



CRABBET ARABIANS

Desert Roots

Although the exact origin is unknown, somewhere between Northern Egypt and the Euphrates, where history began, dwelled an ancient breed of horse, known today as the Arabian. The Arabian is the only original "hot blood." There is no known link between the Arabian and any of the other branches of the prehistoric horse. He is unique unto himself, possessing qualities and characteristics unlike any other breed. His prepotence in passing on characteristics is unrivaled as he has remained virtually unchanged over thousands of years.

The Bedouin tribes of the desert were the first to recognize the extraordinary qualities of these horses. The harshness of the nomadic desert life required tremendous endurance and stamina from these horses, and only the strongest survived. As war raids were a regular part of Bedouin culture, the mare chosen to be ridden into battle had to be as swift as the wind, unflinchingly brave and blindly obedient. Stallions had to be extremely prepotent in passing on the most desired traits, for to keep a stallion that did not was a luxury the Bedouins could ill afford. Only the best sire-quality colts were kept. All others were killed at birth. As a matter of dire necessity, only the best mares were bred, and stallions kept. The ability to exist on the most meager of rations, the braveness of heart and the supreme devotion to a human master were characteristics that evolved gradually through superior individuals who were best able to accommodate themselves to the dreadful hardships of their lot. Ironically, a frugal land and its people, who had little to offer in the way of riches, became the source of a breed of horse that has become legendary for great beauty. Mohammed Ali the Great, ruler of Egypt during the early 1800s, was among the first of what would become a succession of very elite, discriminating breeders who became enthralled, even obsessed, with these fascinating desert beauties. Sending his agents out into the desert to acquire the most magnificent and precious of these treasures, Mohammed Ali eventually assembled one of the largest and finest collections of desert Arabians in the history of the breed.

After his death, Mohammed Ali was succeeded by his son Ibrahim and later by his nephew, Abbas Pasha. It was Abbas Pasha's absolute commitment to perpetuating these living masterpieces according to the breeding practices of the Bedouins that set the standard. Abbas Pasha, determined to acquire the very finest of the breed, sent his emissaries to comb the desert, enduring great hardships and danger, to seek out the most prized stallions and mares. Aware of the great importance the Bedouin bestowed upon the pedigree, Abbas Pasha paid huge sums of money to obtain those horses whose pedigrees were held in the highest esteem. He went to great lengths to ensure that these pedigrees were of first class quality and unquestionably reliable. The information acquired during this formidable quest was compiled into book form known as the Abbas Pasha Manuscripts.

After the death of Abbas Pasha, and the subsequent dispersal of his legendary stud, the torch was again picked up and carried forward. Ali Pasha Sherif, like Abbas Pasha, had an obsession for breeding magnificent desert Arabians. He acquired 40 of the original Abbas Pasha stock (which included the acquisitions of Mohammed Ali the Great), and continued to add to his herd, bringing in more desert bred stock. At its peak, the stud of Ali Pasha Sherif numbered more than 400!

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Early in the 19th century, transportation modes had improved, and the privileged wealthy class of Europe began to explore the Middle East. Lady Anne Blunt, a seasoned world traveler, made several daring trips into the desert along with her husband Wilfrid Blunt. They were in search of Bedouin stock of the highest quality with which to establish a breeding farm in England, Crabbet Park. Lady Anne became so enamored with the desert horses, that she eventually became a devout student of Bedouin breeding. She adopted the Bedouin fervor for perpetuating only those Arabians of the purest of pedigree. She became committed to the Bedouin's definition of "asil" (purity) type, believing that horses of such ancestry were marked by certain physical characteristics, which gave testimony to their purity, and left no question as to their authenticity.

Crabbet Park

The Blunts began breeding Arabians in 1878 and continued together until their agreed separation in 1906. With the importance of the horses in their lives, it is not surprising that they chose to partition the Crabbet Stud. Not all details of the division are precisely known, but Wilfred moved his section of the stud to Newbuildings, and Lady Anne remaining with her portion at Crabbet Park. The record shows that both Crabbet and Newbuildings bred individuals of the very highest distinction.

Lady Anne later chose to settle in Egypt at the garden of Sheykh Obeyd near Cairo. The Blunts had founded a stud at Sheykh Obeyd about 1890. It was reorganized in 1897 and provided a rallying point for the remnant of the famed breeding programs of Abbas Pasha and Ali Pasha Sherif. The original intent had been to exchange stock between the Crabbet and Sheykh Obeyd studs, but when the stallions Rataplan and Jeroboam died at sea on the way to Egypt the enthusiasm for two-way transfers was greatly reduced.

It is difficult to know where to begin and where to end when discussing the horses imported to Crabbet from the lands that gave this breed its birth. The discussion must begin with Mesaoud, a chestnut with four white stockings purchased from the famous stud of Ali Pasha Sherif in Egypt (see also Egyptian Arabians). Mesaoud was imported to England in 1891. He was to become one of the most influential Arabian stallions in the world and shows up today in literally thousands of pedigrees. His principal sons were Seyal, Daoud, Nejef, Astraled, Nadir and Lal-I-Abdar. Perhaps the most famous of the lot was Astraled, foaled in 1900. One of his sons was Gulastra, who went on to sire Rahas, the sire of Rabiya, who sired Abu Farwa, a horse that established his own line in the United States. However, another of Mesaoud's sons, Seyal, was the sire of Berk, a stallion that established a line of Arabians known for their brilliant action. Mesaoud seemed to epitomize everything the Blunts were looking for in an Arabian horse. He was good-boned, strong and of excellent conformation. In addition, he was an extremely handsome horse.

This period was one of great energy and expansion, and laid the foundation for all that was to follow at Crabbet Park.

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Upon the death of Lady Anne in 1917 a family feud between Wilfred and his daughter raged. The situation became quite intense with court action taken. Lady Wentworth emerged at helm of Crabbet Park, and went about producing her "super horses" called because of their increased size and included such animals as Oran and Grand Royal. She continued to narrow the scope of the pedigree base while embarking on sales of horses to several countries. Lady Wentworth's major stroke of ingeniousness was the purchase of Skowronek. Although she was noted for breeding the taller type of Arabian she also continued with the smaller Skowronek and later Dargee.

Upon the death of Lady Wentworth, the stud went to Cecil Covey, who was employed at the stud. He continued to breed the Crabbet Arabians until 1971 when a freeway was to cut through the property and the horses had to be sold.

Crabbet Influence

Nearly every modern breeding tradition has been enhanced by contributions from Crabbet and a robust Crabbet heritage maintains its own identity. When studying photos of the early Crabbet imports, one is not swept away by the intrinsic, classical beauty of these horses. Some appear rather plain and lacking in what today is considered appropriate Arabian type. What horsemen are impressed with, and this seems to be what impressed American breeders who imported them, is a sturdy and sound conformation that permitted them to be ridden or driven without undue worry about breakdowns. Those qualities endure today in many horses carrying Crabbet blood.

During the 93 years that the Stud operated, it produced many horses that were to go on and found other great studs. Some notable horses produced were Naseem, who was sold to the Russian Government with over 20 other Crabbet Arabians. Naseem was to stand at the Russian Tersk Stud for 17 years, where 19 of his daughters were incorporated into the stud. Naseem also produced the influential Russian sire Negatiw, the sire of *Naborr and Salon. The pure Crabbet mare Rissalma also had an enormous impact on the stud through her son Priboj.

At the Egyptian Agricultural Organization (E.A.O.) Stud there are sixteen mares and forty one stallions listed as root stock in their stud book. Of these, nearly half were bred at Sheykh Obeyd or at Crabbet Park. One such example was Kazmeen, who was sold to the Egyptian Agricultural Organization in 1920 along with several other Crabbet horses. In this stud Kazmeen sired Bint Samih who went on to produce the much celebrated Nazeer. If this was the only contribution Crabbet blood had in the E.A.O. it would have been outstanding, but the fact is that several of the Crabbet horses bred in the stud can still be found in modern Egyptian pedigrees.

Skowronek just might be the most important stallion in Crabbet history, although, ironically, he was not bred in the desert and was not involved in the earliest foundations of the Crabbet program. He was bred in Poland late in the first decade of the 1900's. His sire was Ibrahim, a stallion Count Joseph Potocki of Poland bought in Arabia. Skowronek's dam was Jaskolka, a mare that had been foaled in Poland. H.V.M. Clark showed him at a horse show attended by Lady Wentworth. One look and it was all over. Lady Wentworth had to have Skowronek. Not only was he the fulfillment of her dreams for owning an

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impeccable white horse-most of the Crabbet horses were chestnuts and bays-but he would also make an excellent outcross stallion for the Crabbet mares. She succeeded in procuring Skowronek and began breeding him to her mares, especially those of the Dajania and Rodania lines. Skowronek was the sire of *Raffles, imported to the United States by Roger Selby and *Raseyn, imported by W.K. Kellogg.

The United States of America were also keen buyers of Crabbet Arabians, with large numbers purchased by Spencer Borden, W.R. Brown, Homer Davenport, and W.K. Kellogg. But it is Bazy Tankersley who purchased the largest consignment of Crabbet Arabians, 32 horses in 1957. These horses are easily found in current U.S. pedigrees, and are the subject of CMK Group (Crabbet, Maynesborough and Kellogg).

The problem in trying to discuss in a brief treatise the influence of Crabbet lines is that they are so widespread, once launched from the prime source. As a small example, one of the sons of Crabbet-bred Oran was *Oran Van Crabbet, imported to the United States by R.H. Dow. He established his own mark in the show world and then sired sons and daughters who in turn are breeding that ability on. No discussion of Crabbet horses can be conducted without mentioning the role of Bazy Tankersley, today the major breeder of the bloodlines first established by the Blunts.

Mrs. Tankersley purchased 32 horses from Crabbet and Hanstead in the first contingent. Among them was the Rissalix son, Count Dorsaz, as well as three Rissalex daughters. Mrs. Tankersley built her breeding program around two prime sire lines, *Raffles and Rissalix, the now well known 'Double R Cross.' Her chief stallion on the *Raffles side was Indraff, a straight Crabbet horse. For many years, it would be fair to say, her foundation stock set the standard for producing champion Arabian horses and that legacy continues today.

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