



SPANISH ARABIANS

Origins:

Nearly six thousand years ago, the warriors of the Iberian Peninsula were established as superior horsemen. In historic times it is well documented that the Iberian cavalry had achieved fame as an effective and fearless foe, much of their success being due to their fine mounts. This type of warfare consisted of individual horse charges with fast starts, stops and pirouettes followed by retreats and renewed attacks. A form of riding that was made possible by the use of very agile horses, curb bits and pointed stirrups.

In 711 AD, the Muslims invaded the Iberian Peninsula, at the time being ruled by the Visigoths, and occupied it until the end of the 15th century. Much has been written about the influence of the Barb and Arabian horses on the Iberian stock during occupation. Because of their own beliefs in the quality of their war mares, it is possible that from this period the status of the mare became well established. The mares hold a great deal of respect within the Arabian breeding programs in Spain and in general throughout Europe. More emphasis is placed on them and their Tail Females (root mare on the bottom line of the pedigree) as compared to the emphasis placed on stallions and the sire line in the USA.

Originally all breeding in Spain was in the hands of Royal families and Nobles. As the various kingdoms were united by means of both wars and marriages eventually creating a central government, the "State" took over the selection and improvement of equine breeding. Obligatory military service started in the 1700's with a minimum of 8 years. This often led to a lifetime career with further promotions into the Ministry. Officers not only were attached to their mounts; their lives depended upon them. All horses were considered tools of War and the breeding of them came under the Department of Defense. The Iberian War Horse and its crosses were famous throughout Europe during the Middle Ages. It was big, impressive and agile. As more and more of the heavier draft type bloodlines were added, it became a far too cumbersome a horse for any length of travel or speed. Massive roman heads developed, heavy thick necks and broad powerful hindquarters. They were a fearsome spectacle that terrified the villagers in small European hamlets. However as firearms were developed and armour gave way to lighter protection, these horses were far too heavy and slow to put up any resistance against any warrior mounted upon their smaller lighter and far quicker desert bred horses from the Orient..

By 1847, the young 16 year old Queen Isabel II preferred a more agile better tempered mount. She concentrated on breeding purebred arabiens, keeping records of her private stock. She sent a buying commission to the desert to search for the best bloodstock in order to revive and to improve the declining horse population. Thus in 1847 the First Spanish Registry and Stud-Book was started and remains the oldest established register of Arabians today. Her son, King Alfonso XII, continued this trend and imported fine blooded Arabians from France in 1884-1885. By 1893 a Royal Order laid the foundation for the breeding of Arab horses by the State and established the Yeguada Militar in Cordoba at Moratalla. Few purebreds were produced from these earlier imports as the intention was to improve the cross-blooded Iberian Warhorse and upgrade all equine stock in Spain.

The Basis of Modern Day Breeding:



By 1904, serious breeding of the purebred Arabian began on behalf of the Yeguada Militar with various buying excursions (1905-1908) into Mesopotamia, Syria, and the Arabian Desert to purchase the finest breeding stock available. According to the 1905 diary kept by Captain Luis Azpeitia de Moro, 'En Busca del Caballo Arabe', they were looking for refinement, good riding mounts, height (15 hh minimum) and had age limits with a preference of 8-10 years. Boat travel was long and stressful so the horses purchased had to have known stamina. Hundreds of horses were looked at and only 23 head purchased. The 1906 buying commission sent to Poland also brought back a similar number.

However it was the imports of 1908 and 1912 again from the desert and Poland that were the most significant on today's lines. The types chosen were predominantly Hamdani Simri noted for its excellence as a riding horse and its placable temperament and the Saklawi type noted for its refinement, beauty, and speed. There were also several Managhi Sbeyli, Koheilan Ad'jouz, Koheilan Rodan and some get of a Dahman stallion, notably the stallion Ursus from Poland and his paternal sister, Damietta.

A Closed Gene Pool:

For almost 100 years since then, there have been little outside bloodlines added to the gene pool. As a private breeder, the imports made by Cristobal Colon de Aguilera, XV Duque de Veragua, from England between 1926 and 1930 had great impact. In 1935 and early 1936 he also bought all the female stock from the heirs of the Marques de Domecq stud. He was killed during the Spanish Civil War in November of 1936, leaving no direct heirs. His bloodstock, mostly from the Crabbet Stud included five daughters of Skowronek and was of such renown that it was collected by the Military in order to preserve it. The stallion Razada was among the horses unfortunately killed but all those remaining were sent to their broodmare farm, Moratalla, in Cordoba. Most mares were branded and thus identified. Some with the older fillies were identified as Veragua's purebred arabs but the loss of all papers required that they be renamed with the prefix 'Vera'. These were kept by the military. The younger fillies were sold, mainly to the Duque's niece the Marquesa de Avella whose breeding program still thrives.

Then and still now, the Yeguada Militar keeps a broodmare band of 20-30 head and sells off the surplus to private breeders. They keep some 100 stallions which annually are placed in various Remount Stallion Deposits throughout the country for use of breeders and to improve the local stock for a very nominal fee. Purebred get are duly measured, identified, registered, and qualified by a military commission or agent to be included in the foal registry. At the age of four years these foals are included in the main Stud-Book. Grade mares or half Arabian mares will get half papers for their foals which are not included in the Spanish Stud-Book. All stallions of breeding age must be certified by the Military Commission's Cria Caballar in order to be used at stud and are designated either for private or public use..

Although the numbers have increased from 328 in the early 1960's to nearly 13,000 registered Arabians in Spain today (2006), in the USA Spanish Arabians and Spanish Related Arabians represent far less than .1% of the total Arabian population. Because of their rarity and minimal numbers this bloodline is used mainly as breeding stock. Few of these horses have actually been shown publicly yet when ever presented, Spanish Arabians and their related crosses take an extremely high percentage of wins in shows and events.

Introduced to the USA by James and Edna Draper in 1934 with 5 imports including the foundation mares, *Meca and *Menfis, no further major additions were made until the Charles Steen imports of



1965. These brought 25 more Spanish to the US, some en utero like *Barich de Washoe, leading sire of 104 pure Spanish foals and sire of 446 get with no less than 27 National Wins. By 1975 importations from Spain were made more feasible by the recognition of the Veragua horses in their studbook. The late 70's and 1980's saw a wave of importations from Spain, many of which were used predominately for outcross breeding.

Worldwide Influence:

Well known names such as leading sires *AN Malik and *Barich de Washoe, the triple National Champion mare Abha Hamir, the 3/4 Spanish stallion triple National Western Pleasure Champion CA Hermoso, and the half Spanish stallions *El Shaklan and Magnum Psyche are familiar to breeders the world over. As the older imported horses have passed on, newer blood is being sought after and importations have started up again in the new Millennium. Because of their previously closed gene pool and the heavy line breeding up until 1970, the Spanish Arabian has remained quite distinctive in type. In breeder's terms, they tend to breed true. Due to importations to Spain of external bloodlines from 1970 onwards, the term Classical Spanish is used to designate those Spanish Arabians who trace their lineage to horses which were in the Spanish Stud-Book prior to 1970, thus having all four grandparents trace in all lines to the Spanish Foundation Stock, whose original Arabic pedigrees are kept in the 'Golden Books.' in Madrid, Spain. As of 2007, AECCA (Asociacion Espanola de Criadores de Caballos Arabes), the National Breeders Association is the sole registering authority for arabians in Spain. Both AECCA and its affiliate member, Spanish Arabian Horse Society now merged with SAHBI (Spanish Arabian Horse Breeders International) endeavor to promote the Classical Spanish Arabian bloodlines and their related crosses. This effort and the selective breeding by Spain's Yeguada Militar and their private breeders, have made the Spanish Arabian an extremely versatile athletic horse with a willing and gentle temperament. Smooth of line, well angled with a supple neck, it is noted for its large beautiful dark eyes, dense bone, short and strong coupling, high tail carriage and its trainability. The genetic impact of this tight gene pool has excelled as an outcross. Spanish and Spanish-Related Arabians have won innumerable championships throughout both North and South America, Europe and the Middle East. This bloodline has many dedicated owners and admirers worldwide.

Join them and experience the Spanish Arabian for its unique temperament, elegance and quality performance.

Contributed by Elizabeth G. Campiglio, SZED Spanish Arabians, Mallorca, Spain

- [Spanish Arabian Horse Society](#)