Together, We Are WAHO

The Kingdom of Bahrain, an archipelago of 33 islands, is located in the Persian Gulf just off the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia. Arabian horse aficionados from around the world gathered at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in the capital, Manama, to attend the World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO) Conference held under the patronage of HM King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa during February 6-15, 2017.

The Conference was formally opened on February 9 by HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince. The ceremony started with a fascinating film highlighting the history of Bahrain’s Arabian horses. Mrs. Jenny Lees gave an excellent talk about the Royal Studs’ unique group of horses. I think we all agreed with her when she said, “Throughout the centuries the Arabian has been a formidable warhorse. From the number of countries represented in this room today, it seems the Arabian horse is now a creator of lasting friendships and a universal peacemaker.”

WAHO’s President, Peter Pond, on behalf of all WAHO members, then formally thanked HM King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, Patron of the Conference, and HH Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, Host of the Conference, for so generously hosting WAHO’s 22nd General Assembly. He also thanked HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa for attending the opening ceremony, as well as HH Sheikh Faisal bin Rashid Al Khalifa and the High Committee members at the Royal and Crown Prince Courts for their warm welcome.

He emphasised one of the main reasons we all love attending these unique events – to enjoy not only the Conference days with the many excellent guest speakers and diverse social events, but also to have the chance to see and learn more about the horses and culture of the host country. The main WAHO General Assembly business started with Peter Pond’s opening address, in which he spoke on several important subjects but I thought the following held great merit and is definitely food for thought for anyone involved with the breed.

“We live in a very fast-moving Internet age of social media, instant communication and sometimes unrealistic expectations of instant answers and instant results. Most of us cannot imagine modern life without these useful tools.

“In some ways it is perhaps an anachronism for us all to fly half way round the world just to get together for a few days, but I hope by socialising together, meeting new people from every corner of the globe who all share one common passion – the Arabian horse – you will leave here feeling enriched and invigorated by new friendships and with a greater understanding of what WAHO is all about.”

At every WAHO Conference, those members who have passed away since the last meeting are remembered with a minute’s silence. This year the memorial section included an emotional tribute and special film in honour of WAHO’s distinguished Executive Committee Member for over 30 years, Mrs. Izabella Pawelek-Zawadzka from Poland, who sadly passed away in 2015. She is clearly greatly missed.

Other agenda items included the acceptance of China, to warm applause, as an Applying Registering Authority Member of WAHO. There are currently around 200 Arabian horses in China, many of them imported from Australia and USA. Their stated aim is to work closely with WAHO to have the first Chinese Arabian Studbook ready for acceptance at the 2019 WAHO Conference in Australia. This was followed by the unanimous re-election of the WAHO Executive Committee, whose detailed resumes can be read on the WAHO website. Further to the commitment made at the 2014 WAHO Conference to take a fresh look at how Consultants to the Executive Committee are elected, the WAHO Constitution had been amended and updated, requiring a formal vote to confirm its acceptance, which was unanimously
passed. Peter Pond later stated, “We can now move forward with a stronger and better Constitution and also with what we hope will be seen as a more democratic way of finding new people to serve on the Executive Committee in the future. We look forward to the WAHO Conference in Australia in 2019, which will be the first time to enact the protocol for the nomination and election of new Consultants.”

Executive Committee Member Mr. Xavier Guibert reported on the proceedings of the WAHO World Registrars’ Meeting of which he is Chairman. Several issues of importance to the smooth running of the world’s Arabian studbooks had been discussed, and recommendations for updating some registration rules were made, to be brought forward to the next Conference in Australia.

At every WAHO Conference, the delegates in turn presented their detailed annual reports with information about the Arabian horse affairs in their country. Some reported a marked increase in foal registrations, while others reported a drop in numbers. It was good to note newer Arabian horse events. Some of the more important points. Of particular note, he mentioned that the issue of equine welfare has become increasingly important to WAHO. Referring to the recent deaths of several horses competing in endurance endurance, he said, “It is increasingly clear that our Arabian horses are suffering and indeed dying in the name of sport... It is deeply shocking to see how many of these horses, who have no voice of their own and no choice but to go at the speeds dictated by their riders. Arabic horses have tremendous heart, tremendous courage, and tremendous bravery which is why they are chosen for endurance. To stay silent and effectively abandon them to their fate would be to go against our core values and objectives. We can no assure you the Executive Committee will be writing a strong letter to the FEI very soon to put pressure on them to find a solution, and quickly, to this serious situation.”

He concluded by reiterating that WAHO is a totally non-political organization, and that every registry, regardless of size, regardless of country, is equal. “As Jay Stream often said, ‘It is not the horses that bring their problems to WAHO, it is the people. We have always tried, and will always try in future, to resolve all these issues the best way we can as and when they arise, in the best interests of WAHO, of our members, and of the purebred Arabian horse.”

GUEST SPEAKERS

We were treated to a wealth of Guest Speakers at this WAHO Conference. The first was Dr. Ali Hassan Follad PhD, Advisor to the Bahrain Tourism and Museums Authority whose subject was “A Brief History of Bahrain.” His talk covered the most important periods of the country’s extensive and rich history. Strategically situated between two continents, this maritime nation has been an important trading hub for over 4,000 years. Blessed with natural freshwater springs, and formerly dependent on pearl mining and agriculture, it was once known as “the mother of a million palm trees.” Since 1932, when oil was discovered, the country’s economy has evolved rapidly, and today Bahrain is also a busy financial and business centre.

Prior to the conference, many of us had the opportunity to visit historic sites in Bahrain that brought to life the subjects of speakers. Follad spoke about. At the height of its power, the intriguing Dilmun civilization (2,300 BC - 500 BC) controlled the Gulf trading routes. Ancient Sumarian legends told of the islands as a garden paradise, promising eternal life, so people even brought their dead from afar to be interred here, creating the thousands of ancient Dilmun burial mounds that dominate the landscape in parts of northern Bahrain. We saw many of them as we drove around and we also saw remarkable artifacts from this and other eras at the Bahrain National Museum. A visit to the ancient harbour and Qal’at al Bahrain (Bahrain Fort), the former capital of Dilmun, was extremely interesting as the fort is an exceptional example of unbroken continuity of occupation over a period of almost 4,500 years.

Dr. Follad also recounted the history of the Al Khalifa dynasty, rulers of the country since 1783. Many of us had visited Sheikh Isa Bin Ali Al Khalifa’s house, the home and centre of government of Bahrain’s longest reigning sovereign, Sheikh Isa bin Ali Al Khalifa (1869-1952), which offered a great insight into royal life in the 19th century. Sheikh Isa was born in the Riffa Fort, an historic landmark we also enjoyed exploring, together with the nearby Military Museum with its huge, dramatic paintings depicting earlier battles the Al Khalifa Family fought while conquering Bahrain – mounted on their magnificent Arabian warhorses. All this was significant background information for us because the Al Khalifa Family have preserved and bred their Arabs for over 200 years, and we were looking forward to seeing these descendants of their warhorses at the Royal Stables. The next guest speaker, renowned breed historian Edouard Al-Dahdah, gave two talks which due to some unexpected time constraints had to be combined. “Arabian Strains: Origins, Meanings And Relevance Today” and “The Golden Thread – Connecting Our Arabian Horse Heritage From The Past To The 21st Century”. He gave us much food for thought, explaining many aspects of strains and preservation breeding, with little-known documented facts about the origin of some strains, for example the Tuwaiq strain which is still a strain in Bahrain was mentioned by a French traveller in 1685. In Edouard’s opinion, no strain is “better” than another: “They are all equally good. It is actually a matter of preference, of taste and of personal choice among individuals or among tribes…but that preference may not be shared by other tribes or in other areas, and they would have other preferred strains.” On the relationship between strains and type, Edouard said, “There is no single classic Arabian type, there are 290, 369 Arabian types not just one. In the west we have converged too fast towards one type of Arabian horse and so they all end up looking like each other, which is pretty much the show standard and everything that doesn’t look like

slow and progressive... But there is an important difference between them...”
that is ‘off type’, but I would like to say that among Bedouins there is this notion that there are different types of horses and they are all equally valuable. Some are tall, some are long, some are powerful, some are feminine, some are masculine, so there is not just one classic Arabian type.”

His final message was, “Find the strains of your horses. Find the ancestral mare, try to find as much as possible about her, what she was and how many generations are between her and your current horses today, try to read about what their history is, try to associate yourself with that history and take pride in what you own. These horses have been transmitted to us generation after generation by people who have fought for them, battled for them, risked their lives for them. So there is something about the relationship between Arabian horses and humans that goes over generations – and this is what preservation is about.”

Deirdre Hyde, a highly respected international judge, published author and acknowledged pedigree expert based in the UAE gave us an enthralling “Short Gallop through the Story of Arabian Racing”. Her lavishly illustrated talk covered racing in many countries from the distant past right through to modern times. Deirdre began with, “The racing of Arab horses of recognisable type and beauty has been an integral part of the breed which reaches back over hundreds of years, to a time long before any Arab Breed Societies were thought of and very few exclusively Arab horse studbooks were kept, and even those were generally only kept by rulers or leaders. Pedigree was a matter of tribal pride. … The importance of the horse and racing as a vital part of Arab culture cannot be underestimated … Testing the athletic ability is such an important part of Arab horse tradition, it is to be hoped it will never be lost.”

Deirdre concluded her talk with, “Mankind, by selective breeding, can completely change the appearance of an animal in a very few generations, as has happened with the look of the modern show horse or the speed of the modern racehorse. If we care about preserving not only the genetic breadth of the breed but also the whole unique identity of the classic Arab horse as has been described by many experts over the past centuries, the racing of all our horses should be encouraged not just for speed or winning but for the joy of seeing beauty that can perform.”

Dr. Samantha Brooks PhD, a leading specialist in Equine Genetics from the University of Florida Genetics Institute was the next speaker. Her first talk, “How Science is Helping us to Help our Horses” covered the latest findings on laminitis susceptibility and Equine Metabolic Syndrome in Arabian horses. Something that caught my attention was when Dr. Brooks said that laminitis has been known for some 2,000 years and the ancient remedy of cooling the feet by standing the horse in running water has in fact been found, by recent controlled research studies, to be very effective as a first aid measure to prevent further damage to the hoof. She explained that applying ice to the feet and lower legs for periods varying from 4–6 hours and 24–48 hours has shown remarkable effectiveness, in fact some equine hospitals in America are beginning to use this therapy for horses at risk of laminitis due to colic or colitis. The section of the talk on equine metabolic syndrome also highlighted the latest research. It is thought the Arabian may be more susceptible to this condition because, as Dr. Brooks explained
...for a desert horse the ability to quickly lay sand and grass 2,400 metre tracks and the longest, straight; I have ever seen. The featured race was the 1,600 metres WAHO Cup with seven runners. The attractive mare Tuwaisah (2014, Hamdaany Wadhah x Jellaby Sareeh) just caught the front running stallion Al Shamsi (2019, Bint El Alseema Al Shaqab x TFP El Shaqab) as he crossed the finish first, standing in his stirrups and being presented with his trophy.

At the conclusion of the Conference, Mrs. Debbie Watson, a Director on the Board for our Society, stepped up to the lectern to introduce the gathering that Australia will proudly host the next WAHO Conference in 2019, and invited everyone to attend. An inspirational short film about our country and Arabian horses followed and was extremely well received.

SOCIAL EVENTS AND PEARLS OF BAHRAIN DAYS

Included in the exciting four Pearls of Bahrain Days were visits to the Royal Arabian Studs, which are covered elsewhere within the magazine under the title "Living History – Bahrain’s Desert Bred Horses".

We all thoroughly enjoyed the many splendid events held at spectacular venues, especially the dinners where Arabian horses owned by some of Bahrain’s many private breeders were paraded for us while we dined. Sincere thanks go to our gracious hosts The Royal Court; Crown Prince Court; Royal Arabian Studs of Bahrain; Bahrain Royal Equestrian and Endurance Federation; Rashid Equestrian & Horseracing Club; H.E. Sheikha Falha Al Rayyan, Executive Director, and H.E. Sheikha Fatima Bint Nassir Al Khalifa, President of the Royal Stables, and also to A.H.N. for Pearl Days credit assistance.

We spent an exciting afternoon watching racing at the Rashid Equestrian & Horseracing Club, a picturesque racetrack with both sand and grass 2,400 metre tracks and the longest, straight; I have ever seen. The featured race was the 1,600 metres WAHO Cup with seven runners. The attractive mare Tuwaisah (2014, Hamdaany Wadhah x Jellaby Sareeh) just caught the front running stallion Al Shamsi (2019, Bint El Alseema Al Shaqab x TFP El Shaqab) as he crossed the finish first, standing in his stirrups and being presented with his trophy.

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Society WAHO ADD

26. ZT Faa’iq at Al Rashediah Stud.
28. Gold Champion Yearling Filly, D Mastura Al Aqeed.
29. Gold Champion Stallion, D Jad, owner Mr. Khalil Ebrahim Mukhtar.
30. Al Rashediah Stud’s marvellous fountains.

This first international show was equally well supported, with 135 entries forward for judging, the whole event broadcast live on Bahraini television and live-streamed on the Internet. Unfortunately, the weather was not kind, being unseasonably cold and rainy, but despite the conditions we admired the excellent horses, which came from a most interesting cross section of international bloodlines. The Junior Colt Champion, owned and bred by Mr. Abduraham Al Jasmi from Al Rashediah Stud, was the impressive three-year-old grey Hermes (EKS Alihandro x Sanadina). Mr. Saeed Jaffar Almaheshi’s Champion Mare, H Perdita (2012, Kunar T x Exotic Pearl) was imported from the UK, and all the other Champions came from the UAE. Yearling Filly Champion D Mastura Al Aqeed (Madwe Al Shaqab x DF Yasirah), owned Hamad Al Hajri; Senior Stallion Champion D Jad (2013, Frazer Mashar x Muranas Je Tame), owner Mr. Khalil Ebrahim Mukhtar.

What a great pleasure it was to attend the WAHO Conference and experience the exciting activities associated with it. I found visiting Bahrain to be a magical experience full of surprises, captivating history, friendly people and amazing Arabian horses! I can hardly wait until Australia hosts the next WAHO Conference in 2019. Anyone with an interest in the Arabian horse is welcome to attend and I hope to see many of you there!

For further information about the World Arabian Horse Organization please visit their website at www.waho.org