyers might think in their mind in these terms before they take a decision. Visiting observers and owners follow in horse shows the known judging procedure in even giving their own points, but still many of them leave the event with a shaking head indicating they could not follow properly why judgement was done this way and not the other.



The point-judging-system is applied in all major shows in Europe, like in the Nations Cup in Aachen or the world Championship in Paris

A well-balance pure-bred Arabian stallion....



...and a perfectly balanced Arabian brood-mare, highly evaluated by showmen and breeder people

This all indicates that there is plenty of room for interpretation and still more need for explanation as to what is the meaning of each of the 5 categories and how one could come closer to a proper common application and understanding. On the next pages, reference will be made to “type”, “head” and “neck”. The category of type is maybe the most difficult and complex one and common understanding is not easy to reach. The main reason is the fact that no objective measurement exists for type. It cannot be measured in meters, in time or weight. And in addition, type is not a single feature. The word “type” covers a summary of different features. It is a composition of qualities and features which could be ordered as follows:

Words like “balance”, “presence”, “harmony”, “charisma” or “quality” are often used to describe type. All these ones are of a subjective nature and every person will fill them out with his own opinion and according to his own taste. Different evaluations must be expected and nobody should try to eliminate such divergencies completely. They should remain a well-accepted human privilege. However,

it might be possible to bring such opinions closer together through a learning process which should concentrate on the application of those words on the Arabian breed. The term “balance” is possibly the most important one, “presence” is the next. To evaluate such balance requires observing the horse from a distance. Only then balance can show. Balance as such means to give a certain weight to each part of the horse and these weights should be in a proper relation to each other: Nothing should be too short or too long, too heavy or too light. Head and neck, neck and back, body and legs, all should unite to a balanced entity in itself. A perfectly balanced horse excels in harmony; it comes close to standard. Balance in movement acts like a confirmation of previous judgement. The horse must remain in balance, when it comes into movement and not fall apart when movement stops.

As soon as the horse goes forward, then also “presence” should become more evident. A horse must be able to make himself known even at halter by posing itself in an eye-attractive position. It must look alert, interested and not lazy or sluggish; such presence will be activated when it is allowed and encouraged to move. An Arabian which is unable to express all his fire and presence in movement fails to be a true member of this proud breed. There should be no winning horse which does not express perfect balance and proud presence at halter and in trot Secondly, there are three features which refer directly and only to Arabian horses.



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A young, highly spirited mare, a perfect example of presence



The fierce expression of a stallion's head, masculine and powerful, acting as a trademark of the breed

These are the ones which make an Arabian differ from all other horse breeds world-wide and give it a special touch.

The first criterion is the “Arabian head”. No other horse breed ever worldwide in history or at present has a comparable feature. It is this head which made an Arabian unique.

Particularly, the noble society in earlier times as well as breeders, horse lovers and artists of today have been attracted and became amazed by this specific face.

A further second typical Arabian feature is its “tail carriage”. Dedicated Arabian horse breeders always paid highest attention to this genetic historical heritage of an Arabian horse. It is as unique as its head. An Arabian horse which is unable to carry its tail high like a “proud flag” has lost a very important Arabian feature.

Head and tail carriage are two very easily recognisable features. However, there is an additional one, which might be claimed by other horse breeds as well, but it is definitely deeper and more solidly settled within the Arabian breed. This refers to their skin and to the incomparable dryness of this breed. A fine skin must make muscles, bones and veins clearly visible. The skin should be so delicate and fine that all the physical details which are placed and hidden underneath the skin penetrate to outside. An Arabian horse should show texture and should look dry. Accordingly, expressed in a negative way, a thick skin is not in conformity with the Arabian breed. It covers the body like a heavy blanket. Texture creates the impression of life, a flat surface suggests a rather inorganic entity, impossible to animate.



Tail carriage in perfection

The easy flying trot of a young mare



The Arabian in its homeland, trained to surprise the enemy in the frequent local wars

Movement, the next component of type. Previous Arabian breeders did not think so much about halter judging. They liked to see a horse move. "Close your eyes and you should not hear your horse in trot." So easy, so elastic an Arabian should fly over the ground that hoof beats do not seem to exist. An Arabian is, so to say, a light-weight horse, less than what is ever average, a fine product of desert life and an environmental relative to the gazelle of this region.

An Arabian was once in its history a war horse. Local smaller wars between Bedouin tribes were fought all the time. Mostly in the dark at moonlight, these Arab riders, themselves of a lighter stature, mounted their mares, alert, obedient and well-trained horses for such attacks, and in absolute silence, avoiding any kind of noise, they approached the location of their enemies. Such desert life was asking for these delicate qualities of their horses in order to fulfil their duties, and without doubt they still exist. Stallions which tended to get excited and make noise did not fit to such surprising raids.

The 4th consideration covers size. There is a common understanding that an Arabian horse should not be smaller than 146 cm. Most State Studs and breeders eliminate all horses less than 146 m height: they do not want an Arabian to be smaller than this, as if it belongs to the pony-breed. It should fit properly into the warmblood family.

But what is the upper limit and why do all breeders want a stallion to be taller than a mare?

Well-known State Studs limit the size of their horses to 156 cm. This should apply to males and females, even if it is preferred that the mares should be 1 to 3 cm smaller than stallions. Size definitely interferes with type. "Things grow out of proportion", a saying which suggests that harmony gets lost or, with other words, that a certain size does not fit to a certain object any more. Again, the simple words "too big" or "too large" indicate that something starts to be not normal and becomes exceptional. Size belongs to type as a further component, applicable for both, to the lower as well as to the higher side.

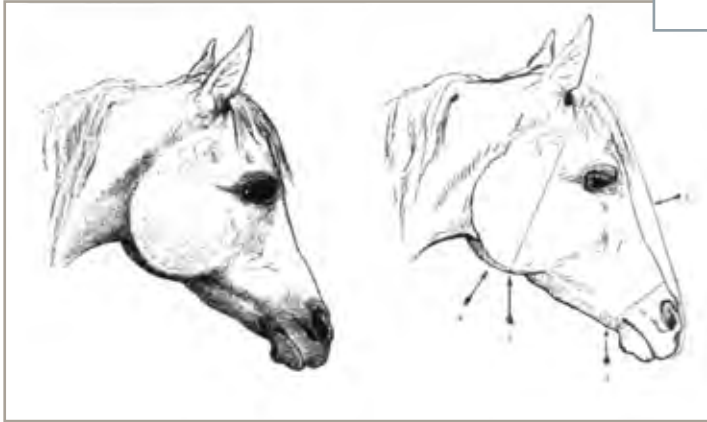


A stallion in action, showing his masculine behaviour

The soft and quiet look of a female face



Finally, a last 5th consideration refers to sex appeal. Stallions must look like males and mares as females, clearly and without any doubts recognisable as those. An Arabian stallion should show at least the following prominent masculine attributes: Powerful movement, a well-arched stronger neck and a proud carriage of his head. All three are important features of masculine behaviour. Such proud behaviour of a male in whatever breed, sometimes entering ridiculous dimensions, is one very basic tool of natural features of masculine behaviour. When in great shows the note “20” appears on the screen for “type”, have all these above points been well considered? Judging was perfect, when in this one note all these different components were properly summed up which enter into the evaluation of type, like: Balance and presence, the unique shape of head and carriage of tail, the fine texture of skin, the elegance and balance in movement, the size of their body, the pride of a stallion as well as the sweetness of a mare? The fact that some experienced judges enter their note for type only at the end of the whole judging procedure on their document, indicates that they are on the right track for proper and comprehensive evaluation.



The typical head of an Arabian mare designed by Mrs. Lady Blunt. The finemouth and the triangle are perfectly demonstrated

The next category after “type” is named “head and neck”. Why head and neck have been combined under one single note, will remain mysterious and why nobody is courageous enough to change this unhappy combination is mysterious, too. A head can be so pretty and the neck so wrong or vice versa as well. An open door for basic mistakes in evaluation and misleading in breeding. When a breeder wants to improve the heads of his horses, this has nothing at all to do with their necks. Necks can be improved independently; heads may remain the same and vice versa. There is no relation or better, no correlation. If there might be such a correlation, it is just one of those unpleasant accidents which could happen in the big gamble of heritability. Head and neck should be evaluated separately, because they have also considered each one by itself, when one likes to improve and have to select for them.

The Arabian head is in fact the trademark of this breed. In principle, a trademark in doing this, it is not guaranteeing the quality, but it stamps its product and makes it easy to recognise, and by all means this Arabian head is unique, well known, attractive and can be noticed immediately by any observer, when he approaches the horse. It cannot be overlooked. Nearly all other horse breeds show a convex forehead - a roman nose - or a straight forehead, but none can claim a concave one, the so-called “dished head”.

Many breeders were getting overexcited concerning this dish, and in our days even with an increasing tendency. The more dish, the better until the point that one is inclined to believe and fear that Arabian type and Arabian head would once become synonymous.



One should hope that this will never happen, otherwise this Arabian breed would lose by the time its general acceptance as a proper horse. Extremes and continuous overevaluation would kill its balance. It is known that in history only a very small percentage of the horses in the Arabian homeland had such striking heads. They were rare exceptions and traded for high prices between the richest of the society. But still this head was only one famous feature of the Arabian.

It was appreciated also for other highly regarded qualities. The early breeders were well aware that it requires many additional features and abilities to be a proper, perfect noble Arabian.

Again, there is a summary of traits which adds up to a good, beautiful and all time appreciated Arabian head. Starting from the lower part of the head to the upper one it could be listed as follows:

A fine mouth or muzzle with large nostrils easily wide inflated when breathing. A slight concave forehead in a smooth line. This line should on its lower side not be disturbed by a bump, the so-called "camel nose", and on the upper side not enlarged by a bump at the upper front of the head. The whole forehead should nowhere be abruptly turned in; it should be shaped by a natural easy curve fitting to a horse's face. A similarity to certain dogs' breed head, where the famous "stop" on the forehead is a preferred feature, would look bizarre on a horse.

The broad forehead and fine nostrils of an Arabian in the front view



An Arabian head in the side view. Again, the tringle must not be overlooked

The head should form a triangle, seen from the front and as well from the side. The small mouth-muzzle and the broad front of the upper head, enlarged by clearly extended eye sockets, form this shape as a front view; again, the small mouth/nose combination on the lower part and the properly medium-sized, but round shaped jaws appear as a triangle from the side view. If these triangles appear compact, a shorter head is formed. If they are stretched out, a longer head is the result. But in all cases, the triangle shape must be clearly recognisable and never be lost.

The ears should fit the head. A short head should have shorter ears, a big longer head might have longer ears. However, for both of them too long ears are not much appreciated.

The eyes of an Arabian should be round and by no means show an angle shape. They should not be positioned too much sideways, rather clearly visible from the front as popped out from the head. Big and black eyes are the most wonderful ones, small and at the same time sideways placed eyes are not acceptable at all. To differentiate between these two extremes is easy, however, when it comes to the so-called medium-sized eye, arguments may start. Most of the eyes one sees today are of such medium size. To find an Arabian with really big dark eyes became seldom.

There is a strange, regrettable observation: While Arabians with such black, large, wonderful eyes are getting rare, the so-called “dished head” is in advance. It looks like an unfortunate correlation, which should be followed up with care. A big eye is a feature which could be improved by selection.



The wondergul black eyes, round and big, are the most attractive part of the head



A good neck is one of the most important preconditions for a horse easy to ride

Finally, when the head is thinly attached to the neck, an important precondition is given for a perfect combination. The finer and thinner is this attachment, the more elegance appears. Type and head are the utmost required Arabian characteristics and there should be no proper Arabian which is missing the one or the other. These two features are stamping the breed and they are and will remain for curious Arabian horse students, for enthusiasts or even fanatics the ideal. The difference between a male- and a female head should be remembered.

Each of the sexes should have its own typical expression. Again, the head of a stallion, more fierce looking, with somewhat stronger bone, and a possibly broader forehead, a female head is finer in structure, maybe a bit longer and comparatively smaller. In principle, the size of the head of each one sex should be seen in balance to the whole horse. A smaller head in relation to the body adds to more grace and especially in mares, such feature will increase their charm, as already mentioned battlefield of arguments when it comes to look for final answers.

From now on the subject of evaluation enters into the more professional horse breeding field and the term of functionality needs to be considered. The evaluation by professional and self-made Arabian horsemen should go into the same direction and have a clear orientation: also, an Arabian horse must remain a useful animal. Horses were not domesticated for their own sake. They had to fulfil a duty and should become a servant of men. The kind of formation of neck falls already under this category. Horses with ideal necks are easier to ride than those ones which are faulty.



It is not appreciated when head and neck are broadly connected. Such horses cannot easily be ridden

The first critical point in looking at the neck is the connection from head to neck. The Arabs gave this connecting point a special name “Mitbah”. There should be enough room between the two jaws indicating again a nice broad head and seen from the side view a fine connection, without the disturbing loose throat latch and by all means not a broad, thick upper end of neck. A nice small clear throat is the optimum. At the lower end of the neck, a proper laid-back shoulder should act as its base. Such a shoulder allows the horse to carry an upright neck. It prevents, in fact, a neck which starts too low nearly from the middle of the breast, and also the undesired under neck is not as frequent, when a laid-back shoulder is present. In other words, an under neck and a low starting neck is not welcome and indicates to pay attention to the shoulder position.



The light elegant neck of a young female

Good necks are not too difficult to breed; they are well settled in several Arabian horse families. However, even good necks can go out of proportions when Arabians are overfed. They get thick and round, since fat gets easily deposited under the skin around the neck. It became a habit to present Arabians well fed and in good condition during show time. When fat is deposited on the hips, loins and quarters it is found consequently and well in abundance on the neck. Sweating by the use of “neck sweats” are the answer; a procedure which is disliked by many people and since a certain time under a very controversial discussion. Like this, the neck is kept lean and the rest of the body shows well-conditioned, a good solution?

The optimal length of the neck is a question of balance. Very seldom are necks in Arabians are too long. There is little fear that this could happen. Mostly they are too short. A nice long neck should always be honoured, it adds to elegance and it increases tremendously the quality of the horse for riding purposes. It is flexible and allows the horse to carry his head in a very attractive collected position.

The upper side of the neck should connect at its lower end to a wither; a smooth line from the neck directly into the back is undesired. And finally, again the sex appeal: a stronger well-arched stallion-neck, proudly carried and maybe even broader and in contrast a leaner, finer and more straight neck of a female.



A typical young female with an attachment of her neck on the shoulder and at the “mitbah”

The famous artist Adam was, without doubt aware that a nice, long and finely attached head gives an Arabian the attractive elegance for which the breed is known



If one remembers a fine dry skin, a leaner and lighter Arabian with a neck, set well on the shoulder, long enough to show a nice curve, a fine attachment to the head and finally a head with a tendency to the smaller side, then additional conditioning may add not much and is not even needed for perfect horses.

When conditioning is building such muscles which are basically needed, this will help the horse and they will stay. When good feeding, however, ends in too much fat and needs correction it is a waste.

In considering all that was explained above, head and neck are doubtlessly physically connected, but concerning their desired qualities, they should be evaluated completely independent of each other, they are belonging to separate categories. The head is representing and exhibits the breed; it makes an Arabian to look as a special breed of its own. The neck, however, fulfils an important function; it is just the same one and without any difference in whatever kind of horse breed. □