

# THE ARABIAN *Foal Festival* —IT'S A HIT!

by MARY KIRKMAN

The idea was too simple, really. Last spring, as Santa Ynez horsemen were considering ways of drawing attention to their horses, Aljassimya Farm Manager Bart Van Buggenhout suggested a foal competition for amateurs only. It is not a new concept, he conceded, but the way they did it could be all their own. Others in the club agreed; in four months, they put together their horse show, and over the weekend of October 5-6, at the Santa Ynez Equestrian Center, they realized that they had tapped into something special. They had hoped for 50 horses from the local area, but welcomed 70 from as far away as Northern California, and they saw the rails lined with 150 to 200 spectators each day. On Sunday morning, the Arabian Foal Festival was front page news in the Santa Barbara News-Press, and that evening, when a lot of people loaded up their horses, they went home happy.



What did the Foal Festival, which was put on by the Santa Ynez Valley Arabian Horse Association, do that worked so well? The Show Committee (Buggenhout, Greg Gallún, Henry Metz, Doug Dahman and Kelly Elm) not only listened to what people said they wanted, but also read between the lines: the event needed to be inexpensive, convenient, fun, and most of all, fair.

“People said they wanted a show where everyone was equal,” Buggenhout says. “So that’s what we did.” The extremely accomplished individuals whose expertise, while amateur, is nearly at the professional level were not the target exhibitors. That was not about keeping people out, show organizers emphasized; it was about making others, such as those who had never shown before, feel more welcome.

“When you level the playing field, people find it fair,” Buggenhout says. “Then they can come out and do it themselves. It’s just going back to the old days, when owners were showing their lone horse—and even showing national champions.”

“Showing a horse is overwhelming to a lot of people who love and appreciate Arabians,” adds Greg Gallún. “We really want to reach out to people who are afraid or intimidated about going to Scottsdale or Las Vegas, or even a regional.” The unspoken implication was that if beginners at the Foal Festival enjoyed the experience, they might eventually move on to other levels of participation.

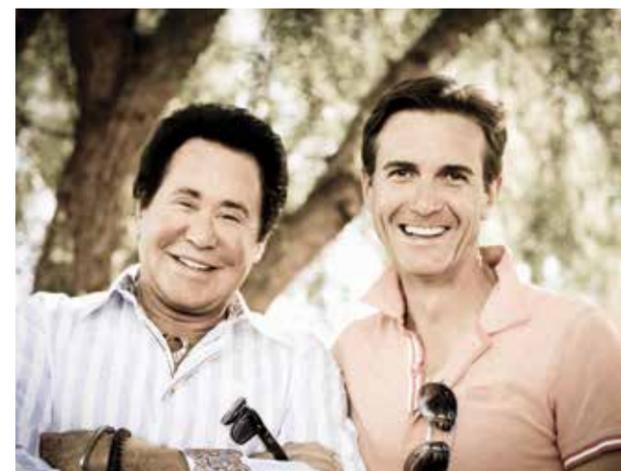
Organizers also paid attention to the conditions the weanlings and yearlings would face, knowing that many would be on their maiden voyage away from home (the show, publicity explained, was designed to be a “first time, low stress experience” for the youngsters). Weanlings were allowed to show at their dams’ side, and only leather chin straps, not chains, were allowed. The foals could be clipped with no more than a No. 10 blade, and whiskers, eyelashes and hair deep in the ear had to be left untouched. Stand-ups were casual (no hard poses), and the youngsters were required only to walk and trot. Whips were not permitted, but carrots, grass or grain could be employed to get a foal’s attention.

“The filly that won the weanling championship never really stood still, and it didn’t matter,” Gallún smiles. “Sometimes they don’t stand still perfectly. The thing that was neat about it is when the people knew that it didn’t really matter how perfectly your horse stood, it just changed the mentality.

Competition is great,” he notes. “I make my living at it. But we kind of took a step back from it in this show. Yeah, there’s first and second, and there’s gold, silver and bronze championships—it is a competition—but that wasn’t at the



Best Large Breeder, Aljassimya Farm.



Wayne Newton and Bart Van Buggenhout.



Audience members enjoying the relaxed atmosphere.

Left: Bart Van Buggenhout, Sheila Varian and Wayne Newton.

forefront. It was more just to enjoy some really beautiful horses in a beautiful area.”

The Foal Festival offered 10 classes, divided into sections, with only five entries in each section. Competition was divided into colts, fillies and geldings, in-hand and performance-oriented, with first and second place awarded in each section from Saturday’s qualifying rounds. One judge, selected in rotation from the pool of Bill Melendez, Cynthia Richardson, Becky Rogers and Mark Wharton, officiated in each section, and afterward explained to the audience the positive points of the horses chosen. On Sunday, championships for each class were held, using a point system so that spectators would understand the thought behind each ranking.

Also on Sunday was a Trail In-Hand class for yearlings, a new event scheduled to be introduced by AHA next year. “People loved that,” Gallún says. “When a horse finished a pattern, people were cheering like they would for a good park horse.”

The calendar was not nonstop competition, however; each day, performance demonstrations helped the public understand the disciplines that the performance-oriented in-hand youngsters would grow up to enter. And on Saturday night, a special award recognizing lifetime achievement was presented to Santa Ynez horseman Paul Hemming, who had owned 1965 U.S. National Champion Stallion Raffon. Then Crimson Farms hosted a barbeque that brought old-timers and newcomers together for an evening of fun and horse talk. There even was a touch of celebrity in the air with the presence of longtime breeder and owner Wayne Newton, who on Sunday afternoon told the crowd that he was inspired by the fun, low-key atmosphere of the show. He thanked the Association for taking the trouble to bring everyone together. A Best Handler award was also given, and Martin Valdez was the recipient of that honor.

The Foal Festival closed with a stallion parade that despite 90-degree temperatures kept the audience lining the rail. On hand were Ali Sharoukh, Aria Impresario, Dakar El

Photos by Emma Maxwell



Filly Foal/Weanling Performance Gold Champion **ZENYATTA JCA** (ZT Marwteyn x Jacline Jamal JCA), owned by Jade Creek Arabians.



Colt Foal/Weanling Performance Gold Champion **JAHBAHR ALJASSIMYA** (WH Justice x Ariadne), owned by AlJassimya Farm.



Filly Yearling Performance Gold Champion **EVG BRIANNA** (Stival x Bey Julie Anne), owned by Evergreen Arabians and Gallún Farms, Inc.



Gelding Yearling Performance Gold Champion **HS EXCUSE MY DUST** (ML Afire Dream x HS Bianca Rose), owned by High Star Farms, LLC.



Filly Foal/Weanling Show Gold Champion **AJ FARHA** (Ajman Moniscione x Felicia RLC), owned by Ajman Stud.



Colt Foal/Weanling Show Gold Champion **NWDARIUS** (Stival x NW Shantelle), owned by Michael & Ruth Doe and Gallún Farms, Inc.



Filly Yearling Show Gold Champion **HDC RIJIMA** (Eden C x Reyna JCA), owned by Haras de Cardenas.



Colt Yearling Show Gold Champion **SANTINO V** (Audacious PS x Satine LA), owned by Varian Arabians.



Trail In-Hand winner **LETISHA** (FA El Sharwan x BHF Shabs Lullaby), owned by Gallún Farms, Inc.

Jamaal, Ecaho, Emphasis DDA, Enzo, MPA Giovanni, Sygnifikaynce and Sidon SMF.

Looking at the roster of who showed at the Foal Festival, Bart Van Buggenhout was pleased. “We had several owners who were showing their own horses,” he reports. “And in general, what I heard in the grandstand was several people who were saying, ‘This is something I could do—I want to do this next year.’”

## PAUL AND CAROL HEMMING HONORED FOR THEIR HALF CENTURY OF COMMITMENT TO ARABIAN HORSES

by KELLY ELM



On Saturday evening at the Arabian Foal Festival, the Santa Ynez Valley Arabian Horse Association honored Paul and Carol Hemming of Hemming Ranch for their 50 years of breeding spectacular Arabian horses. The Hemmings' first horse was Raffon, purchased in 1961 as a weanling; they owned him for the remainder of his life, and Paul was on the lead when Raffon was named 1965 U.S. National Champion Stallion. In 1973, the stallion also won the U.S. National Championship in English Pleasure. He can be found today in the pedigrees of many leading sires, including Afire Bey V and Marwan Al Shaqab. The Hemmings also own the national champion sire, BA Bey Elation.

Paul, Carol and five of their six sons stood in the arena for the award presentation as Doug Dahmen recounted the touching story of this family and their best-known horse. After Raffon's win at the U.S. Nationals, the Hemmings were in the horse business. It was because of Raffon that they bought the farm in Santa Ynez where they raised their children. At the end of the story, they were surprised with special guests—U.S. and Canadian National Champion in Western Pleasure HR El Kareem and Greg Harris. A highly successful, 19-year-old son of BA Bey Elation, his show career spans 15 years of competition that includes two national reserve championships and four top tens in his list of top titles. For the crowd at the Foal Festival, he was a living demonstration of the Hemmings' ability as breeders, and he came complete with a garland of roses.

Santa Ynez Valley Arabian Horse Association President Katie Russell, Treasurer Kelly Elm and Show Committee Member Bart Van Buggenhout, presented the Hemming family with a beautiful bronze trophy. As they left the arena, the Hemmings were surrounded by what looked like paparazzi, and stood by the gate for nearly an hour, talking to people who wanted to know more about their horses and their remarkable achievements in the breed.

And the foals themselves? "There were two or three that I think could easily go on to Vegas," he says. "So, they came now to this show with a very good experience, a relaxed atmosphere, before they are thrown straight in front of the lions. This was good. That was part of the point, that this is a system that generates new people in the business and also new interest for further levels."

One key, some observers say, is that when exhibitors and foals are new to the show ring, few have high expectations. They don't know how their foals will show, and they have no idea who they'll be showing against, so the idea is more to have fun, see what happens, and learn about what they are doing. "This weekend was all about the amateurs," Buggenhout emphasizes. "And you should have seen these handlers—they were so proud. They grew in the show, you know, they got better, and that creates enthusiasm."

Another important aspect of the show, he says, is that it can so easily be replicated by other clubs. The laid back ambience means that a fancy arena is not necessary, which keeps the financial aspect in line. In Santa Ynez, they used the Equestrian Center's working cow arena (it had a strong fence, in case any of the foals got loose), and dressed it up with flowers. The club also created a win/win situation by making the show a fundraiser for the Santa Ynez Valley Therapeutic Riding Program, and the charity took care of selling refreshments.

Keeping costs low is important in attracting new exhibitors, he points out. Because the focus is local, they don't face daunting costs to attend, and since most prepare their horses at home, training costs can be minimal. In recognition of this constituency, Buggenhout adds that the show schedule must be accommodating. "It just needs to start at a decent time on a Saturday," he says, "and see that you're finished on a Sunday at a decent time in the afternoon, so we have time to go home, settle the horses back in the barn, go to bed, and next day go back to work."

"I really would be surprised if there's anybody who isn't saying that the Foal Festival was a really good event and breathes a little bit of new life in a different direction," says Gallún. "It wasn't perfect, but we weren't trying to change the world."

He observes that the goal of bringing new faces into the show ring also yielded a fresh realization of the love many owners have for their horses. One lady, in particular, caught his attention. She entered two



Foal Festival Judges: Becky Rogers, Mark Wharton, Cynthia Richardson and Bill Melendez.

horses, he recalls, but asked for only one stall. His wife Nancy, the show secretary, called her to confirm that there hadn't been a mistake. "The lady said, 'No, they're really good friends, so I'm going to have them stay together,'" Gallún recalls. He grins, recognizing that the woman felt the youngsters, away from home, would reassure each other in a strange environment. "That's perfect and smart."

For all its significance as a venue to attract new commitment to the breed, the Foal Festival also hit a personal note. Awarded Best Small Breeder at the show, Gallún, who is clearly at home in the highest level of Arabian competition today, cites a special reminder of the past. On Saturday, he glanced across the paddock and knew a thrill of déjà vue. There, like a replica of his sire, was a foal named Ibn Khemosabi. And Ruth Husband, Khemosabi's owner and owner of the colt, a frozen semen baby, was in the crowd. "I remembered, like it was yesterday, watching Tom Bason show Khemosabi when I was a little kid," Gallún says. "It was like going back in time—a lot of people had that same reaction. You could tell it was one of Khemo's kids."

Ruth Husband, whose health has limited her presence at horse shows in the past few years, laughs. "The colt was such a squirrel," she says. "He just thought he was having fun and he wouldn't be still." That didn't dim her enjoyment of the weekend. She loved seeing the horses and all the old friends who came by to say hello. "It was such a delightful, happy experience!"

That mix of old and new was invigorating, many say—a reminder of the great people and the fine horses that have characterized the industry. "All

these experienced breeders—Ruth, Sheila Varian, Paul Hemming, Wayne Newton—were there," Greg Gallún, says. "I remember going to dinner parties years ago, when people really enjoyed each other, talked and laughed, went over what they saw during the day. We've lost a lot of that, and this was kind of coming full circle. There was really a natural energy—everyone was just positive, and it was wonderful." ■

