



RUSSIAN ARABIANS

Bred by Nobility

East Europeans became aware of the fiery, speedy Arabian breed during invasions of nomad tribesmen who spread north and west in their quest to spread the word of Mohammed. One of the long-term effects was the infusion of Arabian blood into the native horse population. As the "improvement" of succeeding generations became evident, the desire to obtain animals of desert origin grew. The wealthy nobles of Russia were no different than those of other countries and coveted purebred Arabians. What could not be obtained through war was pursued by other methods by those with the financial and political influence to journey to the homeland of these magnificent animals.

Arabians were known to have been in Russia during the 17th century, bred by Tsars and noblemen. However, organized breeding was not really established until the late 1800's. One of the first to pursue purebred breeding was Count Orlov, for whom the Orlov Trotter was named. Two others who established early private farms were Count Stroganov and Prince Sherbatov. In 1889 they traveled to Middle Eastern countries and eventually secured nearly 30 animals for breeding programs.

A few years later Count Stroganov visited the Crabbet Park Stud in England and obtained several animals, including the eminently influential stallion Mesaoud. Unfortunately, political upheaval was brewing and during the devastation created by the Russian Revolution most of the purebred Arabians were killed, the studs destroyed and the records lost.

Tersk Stud Founded

As the new government gained control and established order, attention was eventually turned once again to the breeding of quality horses. In early 1921 a state-controlled breeding farm was begun at the former estate of Count Stroganov. Known as "Tersk" the farm began with native breeds but later concentrated on the breeding of Arabians when, beginning in 1930, new stock was introduced from various sources. With the purchase of six mares and one stallion from France, the Russian program re-established itself.

The Russians had a preference for racing types of horses, and the Arabians they purchased followed that pattern. Kann would become one of the leading sources of athletic ability in the Russian Arabians, and his progeny would dominate racing. His line is most prevalent through his son Korej, a sire of more than 200 foals during his 13-year tenure at Tersk.

The next substantial purchase by the Russian government was a group of 25 horses from Crabbet Park in 1936. Unlike the French horses that were strong on athleticism but lacking in type, the Crabbet contingent contributed an ingredient of beauty and elegance. The star of the importation was Skowronek's son Naseem (out of Nasra, a granddaughter of Mesaoud). Naseem would serve as an important sire in Russia for 17 years and gained worldwide influence, especially through Negativ and

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Negativ's sons Nabor and Salon. On the female side, the Crabbet-bred mares proved to be great crosses with the French lines and they (and their daughters) have produced numerous outstanding sons.

The outbreak of WW II once again threw a dark cloud over livestock breeding, yet Tersk would suffer much less than many others. In fact the "silver lining" for Tersk proved to be the evacuation of the best of the Polish Arabians in 1939. Depending on the source, these horses were either "taken" or "rescued". Regardless, while Tersk benefited, it was a staggering blow to the Poles. Included in the group were Ofir whose sons Wielki Szlem and Witraz would become foundation sire lines for Poland's post-war program while his son *Witez II would spread his name and influence into the burgeoning Arabian population of the United States.

Between the cessation of conflict and having a larger number of animals to work with (some 100 were brought to Tersk between 1930 and 1947) the managers of Tersk were once again able to turn their attention to the art of breeding. The testing ground was most frequently the racetrack, and those who failed to measure up in either conformation or ability were ruthlessly culled.

Infusion of Outside Blood

In the beginning the formula that seemed to most often succeed was a nearly equal combination of French, Crabbet and Polish lines. The dominant sires were Kann (the athletic powerhouse who contributed size and speed), Naseem (who consistently added his beautiful head and neck) and Ofir (who added structure). As time passed, the lines became more heavily based on the Polish horses (due in part to their larger numbers) but the intermingling of the original sources remained with only an infrequent infusion of new blood.

The Russian program progressed along these lines in pretty much a closed unit until the late 1950's when more Polish blood was added through the stallions Arax and Semen. The final component was introduced in 1963 when the Egyptian government presented a Nazeer son to the Russians in appreciation for their help in building the Aswan Dam. The stallion, originally named Raafat, was rechristened "Aswan" and immediately incorporated into the breeding program with phenomenal results, consistently bequeathing the exotic type for which the Egyptian lines are so well known.

Aswan blood has become truly an international phenomenon everywhere except for his home country where other Nazeer sons have most ably made up for his exportation. He has had great success through both his sons and his daughters. Their exceptional type, grafted onto the strong foundation of the earlier Russian horses, has been one of the most important factors in having found such approval with breeders throughout the world. A great many of those eventually imported to the U.S. or Canada had first been sold to other countries and left a legacy of offspring behind. National winners and leading breeding animals in North America, South America and throughout Europe trace to him through his son Patron, and in Germany his son Kilimanjaro has been a leading sire. It may be considered that his son Palas, used extensively in Poland and responsible for numerous Polish and European National Champions, has done much to repay the loss

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American Importations

Ed Tweed was actually the first of modern times to import Russian Arabians when he brought in, via England, several Russian horses along with a group he had purchased in Poland.

Long before the later Russian horses were accepted, American breeders were using Russian lines - although they'd been imported from and were considered "Polish". One of the first and most influential of these Russian transplants was *Naborr. Bred in Russia, he was sold to Poland where he became a premier sire of broodmares. Many of them have been imported to the U.S. and gained National awards. The triple Reserve National Champion Stallion *Gwalior and double National Champion Stallion *Aramus come quickly to mind.

Ed Tweed's Top Ten Stallion and National Champion Racehorse *Orzel was a son of Pietuszok, another Russian stallion who first gained acceptance as a noted sire in Poland.

Padrons Psyche was the sire or paternal grandsire of multiple national champions. His grand-get represent the 4th generation to attain such honors as he a son of *Padron who took the U. S. National Champion Stallion title in 1982. This is the sire line of Aswan through Patron, who was himself a National Champion in Holland. *Padron has sired more than 60 National winners worldwide but Padrons Psyche is coming on strong and likely to surpass his sire in total numbers.

The first National winner of Russian breeding was *Pristan (Aswan x Palmira). Out of 43 entries she emerged from the 1979 mare championship class with a Top Ten. The following February *Muscat made his debut at Scottsdale. Marked with a blaze carrying the distinctive crescent cutout and 4 white feet which only accentuated his spectacular movement (a trait the Russians are known for having on a consistent basis) *Muscat captivated the crowd and impressed the judges. His Stallion Championship was only the first step on a history making journey that would culminate in his the 1980 "Triple Crown" by also winning the Canadian and U.S. National Championship titles. Having such a stunning standard bearer, the Russian lines had no trouble gaining prestige and recognition.

Proving that *Muscat, while exceptional, was not the only quality animal Tersk could lay claim to, Canadian judges awarded *Nariadnaia and *Pristan Top Tens. In the U.S. the Salon daughter *Pesenka walked out with the Reserve National Champion Mare and both *Pristan and *Nariadnaia (by Aswan) added another Top Ten to their records.

Russian stallions were in the forefront of the 1981 Nationals when *Padron, technically half-Russian, charged to the Championship in Canada (and would take the U.S. title the following year) and *Marsianin took top honors in the U.S. Keeping up the distaff side, *Pristan took Top Ten number three. The performance divisions were likewise beginning to see the influx of newcomers and *Napitok began a long career of championships with a Park National Championship in Canada and a Top Ten in the U.S. Since that time evidence of the Russian program has continued to grow and spread throughout the performance scene. Such talent is not at all surprising since the goals of producing an animal that is not only pleasing to look at but extremely athletic has been the prime objective of the Russian breeding

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program. Their dedication to this ideal will most certainly continue to keep Russian bloodlines in high demand from breeders around the world.

by Cheryl Himes

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