

Arabian Horse Magazine
Modern Arabian Horse
February 5, 2007
Pamela Burton
Word count: 3714

Racehorse, retired

He can feel as well as hear the excitement of the noisy crowd. His groom leads him into the saddle paddock, where a wisp of a saddle is placed on his back and secured by a long girth. The loudspeaker boldly proclaims race winners from the last race as a jockey leaps lightly onto his back while he is led out onto the track. The dark clouds are hovering and a spatter of rain dampens the track, bringing the smell of wet earth along with the scent of his nervous sweat into his nostrils. Some of the other horses are jiggling with anticipation and excitement, using up precious energy. He wants to look around, but the pony rider holding his reins pulls his head close to his own horse to steady him on his first trip to the starting gate. He is hardly aware of the diminutive human on his back whose legs barely come below the small saddle. This is a familiar part of the drama that he has learned on countless practice starts. The rain is now coming in torrents and the dirt under his dancing hooves is getting wet and heavy. As they get close to the towering metal gate stretching across the track, his pony companion fades back and two handlers direct and nudge him into the narrow confines of the starting gate. He tenses his muscles. He can feel the heat and anxiety of the other horses as his jockey gathers the reins and speaks softly to him... "You can do this boy....steady....ready...now, go". The starting bell shrills and the gates swing open with a clang. He is caught by adrenalin and is part of the wave of horses that leap out of the gate. Needing no other motivation but the desire to run, he throws himself forward into the midst of pounding hooves and flying dirt and mud as he has been trained, as he has been bred to do. ~

It has been estimated that there are 660 purebred Arabian horses racing each year in the United States on 19 major racetracks. Expenses to keep a racehorse going are estimated at between \$18,000-\$25,000 per year. Horses that seem genetically and temperamentally disposed to the racing world begin their training by aged two. By the tender age of three, they must earn their way on the track.

Just as in Hollywood, not every horse will become a star. A horse must be earning his way to warrant the expense of the racing world. What happens to these athletic and conditioned horses that have moved out of the racing program?

Many of the "retired and retrained" horses go on to excel in new performance careers, while many more are sold to homes of recreational trail riders.

Michelle Morgan of Mandolynn Hill Farm in Aubrey, Texas, has found homes for some of her "retired racehorses" in the demanding disciplines of reining, dressage and endurance. "We also sell to people who just want a pleasure or trail horse," she said. Morgan started her farm in 1987 and she now stands stallions from some of the top race bloodlines at her ranch including Amazing Son (Magus x Amaysing, by Sambor), Jolly by Golly (By Golly x Las Tigre), Kan U Run (Wiking x Kania) and the French stallion, Chndaka (Dormane x Malika Fonteray), owned by Shadwell Stud.

"We breed for the athletic horse," she said, "and our main focus is racing.

We are a business, and a horse must be able to cover all of its expenses.”

She cited the costs of a trainer as running \$1300-\$1500 a month, plus other expenses such as feed, supplements, shoes, and travel. “If they don’t hit a certain level we must find them a new career,” said Morgan. She feels that an ex-racehorse is an excellent choice due to its’ athletic breeding, nutritional advantages and training. “We put a good base on them,” she said. “These horses are exposed to so much with their lives on the racetrack.”

Wayne and Melissa Becker, of Gainesville, Texas, live 40 minutes north of Aubrey. Melissa, an avid rider and competitor since her youth, has teamed up with Morgan to retrain and resell some of her retired opportunity horses.

“These horses have a wonderful foundation,” said Melissa. “The ex-racehorse has been handled. They load, they eat, they’ve seen scary things at the track, they’ve been exposed to all sorts of people and commotion, and they will pick up their feet up for you.”

Melissa estimates that she and her husband have placed over 100 ex-racehorses since 1999. Once retrained, she puts them for sale on her website or other Internet equestrian sale sites. Word has spread about her abilities and she now is offered ex-racehorses from other race facilities as well.

“We start them back in the world by trail riding, putting them through obstacles and camping with them,” she said. “You get racing off their mind. Melissa often conditions her mounts on 50-mile endurance rides. “I’ve kept in touch with many of these horses after they are sold,” she said. “We’ve gotten them some good homes.”

Melissa strongly believes in the desirability of these athletes. She found her own favorite riding mount, a racing retiree with an excellent pedigree, and named her farm after him. “Sweet Talker (Magus x Ten Cents Akiss) was the third horse that I got from Michelle about 10 years ago,” she said. “He is the best horse I’ve ever had in my life. He will do anything that you ask him to do. He has tremendous heart and he respects me 100% and I trust him 110%.”

When an exceptional horse meets a talented rider, the possibilities are endless. Mag’s Motivator (Monarch AH x Parilier) was originally sold out of Sweet Talker Farms. A big boned, confident gray with unmistakable talent, he was intimidating to the riders that owned him after his race career ended. Recognizing his potential as a top endurance horse, he was offered to international competitor, Susan Summers of Gifford, Washington, in 2004. After seeing his pedigree and his photo, she bought him sight unseen. With her loving, firm hand, M&M, is developing into a world-class endurance horse. After easily placing in the top 10 in 50 mile rides, he entered and won the 100-mile Forth Howes ride in Montana in June, 2006 in the ride time of 10:24. Mag’s Motivator was subsequently named an alternate for the 2006 U.S. Endurance Team for the World Endurance Games in Aachen, Germany. In 2007, he was one of several horses invited to compete in the February President’s Cup in Abu Dhabi, UAE. (Feb 17) (Photo of Sue and Mag’s Motivator).

Race horse bloodlines

U.S. Arabian racehorse bloodlines often trace back to racing foundation sires, such as Priboj, *Sambor (1965-1988), and *Wiking (1979- 2003). The descendents of these stallions now standing at stud in the United States include names such as Patriot Missile (*Wiking x Toppers' Starlight), Sam Tiki (*Sambor x Kyla Tiki), Kan U Run (*Wiking x Kania), the *Sambor grandson, Tyx (Samtyr x HCC Maloska by Wosk) and Moment of Valor (* Wiking x Sir WM Marusia by *Sambor).

In the article, Arabians, by Longin Blachut, he states: "From 1984 to 1999, 636 horses won Stakes races in the United States. The progeny of *Sambor and *Wiking represent 57.4% of the winners. The remaining 42.6% are the progeny of 38 different sires."

The importation of French horses has literally brought new blood into the U.S. racing program. Horses that are proving themselves on the track often trace back to the French stallion, Dormane, by Manganate.

Amid the vibrant green grass and gently rolling hills of historic Hanover County, Virginia, Alan Kirshner and his wife, Deborah Mihaloff, have bred, raised and run Arabians for the past 29 years. One of the four racing stallions standing at Cre Run Farm is Sam Tiki (*Sambor x Kyla Tiki), with racetrack earnings of \$100,989. His sire, *Sambor, was a member of the Racing Hall of Fame and sire of 22 stakes winners, including Samtyr. His bloodline is highly prized for producing speed and athletic qualities.

With trainer charges of \$45 a day, plus board and maintenance, it is not cost effective for a racehorse owner to float horses that are not going to pay their way. By the age of 3, the breeder will already have spent about \$25,000 on each horse, and by the age of 5, the horse will have shown whether it will make a career as a racehorse. "A horse might not be fast enough, he might not like running in mud, or running with a group of horses that are bumping him down the stretch" said Mihaloff. "Or he may not like the game of racing, but he might have the condition and the aptitude for longer racing such as endurance rides."

Lynn Ashby of Middletown, Delaware, trains horses for Cre Run, as well as 'let down' race horses for outside sales. Ashby typically puts five to six months of training into her mounts before they get to the racetrack. "It takes that long to leg them up and put some cardio workout into them," she said. "As long as they are earning \$20 or \$30 thousand a year, we don't let them go."

"By the end of their race career, it is the perfect time to pick up a conditioned horse to start right into the endurance world," said Ashby. "These horses are sound and have gone everywhere. They haul, they ship, they clip, they load and they are in top condition. These are top ten horses, not just race horses." Ashby's horses will also have done hill work, they are in the bridle, and they have a good dressage base. "They get plenty of groundwork," she said. "We cross train them so can go cross country... up and down. They are used to going into creeks. They have to go in a frame to be a racehorse and stay sound. They must know their leads and change leads quickly. They are supple and very balanced. They know leg yields."

Ashby sells many horses to a new career in endurance and she explains some of the training that will have to be redrawn for a horse to switch from the racetrack to his new career. "We throw our riders up at the walk as there is no security from the saddle", she said. "You have to

teach your ex-racehorse to stand when you mount.” She also said that a racehorse is taught to pull in the bit. When she starts retraining, she works them in a hackamore and they go out on the trail. She said they usually realize that they will be working for longer periods, so they learn to back off. Ashby advises: “After you purchase your ex-racehorse, go back to your basic schooling; whoa, back, turn, leg yields, and hit the trails. The horse will be in a frame as they are accustomed to using their rear ends.”

The ‘renewed career reining horse’, Blew By You, came through Ashby’s farm, Marlyn Meadow Racing, and Ashby recommends about three months of added work to get ready for this discipline. “They need lots of circle work and whoa with backing and teaching spins and neck reining. They are very fit and they just need to relax and not anticipate.”

Barry Waitte, of Hicks Creek Ranch in Los Gatos, California has had good success with Arabian ex-racehorses. “In 2001, my second endurance horse was Kann Sam Count (Sams Count x Koketka), a former racehorse,” he said. “Sam had a spectacular record on the track. Now he is a spectacular horse in endurance. The vet that checked him out said ‘it is almost impossible to believe this horse has ever raced, he is so clean.’”

There are challenges to starting out your career with a well-conditioned horse. “Sam was more horse than I could handle for the first few months,” Waitte admitted ruefully. “He really taught me how to ride. Now I have a blast with him.” Waitte was not daunted, but very impressed by his new mounts immediate aptitude for long distance racing. “That horse wet my appetite for racehorses,” said Waitte. “You can take these horses off the track and they can be very successful in a second career. “We try to get horses when they are five or six, early enough in their life that they know how to compete. They are trained to the track, so we must retrain them, but they already have attitude, spirit, and a notion of competition, which is wonderful. We just redirect some of these attributes such as slow them down, make them think about doing longer rides as opposed to short ones.”

Before Waitte purchases, he puts his picks through a complete vet check, including x-rays. “Usually if there is an ongoing condition, it will most often show up in x-rays,” he said. “We plan on using these horses for a 15-year career in endurance. It might be that something that would not be a problem on a racetrack might be an issue for a horse on the long term with the work of endurance.”

Waitte characterizes his operation as “an endurance development farm” and he and trainers Heather and Jeremy Reynolds have four racehorses in training at present. He recently bought the ex-racehorse, Dream On, aka ‘Reve’ (Monarch AH x CR Dream) from Cre Run Farm, and Sir Smith, aka ‘Smitty’ (Virgule Al Maury x Amenn) from Lynn Ashby.

Waitte has a specific agenda when vetting out a horse. “When a horse is recommended to us, we first ask for photos,” he said. We have a specific set of requirements as to confirmation for endurance. This would include shoulders at a certain angle, straight legs, etc. From that, if we like everything, including the price, we’ll make a physical inspection and ride the horse. If we decide to go forward, we have a complete vet exam and a set of x-rays.”

Heather Reynolds, barn manager and trainer at Hicks Creek Ranch is enthusiastic about their racehorse prospects. “When we go out to look at horses, our biggest resource is the

racetrack,” she said. Our theory is that if they held up through their racing, and they are still clean and clear, then that’s a tough horse.” (two photos of them at Fort Howes ride...Sir Smith)

She recalled going to Cre Run where they found Dream On and were hosted by Deb & Alan Kirshner. “When we got back,” she said, “Lynn Ashby gave us a call and said she had a really special horse for us. She said ‘take my word on this’. We liked his look from the photos. He’s a big brick of a horse with tree trunk legs, and a huge nostril. Lynn said that he was not good at the track distance. He came on too late, going like gangbusters as the leaders were heading under the wire. He needed a longer race.”

After many conditioning rides, Smitty started winning his 50-mile rides with ease. At his first 100-mile ride in the desert at the Git R Done ride at Inyokern, Ca., he blasted to first place in the fast time of 8 hrs, 42 minutes of ride time.

**

Valerie Kanavy, two-time World Endurance Champion, has had success with a number of Arabian ex-racehorses. Her 1998 World Endurance Champion horse, High Winds Jedi (Tut El Sakkara x Raf Silver Sonnet), had as great grandsire on the male side, *Sakr, known for his big trot and his love of running. Kanavy placed 7th at the 2002 Endurance World Cup on Bearcat O’Reilly (Wildcat Kelly x Aurtorch). Although Bearcat never raced, his sire line is Ibn Kontiki by Kontiki, a stakes winner who earned over \$100,000 at the racetrack. Shahdon (TYX x Shaheda Saba), Kanavy’s mount for the 2002 World Equestrian Games in Spain, also had done his time at the track before she found him. TYX is a Samtyr son.

A recent racehorse bred acquisition for Kanavy, Flash Flame (Flaming Tigre x Dyna Streak), won the 2005 Arabian Nights ride in Idaho in a time of 9 hrs. 8 minutes and received Best Condition.

“What I like is that the ex-racehorse has had a younger cardio vascular stretching,” said Kanavy. “The type of muscle that a younger horse has gives them more speed. Those youngsters that get that anaerobic work tend to have a more developed heart and lungs. “The horses that are bred and selected for the track are more athletic,” she said. “The race breeding blood lines are great.”

Kanavy is following the current trends in Arabian racing bloodlines and likes the bloodlines of Flaming Tigre and some of the newer imports. “The French horses that are now popular seem to have a quiet mind, “ she said.

Kathleen Downs represented the United States endurance team at the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen, Germany in August where she rode, her 1996 gelding, Pygmalion (Protocall x Provocative Lady), to the top finish by a US rider in 15th place. With over 9400 AERC race miles since 1986 and over 70 100-mile rides to her credit, Downs had had some success with Arabian racehorse when she purchased the Wiking grandson, Blew Away (Blew By You x MHF Cesjal) that she bought in 2004.

Downs is a registered nurse with summer headquarters in Somerset Maine. She trains for the winter months in Williston, Florida, near the burgeoning community of endurance riders that

surround the 100 miles of trails through the Goethe State Forest, and calls herself a 'working snowbird'. The added incentive of the nearby Arabian breeding and racing facility, Trackside Farms, is the icing on the cake.

"I went to Loren Nichols' Trackside Farm to see a horse that they had recommended," said Downs. Another horse caught her eye as he came in with the herd. Minor Merger, aka Virgil, (Virgule Al Maury x Maibeibi) had the look that she wanted and she knew right away that he was the horse she would take home. "I could see him thinking - thinking about coming in and thinking about how he could get some food," she said. "He had a nice body and a nice eye."

"I have had Virgil for a month and I could not be happier," said Downs. "He has the brains, the pulse, a nice body. I'm looking forward to working with him."

Beverly Gray of Park City, Utah, has finally been able to take home her "released" racehorse. Gray, with over 14,000 AERC recorded miles, wanted an FEI caliber endurance horse. "I've been watching Amazing Ku (Amazing Son x Monica Ku) since he was 2 years old," said Gray. "I love his steamroller attitude, his confirmation. I've been enthralled with him. I've watched him grow on the track."

(photo of Ku) (photo of Bev and Ku).

"I traded a filly for the colt prospect, Amazing Ku," said Kathy Smoke of Britton, Michigan, owner of Mokee Arabians. "Beverly Grey emailed me years ago about another race horse that I had advertised. She was originally quite skeptical about buying an ex-racehorse. It took a number of years for me to convince her that an ex-race horse is an excellent choice. They have a good heart, they are healthy and they are trained.

Years of emails passed and Beverly kept in touch with Kathy Smoke via email. When she asked again about ex-racehorses, Smoke sent her some photos of her horses out in the pasture. The Kodiak Kid (Sam Tiki x Easter IA x Wiking) was an opportunity that interested Gray. One of the photos showed Kodiak running with his pasture mate, Ku. "Send me more photos of the chestnut," Grey said. "I just have a gut feeling about him." Gray eventually bought The Kodiak Kid from Smoke but she kept track of the chestnut, Ku, while his winning race career continued.

"Amazing Son is a multiple stakes winner and truly an amazing colt," said Smoke from her Michigan farm. 'His get have a phenomenal work ethic ... I call them our blue collar workers they love to race, they never get sick, and they are strong."

"Amazing Ku is like his daddy", continued Smoke. "He is big boned. He has big feet and big nostrils. He's not 'typey', but he has a desire and a heart that won't quit. Every trainer has loved that horse."

She said that unlike some racehorses, Amazing Ku would not get discouraged if he didn't win. "He'd come back the next time and try just as hard," she said. "The older he got the more aggressive he became."

Amazing Ku won over \$56,000 on the track. “In the up and down life of a racehorse, Ku paid his way every single year”, said Smoke. “Many years Ku paid the way for some of the other horses, too.”

Smoke has re-conditioned other racehorses with talent. She remembers Solar Phlair (Sam Tiki x Glytter x *El Paso) as “a big 16-hand mover. He was very fluid.” Kat Olbrych, of Brownsville, Vermont, bought the horse she called ‘Hot Shot’, after his race career ended.

“I did a tremendous amount of groundwork and trail work with him,” said Olbrych. “We did a few schooling dressage shows where he did well, but my main goal was competitive trail. After taking a John Lyons horsemanship course, she had new tools to work with her ex-racehorse. “Hot Shot became my demonstration horse,” she said. “What better way to do this than with a beautiful and talented sixteen hand Arabian? He impressed people wherever he was seen with his big movement and playful personality.”

It is exciting to see the range of endeavors that can be accomplished by retired Arabian racehorses. They come from some of the finest athletic breeding money can buy. Their heart, loyalty, confidence, spirit, intelligence and competitive spirit can be refocused to include many new jobs. They already have a broad base of training, are conditioned and fine-tuned when they come off the track. Their work ethic, learned from a tender age, allows them to be great partners and work companions, no matter if you are in top-level competition or want a trustworthy trail horse.

Sidebar -

- * If you are considering purchasing an Arabian ex-racehorse -
A prospective owner typically can expect to spend \$1,800 -\$8,000 for a horse that has some retraining, depending on his race record and abilities.
- * It is important to work only with reliable and recommended sellers, breeders and trainers.
- * Have all prospective purchases examined by a qualified veterinarian and have x-rays taken.

Farms:

Mandolyn Hill Farm, Aubrey Texas
Michelle Morgan
Phone: (940)440-9359
Webpage: www.mandolyn.com

Sweet Talker Farms, Gainesville, Texas
Melissa Becker

Webpage: [http:// www.sweettalkerfarms.com](http://www.sweettalkerfarms.com)
Phone: (940)565-3032
Email: sweettalkerfarms@hotmail.com

Mokee Arabians, Britton, Michigan
Kathy Smoke
Phone: (517)423-3609
Website: <http://www.mokeeparabians.com>

Marlyn Meadow Racing, Middletown, Delaware
Lynn Ashby, trainer
Phone:# (302)378-8642 Farm
Email: ondemark@aol.com

Trackside Farms, Williston, Florida
Loren and Anita Nichols
Email: lnichols@webkraft.net

###