



POLISH ARABIANS

The history and development of the Polish Arabian is inextricably involved with war. Without natural boundaries, Poland has for centuries been the prey of stronger, more aggressive nations. First the Mongols, then the Tatars and finally in the seventeenth century, the Turks, attempted to conquer Poland.

Through the years, Polish horsemen came to appreciate the sound, tough war mounts of their Middle Eastern and Asian adversaries, and the horses-Arabians-became the most desirable prizes of war. The captured horses were retained and stud farms were set up. As early as the sixteenth century, writings mention the breeding of purebred Arabians in Poland. In 1699 a truce with Turkey severed the Polish horsemen's most convenient means of acquiring Arabian horses. To compensate, they began organizing expeditions to the desert to obtain bloodstock, and during the eighteenth century, the breeding of Arabians grew.

World War I nearly destroyed Arabian breeding in Poland. Since the cavalry was then a viable military weapon, the horses were even more vulnerable; by the close of the war, only 25 mares and seven fillies were left. The Poles built back, and the Arabian Horse Breeding Society was formed in 1926, introducing racing as a means of physical testing in 1927. The Society also published the first studbook in 1932.

World War II rolled over Poland with a devastation that eclipsed its predecessor. Russia removed most of the finest horses, and Polish horsemen evacuated and protected as many of the horses as they could. Others were simply lost. Witez II and Bask's grand-dam *Iwonka III were forwarded to the U.S. and sold at auction. Following the close of World War II, Poland fell under the influence of the Soviet Union and the studs came under the jurisdiction of the state.

The Polish breeding program today is, as it always has been, based on its broodmares. There are many dam-lines in use, all dating back 100 to 150 years or more-some from the turn of the nineteenth century. Sire lines have been somewhat more diverse. In the early twentieth century, there were approximately 30 sire lines in use.

Two of the four 1931 imports left particularly significant lines in Poland. Kuhailan Haifi, known for his athletic prowess, sired Ofir, who produced the triumvirate of Witraz, Wielki Szlem and *Witez II. Witraz, who was more beautiful than Wielki Szlem and possessed a fiery temperament, was the sire of *Bask++.

In a monumental case of oversimplification which is nevertheless somewhat helpful in keeping traits straight when starting out, Americans tend to refer to Polish horses of intense refinement and beauty as "Seglawi" in type, while the more athletic ones are generally "Kuhailan." This is, as mentioned, an oversimplification, as both terms refer to strains and there were many more strains than just those two. However, the program has always reflected the judicious mixture by breeders of tough, athletic characteristics with ethereal beauty and remembering the two types can help one keep track of the teams. Seglawi horses often come in grey, while Kuhailans are frequently bay.

Most Polish horses go to the track in Warsaw in their three-year-old year to pursue a career on the turf. The object is not necessarily to win races, the breeders are examining a horse's ability to carry weight



over distance with speed, and his or her soundness and capacity for quick recovery. Those that pass the tests are retained for breeding on the stud farms; others are sold. Other than the importations by General Dickinson and Mr. Babson in the thirties, Americans by and large did not acquire Arabians from Poland until the late fifties and early sixties. It was then that British breeder Patricia Lindsay, intrigued by the history and quality of the Polish breeding program, learned the Polish language and traveled to Poland to investigate for herself. She purchased and leased horses for her program and eventually bought for interested Americans. American breeders began visiting Poland in search of bloodstock, and the relationship has been growing ever since.

The Poles host an annual auction, the only time during the year that horses are sold for export. Held in late summer, the sale is publicized worldwide and conducted the day after the Polish National Horse Show. Predominantly the horses for sale are broodmares with one or two stallions offered. Some young stallions just off the track are or fresh from a season or two at stud are available for purchase in a silent auction.

By Mark Kirkman, reprinted with permission of National Show Horse magazine