

2016 U.S. NATIONALS HALTER DIVISION



by **Cindy Reich**

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The halter judges, from left to right: Koenraad Detaillieur, Belgium; Cory Soltau, California; George Zbyszewski, Florida; Cathy Murphy Economy, Michigan; and Dana Gardner, Virginia.

The first U.S. National Arabian halter class had rather humble beginnings when it was held outdoors in the Fannie Mae Arena at the Stanley Park Showgrounds in Estes Park, Colorado, in 1958. Many of the horses were shown by their owners, but there were a few trainers as well. There were only two halter classes — National Champion Stallion, won by Mujahid (Sureyn x *Silver Crystal), and National Champion Mare, won by Surita (Sureyn x Bonita).

Attire was simple, slacks or jeans, a snap button shirt and a hat. There was no fanfare, no bells and whistles, but a great desire to see who would be crowned the best in their class. Over the following decades, there have been many changes as the halter arena has evolved. From the addition of Half-Arabian and amateur classes, to years when the coliseum was standing room only for the halter, when entries in the halter classes looped several times around the arena. Green sawdust. Live music. Entertainment between classes.

Futurity halter classes. Yearling halter classes. Yet one thing never changed: the quiet, expectant hush in the arena when the National Champion is announced. However, fifty years on, it seems like the halter division is going through a midlife crisis. This was evident with the appearance of a petition (see Guest Editorial on page ??) asking for changes to be made in the halter division or face a potential boycott.

This approach “to make halter great again” was heavy on emphasizing the “entertainment” factor. As in destination location, more attention to luxury conditions, and making the classes more entertaining. Is it possible to reconcile an entertainment class with a class that is supposed to be evaluating breeding stock? Several years ago I chaired a committee of leading breeders, owners, and halter trainers and the conclusion after one year was the same. You can have a class that is a serious evaluation of breeding stock or you can have an entertainment class. But they don't work as the same class. The halter division in the U.S. is at a point where decisions need to be made as to which it's going to be.



Champion Junior Filly
***Mozn Al Bidayer** (S.M.A. Magic
One x Mattaharii), owned by
Albidayer Stud, Sharjah, UAE.

Entries in halter have been declining (non-amateur) while performance classes continue to grow. It will be interesting to see what happens a year from now. If the contingent that put forth the petition wants to carry out their demands, there may be an even smaller number of horses to report on. Lets hope that all parties — breeders, owners, trainers, AHA, and USEF can agree on a format that will invigorate the halter division once again.

That said, the quality of the halter horses was again quite high, especially in the yearling Breeder's Sweepstake classes. These classes are built on the promise of a particular cross, and winning these classes not only brings financial reward, but the satisfaction of bringing a dream to reality on four legs.

In the Yearling Colt Breeder's Sweepstakes class, the Champion was Na-Mous Al Shahania (FA El Shawan x Virtuosa MLR) owned by Al Shahania Stud. Na-Mous Al Shahania won his preliminary class with a score of 395 points gaining numerous 19.5s in



every category except feet and legs, where he gained several 17 scores, which makes him a total package colt in all respects. He was shown by Ted Carson for Al Shahania Stud.

The Baahir Al Marwan filly Pink Rose SRA, out of DM Valencea, owned by the Grossman family and shown by Alcides Rodrigues came from second place (391.5) in the preliminary class to best Beloveds Gracious Lady's (Bey Ambition x Shez Sass) score of 394 to carry out the roses in the Championship. Both fillies had an abundance of type and femininity and also carried strong scores in body, topline, and feet and legs.

Before the Breeders Sweepstakes yearling halter classes were added to the U.S. Nationals, the classes that were looked to with great anticipation were the Futurity Colt and Filly classes. These are still incredibly important classes, as they show what breeding crosses may stand the test of time over the years. Yearling classes are always large nowadays, and all yearlings look like small deer with their long, fragile legs and small, sculpted heads. But very few winning yearlings come back as two- or three-year-olds to do well in halter. Producing a foal that still is competitive at three years of age is much more difficult than producing a beautiful yearling. This year, the Futurity Colt Champion was Turismo RA (Trussardi x Marlene Dietrich) who followed in his sire's hoofprints, as Trussardi (Stival x Precious

(story continued on page ?)

Champion Senior Stallion **Marajj** (*Marwan Al Shaqab x RGA Kouress), owned by Albidayer Stud, Sharjah, UAE, and pictured with owner Sheikh Mohammed bin Saud Al Qasimi.

Age and Beauty Triumph for Albidayer

Albidayer Stud of Sharjah, UAE, had a very successful showing at this year's Nationals. Their two-year-old filly Mozn Albidayer (SMA Magic One x Mattaharii), was riding in on a very successful show career in the Middle East and Europe prior to arriving in the U.S. There was a big buzz about how exquisite this filly was, and she did not disappoint. Not only is she achingly beautiful and feminine, she is also built like a brick house with tremendous length and depth of hip and depth of heartgirth. The judges apparently agreed, as Mozn won her class and was National Champion Junior Filly. Farm manager Dawn Martin says, "She is what every breeder dreams to achieve. She has that unique combination of having a lot of substance without looking coarse or masculine. She is special because she has such incredible size for her age, but still retains her femininity. In addition to her incredible beauty, she has a strong and determined character. She is a diva! It's her way, or no way!"

When asked what the future plans are for Mozn, Dawn replied, "Following U.S. Nationals she flew to Paris, where she was Silver World Champion. We believe she is capable of going all the way, so our intention is to show her only in one or two very select shows and then probably on to Paris again. Perhaps we will try an embryo with her, but we are not big believers of taking lots of embryos from any mares, especially young ones. So we will give it a try but if we don't get



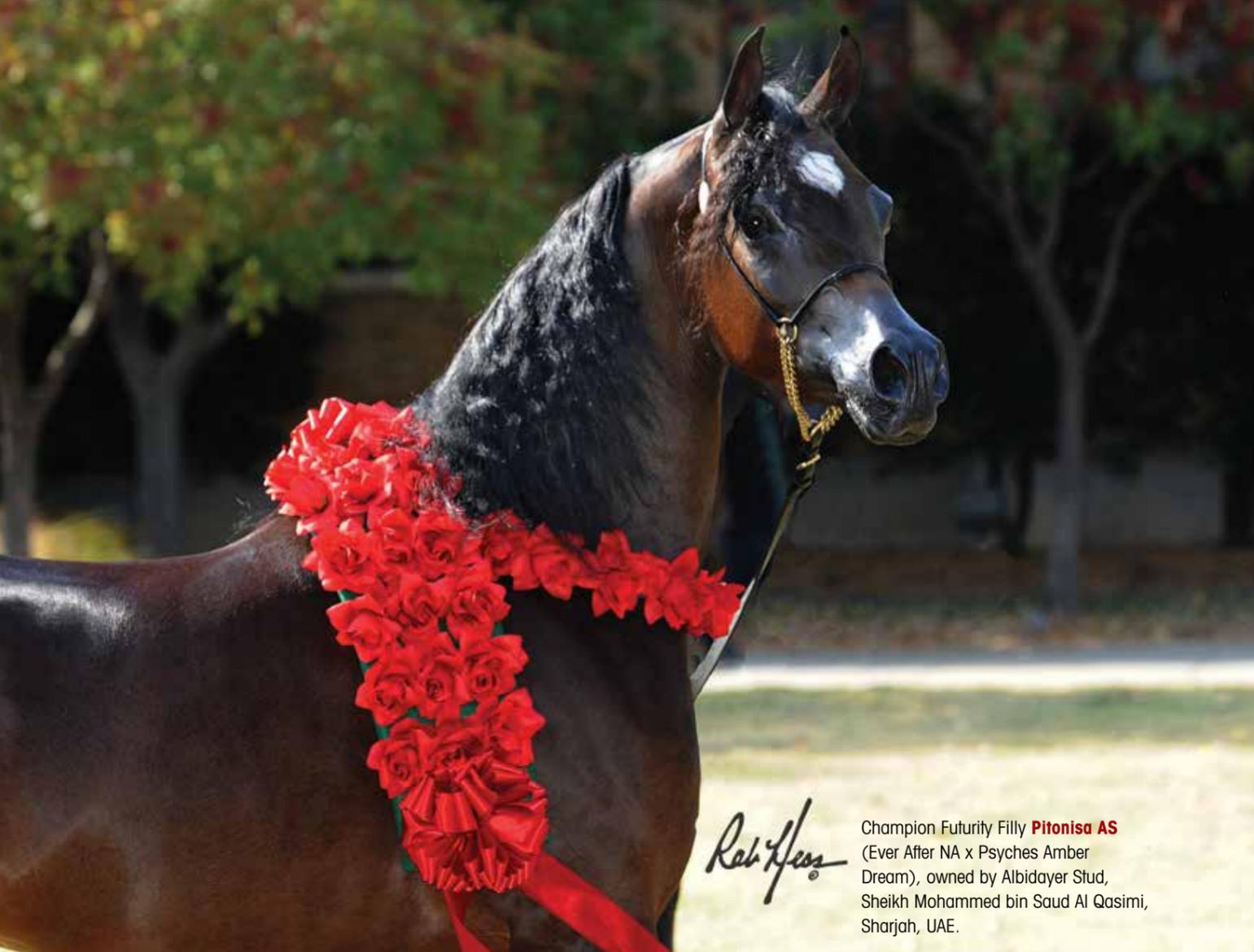
Champion Junior Filly ***Mozn Al Bidayer** (S.M.A.Magic One x Mattaharii), pictured with, from left to right: Albidayer trainer Barry Shepherd, owner Sheikh Mohammed bin Saud Al Qasimi, handler Michael Byatt, and Albidayer Stud manager Dawn Martin.

something right away we won't push it. She has such a huge fan club and has created a lot of word-of-mouth for us! We hope she will add some of the best and most exotic things she has to offer to our program."

Mozn's sire *SMA Magic One (Psytadel x Majidah Bint Pacha), is gaining a lot of attention with his foals that have started to hit the showing. "SMA Magic One already had offspring showing for his owner, Sheikh Abdullah Althani of Alzobair Stud, but she was from his first foal crop," says Dawn. "We had six foals, four of which were champions as yearlings and they continued to win as two-year-olds. Mozn and Raoud Albidayer (x DL Marielle, the full sister to Marajj) started their careers winning Gold Champion Yearling Filly and Colt in Ajman, then went on to be Gold Yearling Filly in Dubai and Chantilly AHO Breeders Cup and Silver Champion Colt in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Chantilly AHO Breeders Cup. It was the success of these foals that helped Magic One get noticed internationally."

Pitonisa AS has been a familiar sight in the winners circle since she was a yearling. The regal daughter of Ever After NA was purchased by Albidayer shortly before the Nationals, and went on to be crowned U.S. National Champion Futurity Filly.

"I have always loved her," Dawn said, "and when the opportunity arose, things fell into place quickly and the deal was finished while we were on the flight coming to Tulsa! This filly has such charisma and style. She has size and elegance with a wonderful hook to her neck, an amazing throat, eyes, and ears." When asked about the future plans for her, Dawn said, "After we purchased her, we entered her in Paris, but she did not handle the flight as



Champion Futurity Filly **Pitonisa AS**
(Ever After NA x Psyches Amber Dream), owned by Albidayer Stud, Sheikh Mohammed bin Saud Al Qasimi, Sharjah, UAE.

well as we hoped, so we are just working on getting her in shape for the possibility of some international shows. We plan to breed her as well, and I would like her to carry a foal as she had previously been flushed for some embryos.”

The crowning glory of the show had to be when *Marajj was draped with the roses as U.S. National Champion Senior Stallion. Shown to the win by Michael Byatt, we asked Michael what his game plan was going into the Championship? “My game plan for the Championship was to let it flow and be courageous. In his class I was overly concerned about his rearing, which he has been known to do, and I was mindful about the fact that each time I had previously shown him, he reared in the ring. I did not want him to get penalty points! *Marajj has had a long-term habit of rearing, which is never done in a mean way, however, it’s just not the thing to do in my world. In the Championship he felt very settled and ready to be called upon. He responded perfectly, with enthusiasm and confidence.”

Dawn Martin also weighed in on *Marajj’s victory, “Going into the Championship we knew it would be a tough fight. After all, he is a 12-year-old stallion who has not shown in years (except for the last minute decision to show in Vegas when he was not yet in condition), and would be competing against much younger stallions. *Marajj won his class

but was second as far as the points for all the stallion divisions. *Equator PASB had very high points in his class and certainly is a charismatic stallion and has been highly decorated. But on many occasions in Europe and the Middle East we have seen a horse with a lot of charisma tend to receive high points across the board in their class, rather than just on the movement. In a comparison system, those horses don’t always turn out to be the winner when the judges can compare the parts of one to another. *Marajj was the first to come trotting through the gate ... head up, tail up, elegant as

always, and as he got in front of the judges he gave a little rear from enthusiasm and joy. We went to stand by him on the rail during the individual judging. He is such a complete, solid and correct stallion that there is not a lot he needs to do in a stand-up to show this off. But he’s always more relaxed with the other horses around so tends to show even better. When they retired the horses to the end of the arena, we were so nervous. But when they called Equator as Reserve Champion, we knew he had it.” As Michael said to *Marajj at that moment, “the old men did it!”

We asked both Dawn and Michael what *Marajj’s strengths were as a show horse and as a sire. Dawn replied, “Actually, I think his strengths as a show horse and as a sire are the same: consistency. He is what he is. His stand-up pose enhances and shows off his strongest points, but he does not need a hard stand up in order to transform himself into something he is not. He sires what he is. Some horses are one thing and sire something entirely different. He sires smooth, correct, athletic, and smart horses. His foals compete in halter, western pleasure, hunter pleasure, country pleasure, and endurance.” Michael added, “He is very well made and extremely beautiful. With those things on his side, he really only has to show up and not distract with his little habit of rearing. As a breeding horse he is very prepotent. Like him and you will like his progeny!”

*Marajj has quite a character as well, and Dawn gave us this insight: “People see him in the ring and think he is this big powerful (and sometimes crazy) stallion, but he’s actually so gentle and extremely smart. He likes cats and had one in Sharjah that would spend a lot of time in his stall, sleeping in the shavings or on the windowsill,

or sitting on the feeder while he was having his afternoon grooming session. She would rub herself on his front legs and he would nuzzle her. He knows when it’s time to show off and when it’s time to relax. He walked calmly out of the arena at Nationals and Michael was met by a little girl who wanted to pet him. Michael immediately put the girl on *Marajj’s back so she could have a photo taken.”

Michael also mentioned *Marajj’s love affair with cats ... and his love of food! “He loves his food very much. He is so funny about feeding time. He squeals with happiness! And he loves cats. He loves to have a cat to snuggle with.”

Perhaps *Marajj is channeling the ghost of the Godolphin Arabian, who, it was said, always had a cat as a companion! In any case, age, as well as beauty, won out in the Senior Stallion Championship!