

# WAHO 2025

## Abu Dhabi

Text and photos by SHARON MEYERS



**Above:** Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque

**Opposite:** The Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization

The 2025 World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO) Conference held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE) from April 5 through April 12 was a resounding success!

Due to the extraordinary generosity of the Emirates Arabian Horse Society, their Chairman HH Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nayan, Deputy Chairman HE Sheikh Zayed bin Hamad Al Nahyan, and Director General Mohamed Alharbi, covering the costs of the WAHO registration fee, pre-conference tours and the Heritage of Emirates Days for attendees, a record-breaking 56 countries attended the conference.

### **A Gracious Welcome**

The conference venue was the luxurious St. Regis Saadiyat Island Resort which looked over picturesque views of the sapphire blue Arabian Gulf. It was a fast-paced week packed with unique tourist destinations, an illuminating two-day conference, and beautiful horses. It was also pleasing to note quite a few people attended the conference for the first time and that WAHO enthusiasts from around the world joyfully engaged in countless discussions about our much-loved equine – the Arabian horse.

The UAE is a world-class tourist destination and Abu Dhabi is a truly remarkable city. I was fascinated by Abu Dhabi's architectural ingenuity, attention to detail and their passion for perfection which shone through as we explored the city. We were fortunate to do pre-conference tours to several magnificent and iconic venues including the Louvre Abu Dhabi, Qasr Al Watan (Presidential Palace) and Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. We also happily meandered around souks and cultural sites. Social events such as lunches and dinners were held at outstanding venues with many meals featuring delicious and vibrant blends of traditional Emirati dishes. The hospitality extended to WAHO members during our visit was exceptional.



Many of us spent a full day in Sharjah "The Pearl of the Gulf", visiting the fabulous Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization and other fascinating places. Late afternoon our group dropped into their vast and well-appointed equestrian centre to see Arabian horses competing at the 26th Sharjah International Arabian Horse Festival. It was a memorable and thrilling evening watching impressive Arabian horses vie for the championship awards. Other days we attended exciting Arabian horse racing at Al Ain and Abu Dhabi racecourses. At Abu Dhabi we had the perfect opportunity to view some of the athletic and successful racehorses owned by HH Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan's Al Reef Stables.

A breathtaking highlight for the WAHO group was when we were honoured with a visit to Dubai Arabian Horse Stud, where we viewed 61 of their glorious Arabian mares, some with foals at foot. The mares were sympathetically and professionally exhibited in family groups, which was very educational. Such a joy seeing these splendid mares, many were world champions as well as being dams and granddams of world champions. At the conclusion of the parade when we began moving towards the dining room, we were taken utterly by surprise when two of the stud's celebrated stallions, FA El Rasheem (FA El Shawan x Virtuosa MLR) and his handsome son D Seraj (x Ladi Veronika), stormed into the arena putting on a brilliant show for us. What a thoughtful and unexpected finale to an unforgettable day.

Interestingly, this is the second time the WAHO Conference has been hosted by Abu Dhabi, the first was nearly 30 years ago in 1996. Between these two conferences there has been a remarkable growth in the number of Arabian horses in the UAE, as indicated by their Delegate reports from 1996 and 2025. The 1996 report stated: "The number of registered horses in the UAE reached 1,425 and in 1995 we registered about 173, mainly imported horses." The 2025 report affirmed: "We began registering Arabian horses with 965 horses in the first five years. This number grew steadily and reached a total of 28,715 horses by the end of 2024. As for import permits, we issued 3,963, and for export permits, the total is 3,643. Regarding owners of Arabian horses, we register over 200 new owners each year, and by the end of 2024, the total number of registered owners reached 5,999." Now, the UAE is a country of great consequence for the Arabian horse. Racing, endurance riding and showing all play a vital part in breeding programmes across the seven Emirates. Their Arabian horses have garnered colossal international success in all these equestrian events.





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At the conference's Official Opening we were warmly welcomed by representatives of the ruling family. An informative video was shown emphasising the vision of HH Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the Father of the Nation, and the admirable achievements of the Emirates Arabian Horse Society and their Arabian horse breeders. Then HE Sheikh Zayed bin Hamad Al Nahyan graciously opened the conference and spoke on behalf of HH Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nayan, saying it was an honour to welcome everyone to the UAE.

Saeed Al Suwaidi, a research expert at the National Archives in Abu Dhabi shared a wonderful collection of stories about Abu Dhabi's history and the Al Nahyan family. Then Muhammad Ali Muhammad Al-Matrooshi, a researcher into the history of the Arabian horse gave an enlightening historical account of their purebred Arabians.



Our steadfast WAHO President Peter Pond has been a Life Member of WAHO since 1971 and joined the Executive Committee in 1996. Since 2014, Peter has presided over five conferences as President. He said, "I always remind the meeting in this opening speech that WAHO is a totally non-political organization. WAHO was founded on our members' respect for each other, on mutual cooperation and friendship between individuals, between countries and across cultures, histories and languages. We often call ourselves the unique Family of WAHO... All the same, I cannot ignore the fact there are many of our members living in an age of instability, political unrest and turmoil, and it is clear that many have been very badly affected. I am sure we all wish these conflicts will be resolved and that everyone affected can return to peace and stability. These conflicts have not only caused much human suffering but have also had a detrimental effect on the Arabian horses in those countries."

*From left down: Qasr Al Hosn Fort in Abu Dhabi; Mohamed Alharbi, Peter Pond, HE Sheikh Zayed bin Hamad Al Nahyan, and HRH Princess Alia Al Hussein; Group shot of the WAHO Executive Committee (Delegates and Observers in front)*





## WAHO Business

The two days of the WAHO General Assembly were taken up with various reports and Delegate votes. Because 56 countries had sent Voting Delegates, it was decided to use a novel voting system, which everyone seemed to enjoy. The Delegates were asked to hold up a green flag for a Yes vote, red for No and blue for Abstention. It was noticeable that nearly every vote produced an almost unanimous field of waving green flags. Two minor changes were made to the WAHO Constitution, and the Treasurer's Report included a notice of an increase in several categories of WAHO membership fees, effective from 2026, although there are to be no changes to Individual Associate Members fees.

The People's Republic of China were welcomed as a full Registering Authority Member. Ukraine has submitted the final draft of their first stud book for approval and once approved they will also become a full Registering Authority Member. I must mention that due to the extraordinary efforts of Ukraine's Arabian horse owners, no Arabians have been lost in the tragic war that's taking place there.

Zimbabwe, which is already the caretaker registry for Lesotho, will act as caretaker registry for Botswana, where there are just a handful of Arabians. It was also agreed that Bolivia will act as the caretaker registry for the Arabian horses of Paraguay, whose horses used to be registered by Brazil. And the Delegates also passed another vote for Kazakhstan to act as the caretaker registry for the Arabian horses in Uzbekistan, where some new owners are starting an Arabian farm and breeding programme with imported horses, mainly from Poland.

Since Brexit, due to European Union rules, and even though WAHO is recognized by the European Commission, The Arab Horse Society (UK) was forced to stop registering and issuing passports for the Arabian horses in Ireland, Greece and Malta. Fortunately, the Arabian Horse Stud Book of the Netherlands, AVS, stepped into the breach taking over the responsibility for the Arabian horses in Malta and Greece. At the conference, the AVS generously offered to help with Ireland despite the fact there are still several hoops for them to jump through with the Irish Government to get this done.

These are four classic examples of WAHO member countries working harmoniously together under the WAHO umbrella! There are also known to be small numbers of Arabian horses in many other countries, including in Central America, in former Soviet Union countries, and in Asia, all originally from accepted WAHO studbooks, and hopefully in time, they too can be brought into the WAHO family of nations through this Caretaker Registry system.

Today it's hard to believe there was once a time when Arabian horses were refused registration based on their pedigrees, their physical appearance or even for political reasons. Imagine the frustration and distress this caused their owners and the distrust and exasperation it caused between countries! This all vanished with the creation of WAHO, by the WAHO definition: "A Purebred Arabian horse is one which appears in any purebred Arabian Stud Book or Register listed by WAHO as acceptable."

WAHO always keeps horse welfare at the forefront. The issue of Embryo Transfer (ET) has been discussed many times at past Conferences, in particular to protect the health and welfare of Arabian mares, and it was a major topic at this meeting. Although a suggested new rule to limit donor mares to one ET foal and one natural foal per year did not pass the vote of the Delegates to the World Registrars Meeting, albeit by a narrow margin, it was agreed to add this very strong recommendation to the WAHO rules: "In order to protect the welfare of Arabian mares, it is a very strong WAHO recommendation that each donor mare is limited to producing one foal per year by Embryo Transfer, that foal to be carried by a recipient mare. That donor mare may also give birth to a naturally carried foal in the same year. In the case of naturally carried twin foals, both will be eligible for registration. For the purpose of this recommendation, a year consists of a period of 12 consecutive months." WAHO also strongly recommends, again for welfare reasons, that fillies should be over the age of 36 months prior to their first use for breeding regardless of the method of breeding used.

Xavier Guibert's report from the World Registrars Meeting informed us, among other matters dealing with registration rules, that 15 Member countries still produce printed stud books, 11 put theirs online as pdfs, 27 have online databases free of charge, and one, USA, has an online database via subscription. The WAHO office can provide links to anyone interested in researching pedigrees.



## Delegate Reports

It's heartwarming to learn from our Delegate reports that Arabian horses are being used globally for an extraordinary variety of equestrian pursuits including: leisure riding, cattle ranching, equestrian tourism, harness, cross-country, tent pegging, dressage, eventing, show jumping, endurance riding, racing, ridden showing, halter/in-hand showing, western riding, cattle sports like cutting/reining, barrel racing, polo, riding for the disabled, competing with children in interschool competitions, liberty work, archery on horseback, taking part in public parades and festivals, and most importantly, Arabians are highly regarded as treasured companions. Delegates also said the awarding of the WAHO Trophy had substantial impact on their countries.

Although not all country registration information had been received for 2024, the following is of interest. Countries that registered an increased number of foals for 2024 from 2023: Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bolivia, Chile, China, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, UAE, Ukraine, Uruguay and Zimbabwe. Countries with over 500 registered foals so far for 2024: Saudi Arabia (5,793), Egypt (>2,000), USA (1,965), Türkiye (1,733), France (1,535), UAE (1,512), Qatar (936), Italy (835), Iran (8200), Morocco (734), Poland (6430), and South Africa (597).

## At A Glance

It's obviously impossible to cover all 56 Delegate reports in this article, so the below information is just a flavour from around the world.

**History** - We learnt from Delegate reports when many nations first obtained Arabian horses. In Algeria, Arabians were introduced in large numbers in the 11th century and with the arrival of French Colonisation in 1830. Between 1852 and 1945, 220 Arabian horses were imported. Today the Algerian government pays special attention to this breed, recognizing its importance not only on a cultural level but also in terms of its socioeconomic value. Chile's formal Arabian horse breeding began in 1872 with horses imported from Europe and the Middle East. China recently celebrated the 90th anniversary of the first official recorded arrival of Arabian horses in 1934. A total of ten Arabians were exported from Iraq to China. Pakistan's Arabian Horse Breeding Stud, Remount Depot Mona, was established in 1956 by the Pakistan Army, maintaining pure Arabian bloodlines imported from Australia, Belgium, Egypt, England, Jordan, Netherlands, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and USA. Romania has a long tradition of breeding Arabian horses and proudly has the oldest Arabian stud belonging to the Romanian State in Mangalia with 200 Arabians.

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**Promoting Arabians** ~ Namibia is a proactive society and arrange educational seminars in person and online, publish articles in equestrian magazines, and have an active social media presence to help promote the breed. Austria presents their Arabian horses at different trade fairs, all breed performance shows, and general stallion shows to increase interest in the breed from the public. Qatar invests in education, training and building global partnerships. Bolivia promotes Arabians through national events and public and private exhibitions. Promotion of Arabian horses in China and the development of events includes horse shows, international collaboration, horse auctions, training sessions covering WAHO rule interpretation, horse breeding, horse health and social media promotion. Switzerland organizes various activities such as exclusive training with Fredy Knie Junior at their National Circus Knie, where the Arabian horse has been an important part of the shows for decades and they have a “Day of the Arabian Horse” at the Swiss National Stud, demonstrating the versatility of the breed. The USA supports the Al-Marah Arabian Horse Galleries in the International Museum of the Horse at Kentucky. The Arabian Horse Association of Ukraine and the Veteran and Adaptive Equestrian Federation organize para-endurance competitions and the project “Riding into the Future” for combat veterans and their families. Naturally, Arabian horses are used for these significant activities. Poland is also promoting the Arabian horse through art. Poles have a long tradition and history with horses and love horse artwork. And artists love to depict the Arabian.

**Noteworthy Information** ~ Namibia said their climate is particularly suited for raising and breeding Arabian horses in the open savannah, although predation from wild animals and African Horse Sickness pose momentous challenges to their breeders. However, many of Namibia’s purebred Arabian horses are born out in the open, without human interference. This was the first time in over two decades that Zimbabwe has been able to send delegates to the conference. Their tenacious Arabian Society is incredibly small with only four active members in total, with three being registered breeders. It was pleasing that the South American Member countries, other than Ecuador who were too late to obtain visas, were all in attendance for the first time in many years. We were delighted to meet them all.

**Food For Thought** ~ Brazil’s Delegate report concluded with: “...we would like to share a concern, which is the preservation of the true purpose of the Arabian horse. We see that many breeders are seeking the highest level of refinement possible, which is indeed very nice and beautiful. However, the result we have seen is that we are producing horses with poor conformation, weak legs, and limited functionality. We worry that we are dividing the breed into horses for sport, many of them without type, and those ones only for beauty. We know that the Arabian horse must have both. So please, we cannot forget that the Arabian horse was made—and I would say also nowadays—to be ridden. I repeat, the Arabian horse was made to be ridden.”

**Notable Events** ~ A true friend of the Arabian horse and passionate supporter of WAHO, Dr. Marek Trela, sadly retired from the Executive Committee, a position he’s held since 2004 and in 2015 was appointed WAHO Vice-President. In recognition of his distinguished service, Dr. Trela was made an honorary Executive Committee Member and a WAHO Honorary Life Member. Her Royal Highness Princess Alia Al Hussein has taken up the position of Vice-President and Dr. Mohamed Machmoum was appointed by vote of the Delegates as a consultant to the WAHO Executive Committee.

Two superb signed limited edition prints by British artists featuring majestic Arabian horses were presented as gifts of appreciation: from WAHO by Peter Pond to HE Sheikh Zayed bin Hamad Al Nahyan, Arabian Study by artist Jacque Jones, and to Director General of the Emirates Arabian Horse Society Mohamed Alharbi, Desert Treasures by artist Judi Kent Pyrah.



*From top: Qasr Al Watan (Presidential Palace); racing at the beautiful Al Ain Racecourse; Peter Pond presenting Mohamed Alharbi with Desert Treasures by artist Judi Kent Pyrah*



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**Guest Speakers** – Monika Savier has a Master of Arts in Social and Educational Sciences, has bred Arabian horses since 1989, and is a renowned international equestrian journalist, photographer and author. Monika's talk on "Female Choice and the Impact of Assisted Reproduction Technology on the Lives of Stallions and Mares" was challenging and inspiring. At the start of her talk, Monika reminded us "we should not carelessly and out of commercial interest turn natural reproduction into a case for veterinary medicine. Of course, reproduction technology can be a great help in special cases, but as an industry it has greatly increased the costs of breeding and in some contexts it is counterproductive. And my point is that, somewhere along the line, the mental and physical welfare of the horses themselves has been almost totally forgotten... No more 'horses of the century' have been born in recent years, despite science and modern technologies for improving breeding. Instead, our breed's gene pool has narrowed considerably. What also falls by the wayside is the natural contact between stallions and mares, their communication and their libido. And that has its side effects."

The second guest speaker, Emma Maxwell, has an incredible lifetime of experience with Arabian horses as a breeder, trainer, judge, writer, lecturer and photographer. Her presentation was titled "Changes - Insights into How Arabian Breeding Has Changed" and was cleverly backed up by photos of horses from the era WAHO began (1970s) plus a video of U.S. National Champions from 1958 to 2024, which gave a pictorial journey that revealed changes in the breed's physical and photographic presentation. Emma spoke about the way breeding goals have changed and theories about selection pressures that may have been unintended consequences. It was emphasized that in the 1970s, an Arabian's versatility was a prominent feature – requiring two things as a base standard, sanity and soundness. Photos were used to demonstrate that countries favoured different phenotypes throughout those years. Although there are still small groups of Crabbet, Polish, Russian and Spanish Arabians, Emma said, "The creation of the 'Straight Egyptian brand' never looked back and is the only 'straight' bloodline definition to maintain its cachet in modern times, where most bloodlines are put into the blender and homogenized."

I would like to share the thoughts of Odette Williams from Australia who attended the conference for the first time. "Having long read WAHO Conference articles with envy, I had assumed you needed to be important or a major breeder to attend. Sharon Meyers encouraged me to come when I was widowed and at a crossroads in life. I may be a converted attendee now! The camaraderie, safety of an organised conference, and the sheer joy of travelling has stirred the passion I felt for everything Arabian when younger. It was eye-opening to see the result of 55 years of WAHO work. Understanding its complexity of working with over 80 countries to safekeep the accuracy of registration and pedigree verification, highlights WAHO as a global movement of excellence. I found the varied uses of Arabians in other countries very enlightening. Seeing the interest in Arabians as part of the Emirati heritage exceeded my previous awareness. Likewise, meeting and listening to people whose names were only known from magazines made for a great spread of information. I gained so much from interesting discussions about other countries and did my bit in promotion of Australia! The generosity of their Highnesses and the Emirates Arabian Horse Society had social media awash with good photos, publicity and praise about Abu Dhabi! Living the high life for a few days leaves an indelible impression of Abu Dhabi being a gracious, fabulous country. I appreciated feeling part of it all."

*From top: The Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization; beautiful saddle in the Museum of Islamic Civilization; spices at Al Fahidi Heritage Souk Dubai; the souks are full of colour*



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*WAHO Conferences are vital for the wellbeing of Arabian horse communities and registries worldwide. They are educational, fun and you meet fascinating people and experience different cultures. Everyone is welcome to attend the next Conference.*

*Visit [www.waho.org](http://www.waho.org) for further information.*