

BRUCE MCCREA

interview



Bruce McCrea, HH Prince Abdullah Bin Fahd Al Saud,
Abha Qatar (Marwan Al Shaqab x ZT Ludjkalba), Marieta Salas & Philip Looyens

by Urszula Leczycka – Arabhorsepromotion.com ■ photos by April Visel, Erwin Escher, Irina Filsinger

Bruce McCrea – involved with Arabian horses since his childhood spent on a big farm in Alliance, Ohio, for over 45 years until now. He has trained, shown and marketed many national and international champions. Licensed judge in the USA since 1976 and ECAHO since 1995 – he took part in over 200 shows worldwide and has judged 25 ECAHO shows including: World Championships, All Nations Cup, Borgloon and the Nationals of Spain, Austria, Sweden, Poland, Qatar and the UAE. Apart, he acted as manager of King Abdul Aziz Arabian Horse Center in Riyadh for over 14 years and currently takes the duty of being

the show manager of the successful Al Mobamadia Stud that belongs to HRH Prince Abdullah bin Fahd Al Saud.

Tutto Arabi: How did you start your involvement in Arabian horse industry? Where, when and was there any particular horse or event that pushed you to go this way?

Bruce McCrea: I grew up on a big farm in Alliance, Ohio, USA. My father was a doctor and my mother a longtime horsewoman. There were always horses and ponies for us kids to ride and show. In the mid 1960's, my mother took our Arabian horses to another level by purchasing SEAHORSE



European Champion Abha Qatar and Team in Verona 2009

DUKE DORSAZ, who went on to be a triple US National Champion. She also purchased and imported mares from Poland in 1968. These horses were the basis for what became a very successful Arabian horse breeding program. I was exposed to great horses and great trainers at an early age. I had the good fortune to work with Bob Hart Sr. and Bobby Hart while still in high school and worked with great horses like ORAN VAN CRABBET, LEWISFIELD NIZORO, LEWISFIELD MAGIC, SEY CHERIE, SERENITY SONBOLAH, GAMUZON, and AMERIGO, to name a few super individuals. Later I worked with the LaCroix Family at Lasma Arabians and famous horses like BASK, PROWIZJA, EL PASO, BUSZMEN, Great Bask daughters like FAME, DANCING FLAME, FIRE MUSIC, BASK MELODY and so many others. I continued to work for or with the LaCroix family for 20 years.

TA: You are well respected international judge who judged many events both in the US as in Europe or Middle East. Do you remember your first show you judged? Do you think your look on a horse, taste and way of working as a judge has changed since that time?

BMC: I got my judges card in the USA when I was first eligible in 1976. I was quickly promoted and have maintained the

card ever since. I will judge the US National Championships again this year.

My first show to judge in Europe was the 1994 Salon Du Cheval World Championship Show in Paris. We had truly great horses that year like, Kubinec and Esteem. I enjoyed using the point system from the start. Having grown up around the Elite of the US horse show scene, I was very "Polish Prejudice" and especially fond of the high trotting English Pleasure and Park horses. Looking back, many of those horses that I loved and won with, were probably not very pretty, but still were great, high quality horses. I would say my appreciation of type and charisma has evolved over the years as a judge and breeder. As my focus moved more towards breeding horses to compete in the European scoring system, my priorities and tastes changed with it.

TA: You started your Arabian horse experience in the US. Did you find it easy to start with judging and work with European and Middle Eastern horses since the market and also a type of a horse seem to be different here and there? What were the most important differences?

BMC: As I stated above, my tastes and preferences have evolved over the years, for various reasons. Our halter horses in the States got away from type, pretty faces, and movement.



Bruce, Maria, and Karin McCrea

Emphasis was placed more on the "hard show". Necks got longer; heads plainer, and horses that could not move out of their own way were winning. I think that this trend is gradually changing. The new American scoring system should help. Over the years, there have been very few horses from the US breeding programs that can win in Europe. And, vice versa, until recently, very few European winners were successful in the United States. They are different styles of horses and they are presented very differently as well. I believe that now both styles are recognizing the qualities of the other and that they will work towards the "ideal" Arabian type.

TA: Which methods and system of judging you prefer and why?

BMC: The old saying that goes "any judging system is as good as the people using it" is still very true. I like the European point system, but I wish we would use a few more points. I like the new US halter scoring system, but feel that it is being used too broadly with a wide range of points between judges in a given category. They might have been better off starting with the 1-10 point scale using 1/2 points. I would also like to see comparative championships used at the US Nationals, like they do in the Major European Shows. Having said all that, I still prefer judging using the comparative system. Any system works when utilized correctly by honest and knowledgeable judges, but any system can be manipulated.

TA: What particularly catches your eye when you look at a horse – during judging in a show ring and while taking a breeding decisions – to choose a sire or make a breeding plan? Are these criteria the same?

BMC: Type and High Quality are what I am looking for in a winner and breeding animals. I like to see a nicely balanced horse with good coupling and strong hind quarters. I like a

pretty, short, head, nice dish, and big pretty eyes. I do not like white around the eyes. I like a good well shaped neck preferably with some length and a fine throatlatch. For me, just because a horse has an extreme dish, it is not necessarily a 20 on head & neck. It must also have good eyes, pretty well set ears, and a well set and well shaped neck.

TA: What in your opinion is the most difficult in being a judge?

BMC: I have never found judging to be difficult.



I love judging good horses at the biggest shows. I do not like judging a mediocre to poor classes in any Country.

TA: What was the biggest challenge for you when you look back at your career in Arabian horse industry so far?

BMC: Of course there have been challenges, but nothing too bad. Successes outweigh the failures and good times outweigh the bad times. Probably the toughest time began in 1986 when the tax laws changed in the USA and the economy got very bad. Those were pretty tough times for everyone involved in the Arabian horse industry in the United States.

Honestly, I have had the good fortune to work in a business I love for the last 40 years. I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with many of the breed's superstar horses. I have



Abha Palma - All Nations Cup Reserve Champion Filly

seen most all of the great ones and worked with fantastic owners, breeders, veterinarians, farriers, and many other people associated with the Arabian horse business. I have seen people come and go, as well as all the fads and trends. Over all it has been wonderful and I feel truly blessed.

TA: How did you start your cooperation with such important breeding places as King Abdul Aziz Arabian Horse Center and Al Mohammadiyah?

BMC: I had been a friend of the Jay Stream family since I was very young, and very good friends with Linda Stream. Jay was working with the Saudi Officials for many years to get the Saudi Arabia Stud Book approved by WAHO. They had asked him to recommend someone to manage King Abdul Aziz Arabian Horse Center (formerly Dirab) and to instruct the staff in all aspects of the Arabian horse industry. We spoke about it several times and then eventually came to an agreement and I made the move to Riyadh. I worked there for 14½ years with Sami Al Nohait. We made immense progress over the years. I am very proud of the achievements we made, but I was ready for a change.

I had been consulting with HH Prince Abdullah Bin Fahd Al Saud for several years in establishing Al Mohamadia. Prince Abdullah was very enthusiastic to create a World Class Show

and Breeding Operation. Most importantly, he is a true Gentleman from a wonderful family, and a pleasure to work for. It was a natural transition to make the move and my family is very happy and thankful to be with Al Mohamadia.

TA: How much influence of your advices is being introduced while in Al Mohamadiyah breeding and showing decisions? Can you tell us more about your duties – how it began and has developed?

BMC: I am in charge of the day to day operations, but Prince Abdullah likes to stay involved. We are still in the process of completing the new farm so he visits often, weekly if his schedule allows. He and I discuss breeding and showing decisions and he relies on my experience in this business. We have been showing in the Middle East, Europe, and the USA, so I travel a lot. At home, I look after a good staff and do a lot of the conditioning myself. I also do most of the AI and frozen semen breeding. My wife, Karin does the correspondence and coordinates the advertising and promotion.

TA: How many horses have been bred during the period of your work there? Can you mention those most successful?

BMC: Al Mohamadia has been having about 10 foals per year. This year we will be breeding close to 20 mares. One of



Officiating at the Abu Dhabi National Show

the first horses Prince Abdullah bought was the beautiful Straight Egyptian Stallion, FARRES. We have been successful showing with several of his offspring. This year we will concentrate on using reigning World Champion and Triple Crown Winner, Abha Qatar. We just had the first beautiful filly from our Middle East Champion Stallion, SAVIO (SMF Dreamcatcher x Om El



Shannan El Madann - Bronze Medal Winner Paris 2008



Abha Qatar - All Nations Cup Champion 2009

Shadina). I am very excited to see four more of his coming next month.

We have had incredible success in a short time. We already have campaigned two World Champions, ABHA PALMA and ABHA QATAR, one being a Triple Crown Winner. SARA AL MOHAMADIA, one of our very first acquisitions, was Champion first time out at the First Al Khalediah Championship Show in Riyadh, and last was Champion at the Wels "A" Show and Middle East Championships. We have won several Middle East Championships as well encouraging successes in other Shows.

Prince Abdullah's Endurance Team is also enjoying immense success in the recent past. They have won the last 3 FEI* Sanctioned Races in Saudi Arabia including the Al Khalediah Festival Cup FEI CEI**120km in January 2010.

TA: Can you share with us some of your visions for the future

activity of Al Mobamadiyah?

BMC: Much of our future will be based around Abha Qatar. I truly believe he is the best young stallion in the World today. He has 10 foals due this year in Europe. I plan on breeding 10 our own mares to him this year. We hope in the future there will be many Abha Qatar foals winning around the World. We plan to introduce some new horses in Europe this year.

TA: What are the most important features of good manager in the Arabian horse world nowadays in your opinion?

What is the key to the success in this field?

BMC: Working and staying successful in the Middle East Market is very difficult. There are so many beautiful and high quality horses, and the shows are extremely competitive. I enjoy the challenge of trying to breed horses with the type, charisma, and movement required to win. I think my experience and knowledge of pedigrees are a benefit. I feel I am very well rounded, having spent so many years as a trainer operating my own stable and later a breeding manager.

TA: Besides breeding and showing their horses Al Mobamadiyah is also a host of a third Arabian show that has been upgraded to an ECAHO "B" International. Can you tell us more about the past years event and your expectations for this year? Will there be any innovations?

BMC: This will be the Third Show for Al Mobamadia in Riyadh. Prince Abdullah is very keen to help and promote horse shows and endurance racing. There are a lot of new people getting involved locally with Arabian horses, so it is nice to provide them a venue for showing. It will be a B show and we may offer Straight Egyptian classes.

TA: We are looking forward to see these innovations successful and wish you another great event. □

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