

Arabian Horse Strains

STRAIN (*Rasan* or “rope” in Arabic):

- Originated as a cultural feature of original Arabian horses not a scientific one.
- It is the means by which Bedouin horse breeding tribes identified the ancestry and authenticity of their Arabian horses.
- Strain names represent the female line of descent regardless of the sire line.
- Any number of reasons may be associated with the identifying features of a strain, from legendary stories, to family notoriety and in some instances behavior or physical features. These identifying features are not static and can evolve and change over long periods of time.

SUBSTRAIN (*Marbat*, in Arabic, which means “the place to which the ‘rope’ is tied”):

- The second or third names after a strain name such as: Saqlawi **Jidran**.
- The substrain usually further identifies authenticity, specific origin, or branches of a strain.
- Can be based on a family or clan breeding their own version of a strain.

For example:

The “Jidran” family bred the Saqlawi strain: Saqlawi Jidran.

It can even have more detail: A breeder named Ibn Sudan became noted for his Saqlawi Jidran, which then became Saqlawi Jidran Ibn Sudan. While another breeder, Ibn Al-Dirri became noted for his Saqlawi Jidran Ibn Al-Dirri (later becoming just Saqlawi Al-Dirri).

- Can be based on a legend.

For example the legend of the Kuhaylan Krush (Krush meaning “lamb’s stomach in Arabic):

One story relates that the Muteyr Bedouin had a particularly prized Keheileh Ajuz mare which had escaped from them, and would not return to her owner when called. Because she was a mare of great speed, the Bedu were unable to capture her so they devised a plan. They dug two holes in the sand, and lined each hole with a lamb’s stomach. They put water in one hole, and feed in the other. Each day, the mare would come to eat and drink at these two holes. Each day, the Bedu would drive one pole into the sand. Each pole was several yards away from the lamb’s stomach bowls, and each one was only a foot or so from the prior placed pole. Day-by-day, they began to build a paddock around the two bowls at such a slow pace that the mare did not seem to mind. Finally, the day came that the Bedu only had to plant one more pole to complete the enclosure. When the mare came to eat and drink, the Bedu rushed forward planting the last pole enclosing the mare. The Keheileh Ajuz mare was then renamed as the Keheileh Krush, in memory of the lamb stomachs which had lined the holes and held the precious feed and water for the mare.

Strains and Substrains in Contemporary Egyptian Breeding

<i>Tail Female Strain</i>	<i>Substrain and root female</i>	<i>Substrain other than in tail female</i>
<p>KUHAYLAN</p> <p>[The El Samraa female line, first listed as Saqlawi, was changed to Kuhaylan in current EAO records.]</p> <p>[Kuhaylan line to Nafaa of Inshass is rare.]</p> <p>[No substrain is given for either El Samraa or Nafaa.]</p>	<p>Jellabi <i>(as traditionally recorded by the RAS for the Bint Yamama line)</i></p> <p>Rodan Bint Rissala - RAS Bint Riyala - RAS</p> <p>Krush El Kahila - Inshass</p> <p>Halawi Bint Futna II - Hamdan Stud</p>	<p>Jellabi (Kazmeyn, Feysul, Ibn Yashmak)</p> <p>Mimreh (Mansour, Ibn Samhan, etc.)</p> <p>Ajuz (Rabdan El Azrak, Mashaan, etc.)</p>
<p>DAHMAN</p>	<p>Shahwan El Dahma - Ali Pasha Sherif Bint El Bahreyn - Khedive</p>	<p>Najib (Ibn Nura, Sahab and other Ali Pasha Sherif stallions)</p>
<p>HADBAN</p>	<p>Inzihi Venus - Shammar tribe</p>	
<p>SAQLAWI</p> <p>[Saqlawi lines to Sa'ud mares, Hind and Mabrouka of Inshass are rare. No substrains are given.]</p>	<p>Jidran (Ibn Sudan) Ghazieh - Abbas Pasha <i>(note: genetically Bint Yamama line is common to Ghazieh)</i> Roga El Beda - Ali Pasha Sherif</p>	<p>Shaifi (Badaouia, dam of Kheir)</p> <p>Ibn Al-Dirri (Basilisk, in pedigree of Hamran RAS)</p>
<p>ABAYYAN</p> <p>[Abayyan line to Bint Karima of Inshass is rare. No substrain given.]</p>	<p>Om Jurays El Mahroussa - Inshass</p>	<p>Sharrak (Saadoun, sire of Durra)</p>
<p>SHUWEYMAN [rare but still exists in female line]</p>	<p>Sabbah Folla - Hamdan Stud</p>	

SOME OTHER STRAINS in Egyptian breeding but not found in tail female line

Muniqi Hadruj

Muniqi Sbaili

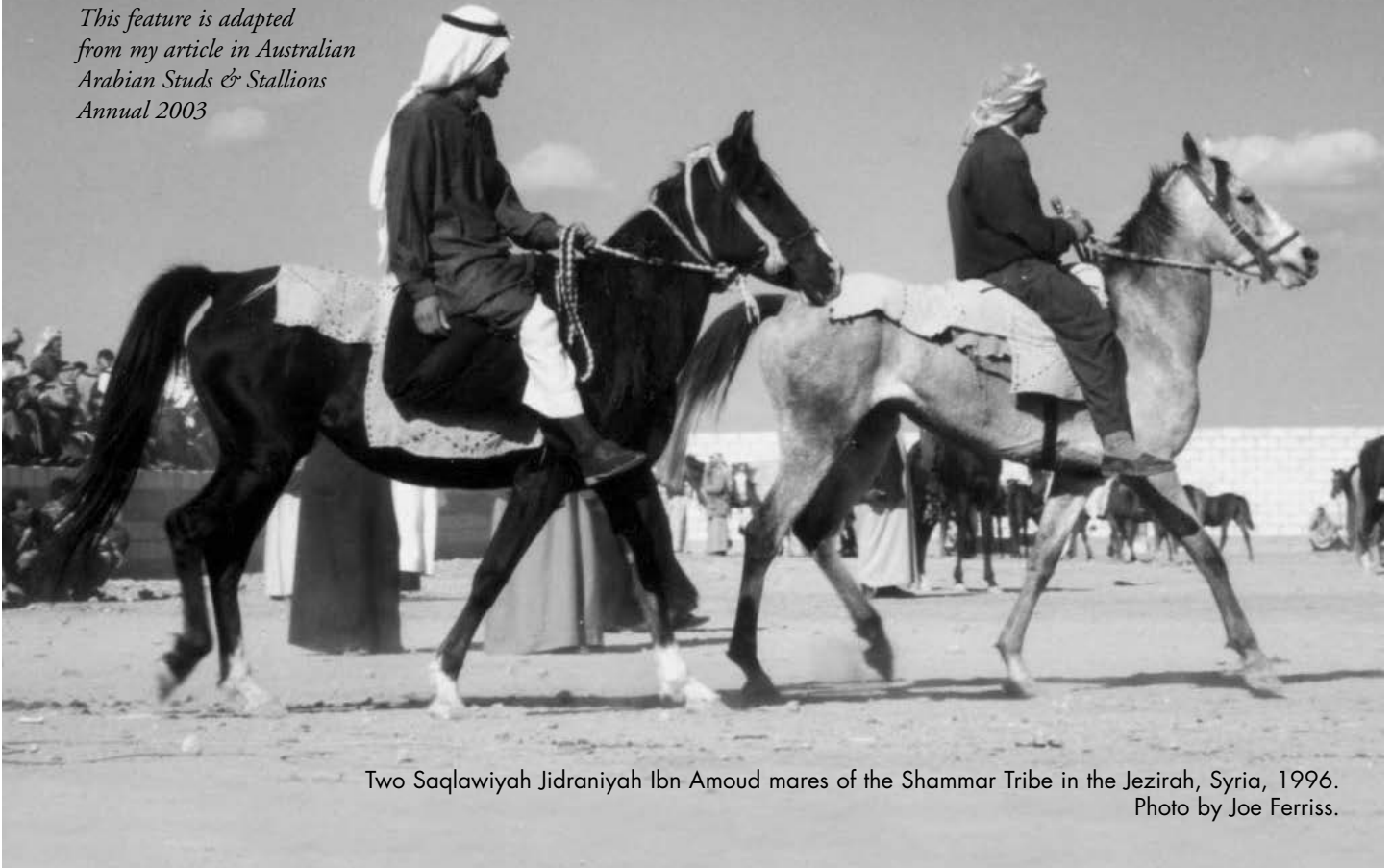
Hamdani Simri

Rabdan (sometimes referred to as "Kuhaylan Ajuz" Al-Rabdan)

The Concept of Strains in Arabian Horses

by Joe Ferriss

*This feature is adapted
from my article in Australian
Arabian Studs & Stallions
Annual 2003*



Two Saqlawiyah Jidraniyah Ibn Amoud mares of the Shammar Tribe in the Jezirah, Syria, 1996.
Photo by Joe Ferriss.

Recalling my past, the first time I remember hearing the word “strain” in relation to animals was when I was a young boy and I heard my grandfather Sidney Ferriss and my uncle Harold talking about grandpa’s dog breeding program. In the late 1930s my grandfather became a prominent breeder of Irish Terriers, Cheviot sheep and Percheron draft horses. Growing up in Detroit, Michigan as a boy, I was an automobile fanatic and didn’t know a thing about animals. It was a rare occasion when I visited my grandfather’s farm but here is where talk of animals and breeding was abound. When I heard the mentioning of “strain” in the context of dogs and sheep is seemed to me to be some sort of family description. In my young mind I likened it to model names of cars to distinguish them such as Chevrolet Impala, or Ford Focus. Some years later after

my grandfather’s passing, I married in 1969 a magical woman named Sharon who loved horses. By 1970 I found myself, city boy that I was, becoming involved with Arabian horses. The word “strain” was to surface again.

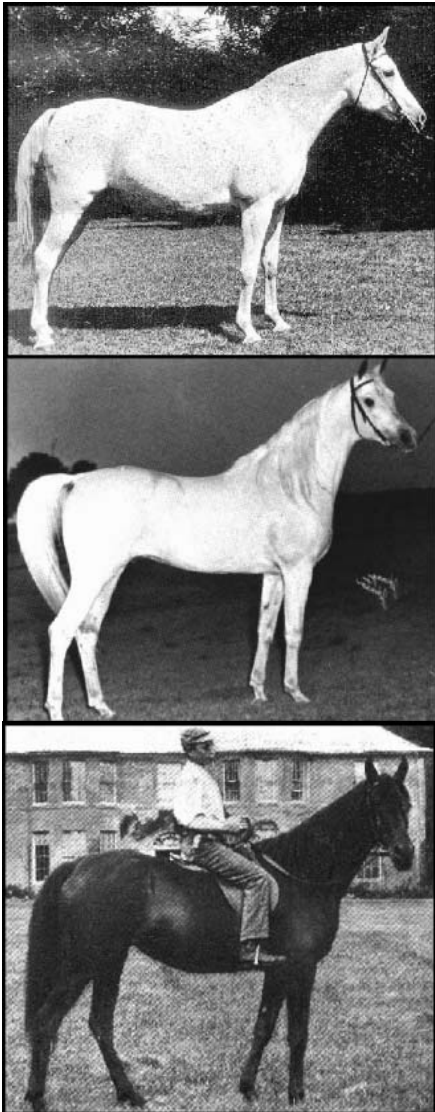
It is impossible to be involved with Arabian horses without being exposed to the long litany of its history mainly through the many books and magazines published. Reading about the Bedouin tribes, their culture and legend was thrilling to a new reader in the early 70s. Before long the more common strain names such as Kuhaylan, Hamdani, Hadban, Dahman, Saqlawi, Abayyan and Muniqi began to surface. Also I was to read that strain names have sub names (or substrain) too such as Saqlawi Jidran Ibn Sudan, meaning from a specific breeder, such as Ibn Sudan. As a new reader I found it

interesting that the strain name of an Arabian foal is handed down to it from its female line of descent, instead the sire line of descent common to European and Western customs.

For my birthday in 1971, Sharon gave me the second edition of the *Raswan Index* by Carl Raswan, a 3 volume publication profuse with writings about Arabian horse strains. This was followed soon by a holiday gift of Carl Raswan’s *The Arab and His Horse*. These two publications were filled with information relating to the strains of Arabian horses. The late Carl Raswan had become a legendary authority on Arabian horses having spend much of his life among the Bedouin tribes as well as procuring horses for many breeders internationally. His name and writings were quite familiar in the U.S. at that time.

Upon reading this material it became clear to me that Carl Raswan's position on strains was that they are distinctive types each with specific physical characteristics. He not only provided detailed descriptions about what many of the various strains of Arabians "look like" but provided a kind of formula for distilling the many physical variations of Arabians into 3 main general categories by strain name complete with a color coded chart. Pages 25-30 of Raswan's *The Arab and His Horse* presents and extensive fold out chart with photos that presents his formula the essence of which is displayed here.¹

For a visual learner like me this was wonderful to have some sort of pictorial formula to try and understand the variations. Carl Raswan's simple visual became popular thought among many



Some examples above based on Raswan's chart at right. Photos courtesy Judith Forbis

Egyptian and desert oriented breeders in the 1970s.

In Raswan's writings he had from time to time cited the importance of considering the **WHOLE** pedigree when applying his formula. The fact that a horse was of a certain strain but looked like another was explained by the influences in the rest of the pedigree. Raswan used a color coding system applying a different color for each strain to illustrate the composition of a whole pedigree. Through his color coding, he made it very visual as to the pedigree differences and similarities in total strain make-up.

His concept of strains as types became thoroughly woven into the thinking of many breeders. It was not uncommon to hear someone describe a compact, masculine horse as being very "Kuhaylan" in type, or likewise a refined, feminine horse described as very "Saqlawi" in type. To illustrate this trend of strain types visually I have prepared Chart 1 in this article which shows a range of "strain types" summarized from some non-Arab writers of the past including Raswan.

Raswan also claimed that some Bedouin bred their horses pure-in-the-strain which meant that stallions and mares of the same strain were mated

THE TWENTY STRAINS

What they represent, and how they are related to each other:

BLUE represents STRENGTH (KUHALAN BLOOD)

RED represents BEAUTY (SAQLAWI BLOOD)

BLACK represents SPEED (MUNIQI BLOOD)

<i>Strain</i>	<i>Related Strains</i>	<i>General Description</i>	
K	KUHAYLAN Kuhaylan Hamdani Hadban Shuwayman (+S) Wadnan (+S)	STRENGTH-TYPE: masculine muscular, wide across back, croup, chest, neck, forehead, and broad across forearm and gaskins. Even the mares are muscular-masculine.	Classic, Antique Type, with rounded outlines
S	SAQLAWI Saqlawi Abayyan Dahman (+K) Milwah Muwajj Rishan Tuwaysan	BEAUTY-TYPE: feminine elegant, fine boned, extremely handsome. The Parade and Show Type. Even the stallions are extremely beautiful-feminine.	
M	MUNIQI Muniqi Jilfan Abu Urqub (+K) Kubayshan (+K) Mukhalladi (+S) Rabdan (+S) Sadan (+S) Samhan (+K)	ANGULAR RACE-TYPE: with long lines (long back, long neck, long legs, and long, narrow head), also taller than the "Classic-Type" and also coarser (often ugly in appearance and temperament).	Long and Angular lines

The essence of a chart from Carl Raswan's *The Arab and His Horse*, found on page 28

to each other in succeeding generations. This was called "strain breeding" or "breeding within the strain". In essence when a stallion and mare of the same strain were mated they would be called "first generation pure-in-the-strain". When the results of these matings were then mated together it would be called "second generation pure-in-the-strain" and so on. These two concepts of strain breeding and strains as distinctive types became largely popular over the next two decades among many Egyptian and desert oriented breeders. The theory behind "strain breeding" was to get deeper into the chosen strain type and move further away from unrelated types within a breeder's program. In this approach it was not only desirable to have all ancestors be of similar type but also of the same strain.

Some of the details of Raswan's writing became over simplified or obscured as time passed to the point that many were embracing the notion that strains are a guarantee of specific types and some believed that a simple proven formula was at hand to solve the riddle of maintaining consistency in breeding Arabian horses. Unfortunately the science of genetics is not as easily managed as some followers of the strain breeding formula would hope. The concept of strains as specific types in reality was sometimes too hard to predict with certainty or to control consistently in the practice of "strain breeding" and gradually this gave rise to some skeptics.

By the 90's more people were traveling to the Middle East and areas previously less visited were being seen by more Western and European travelers. I happened to be one such traveler in 1996 visiting Jordan, Syria, The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. As with other visitors, notions we in the West had about Arabian strains from previous travelers writings were not supported by most of those interviewed in the Middle East. My previous learning was to be challenged by new information.

My travels with fellow members of the Arabian Horse Historians Association allowed me to spend some

time in the Jezirah region of Syria, visiting the Tai and Shammar tribes who still breed Arabians and maintain a keen knowledge of their long equine histories. Many of the photos of Arabians in this feature are from my journey. In interviews with both the Tai and Shammar tribes, strains were commonly discussed. However there was no indication that these strains had specific appearance features and in fact tribal leaders disputed that these strains were each a specific type. Often legends of speed, courage and nobility were related to certain strains but not "looks".

The Tai tribe was most hospitable and put on horse races in the desert for our intrigue. One of the chief stallions used by the Sheykh Mohamad Abdul Razak Al-Taiee of the Tai was a splendid grey Muniqi Hadruj whose appearance was nothing like Raswan's description of Muniqi type but more like his description of the Hadban strain. Later a Hamdaniyah Simriyah mare was presented to us which was more close to Raswan's description of the Muniqi. Wherever I traveled in Syria, Raswan's description of Muniqi did not fit what I saw, and likewise in the Arabian gulf. Raswan's description of the Muniqi was readily disputed by many even though they spoke with reverence about Raswan. The Bedouins and Arabs that I met simply disagreed with the whole notion of strains as types and said there is no real history to support it.

To digress here for a moment, why couldn't the range of type still be described in some generic scientific way to enable breeders to understand the actual variations of types that do surface when breeding Arabians? So even if the Arabs see strains separately from type, the concept of a "range of type" chart would still be useful for evaluative purposes as shown in Chart 2 in this article which eliminates the association with the strain names. I originally created Charts 1 and 2 in 1992 before going to the Middle East, as a way of being able to consider in a new light type variation even as questions had arisen challenging the "strain-type" theories.

While visiting the Shammar, we were given an extraordinary presentation of their prized strains. Horses were formally presented in groups of five at a time. This was a magnificent sight, riders and horses in colorful attire, bounding and prancing in style reminiscent of 19th century paintings. Larger groups of their strains included Saqlawi Jidran Ibn Amoud, and Hamdani Ibn Ghorab. Earlier it had been pointed out by the excellent authority on Bedouin horses, Mustafa Al-Jabri, that many of these substrain names such as Hamdani Ibn Ghorab can often change as a horse changes tribal or clan ownership, by example: a Saqlawi Al Abd acquired by Al-Rolah could be changed to Saqlawi Al-Rolah.²

The Shammar gave a special seminar in the "Hall of the Elders" regarding the histories of their Arabians. I was amazed to hear that their Rabda strain originated not from a Rabda mare but from a Muniqiyah Sbailiyah mare who distinguished herself in battle and having a curved feather mark on her forehead, all of her produce were then named from this particular "Rabda" mare. This indicated that a particular strain name could, in essence, originate from an offshoot of a different strain. What I realized is that strains are rooted in a cultural element, not a scientific one, which liberated me from the notion that a strain will always be a fixed notion of specific description.

Repeatedly, whether with the Tai, Shammar, or private and government breeders of Asil Arabian horses, their view of strains was based more on the character and prominence of a particular family, much like we would think of in famous human names such as Kennedy, Rockefeller, or Blunt. This then was their traditional Arab concept of strains, described as the "Rasan" or rope, shown in Chart 3 which I created after I returned from my travels. It was a fascinating way of looking at strains that I had not heard of before. In most regions we traveled in, this graphic represents the way strains were described. Family characteristics of courage, speed, nobility, agility, endurance, intelligence,

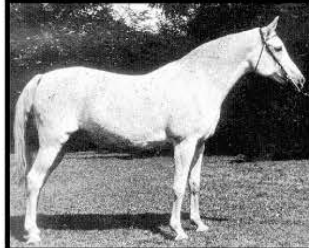
CHART 1

Masculine
or Compact,
Rounded
Lines



Feminine
and/or
stretchier,
longer lines

Some photos courtesy Judith Forbis



Strains as types based on some Western & European travelers previous descriptions

“HAMDANI” TYPE

An exaggeration of the compact, rounded line, masculine end of the scale. Very strong, very circular, rounded lines.

“KUHAYLAN” TYPE

Round, circular flowing lines, depicting strength.

“DAHMAN” TYPE

flowing lines, strength, balanced with some refinement

“HADBAN” TYPE

strength, but slightly longer lines, with great depth

“SAQLAWI” TYPE

longer lines, more refinement throughout

“ABAYYAN” TYPE

Very refined, long serpentine like qualities

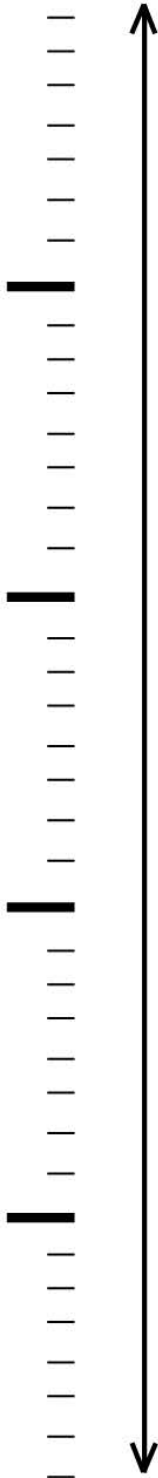
“MUNIQUI” TYPE

An exaggeration of the longer, stretchier end of the scale. Long, angular, relatively straight lines throughout

European and western travelers of the past have sought to offer a formula for organizing and describing the range of desert type they observed. In the writings of these travelers, these descriptions of type were often associated with certain families or strains since so much emphasis was placed by Bedouin on the strain or tail female line of a family.

CHART 2

Masculine or Compact, Rounded Lines



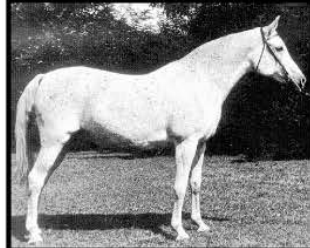
Feminine and/or stretchier, longer lines



Range of Arabian type identified by letter code rather than strain name

TYPE A

An exaggeration of the compact, rounded line, masculine end of the scale. Very strong, very circular, rounded lines.



TYPE B

Round, circular flowing lines, depicting strength.



TYPE C

flowing lines, strength, balanced with some refinement



TYPE D

strength, but slightly longer lines, with great depth



TYPE E

longer lines, more refinement throughout



TYPE F

Very refined, long serpentine like qualities



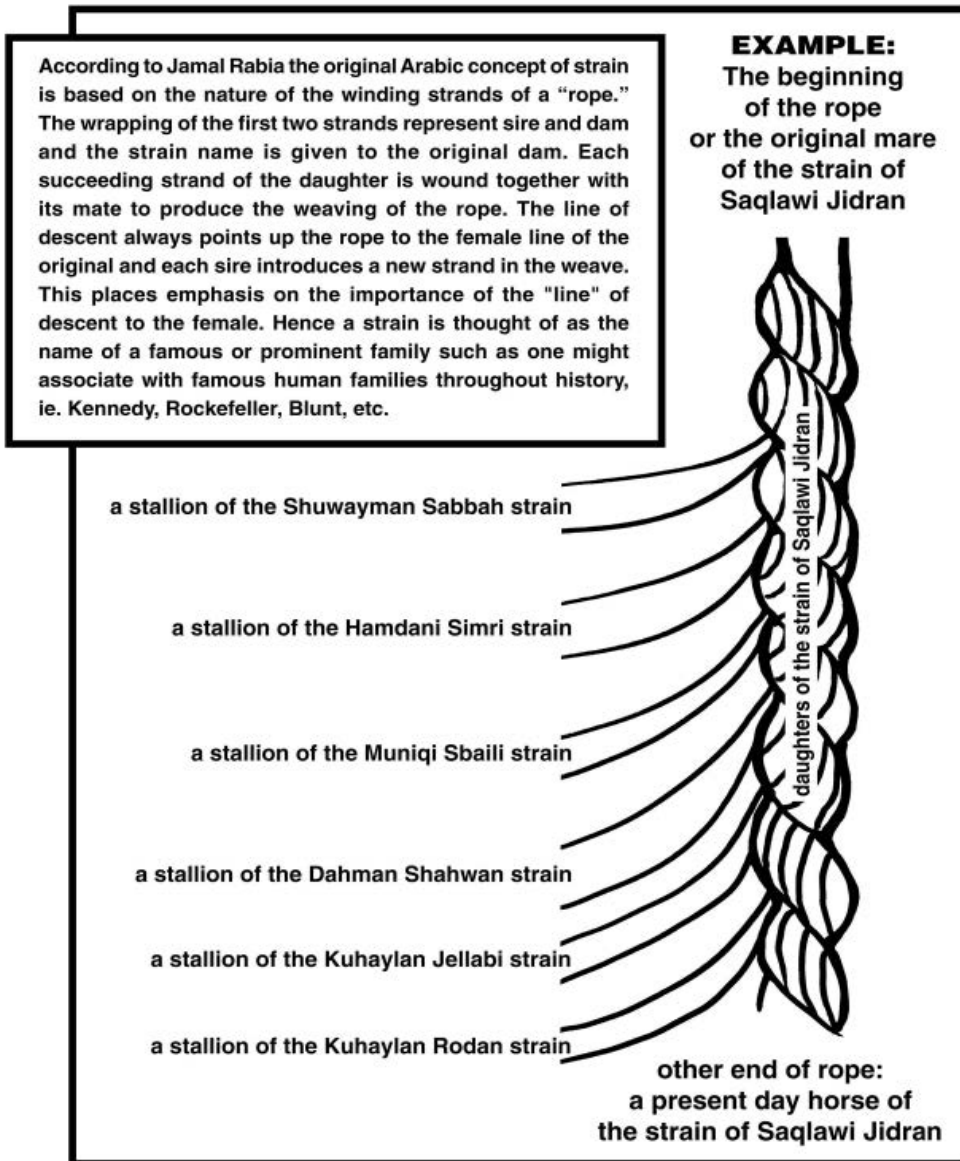
TYPE G

An exaggeration of the longer, stretchier end of the scale. Long, angular, relatively straight lines throughout

Looking at it from a purely scientific view these are the normal parameters of desert type regardless of what strain name is attached. If a particular family has a consistent look it is likely to contain a large number of similar looking individuals or one strong individual ancestor is exerting the major influence (probably through line breeding to that individual).

CHART 3

The Traditional Bedouin concept of "Rasan" or "Rope" of Arabian Strains



or other qualities not photographable were more traditionally associated with certain strains than actual appearance of the horse.

When they were queried about the notion of "strain breeding" or breeding same strain to same strain for several generations, tribe members and Arab breeders we spoke with repeatedly frowned on this. To them it was not desirable to breed any line too close and hasn't been done for a very long time accordingly.

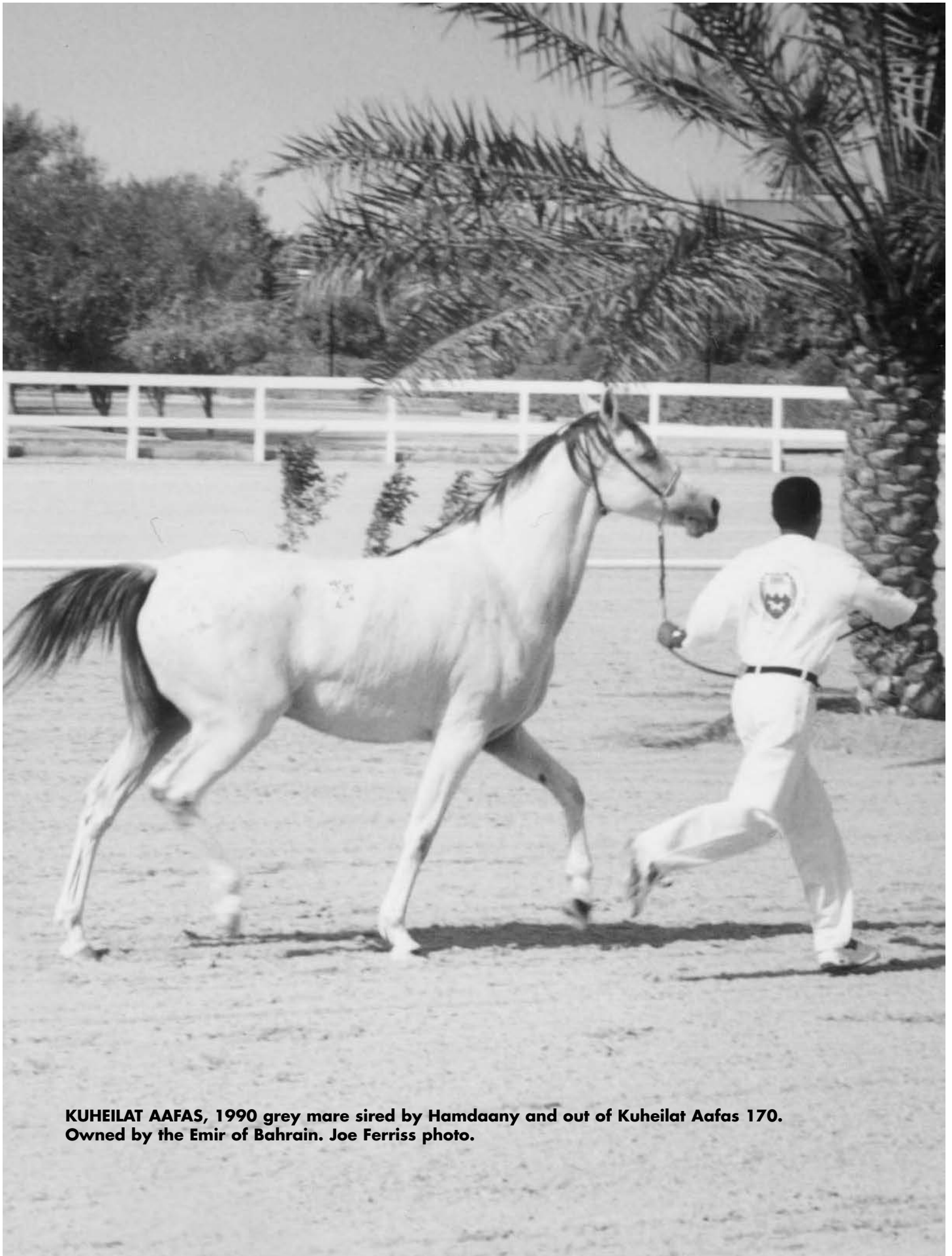
It would be unfair to negate all that Raswan wrote on the subject strains based on later travels. Things could be

clearly different now than in his day even through the tribes have struggled to maintain their way of life. If he could have lived longer and traveled in different regions he certainly would have written more on the subject. It must be appreciated that he laid in an enlightening framework for understanding the range of Arabian type, even if it is not tied directly to strains in the broader sense. In fact the subject of Arabian strains is a very complex one with a very long and evolving history. One will probably never have the final word on the subject and an amalgam of all that has been written on the sub-

ject would likely fill a library.

In this age of internet communication, increased travel, and new learning from various Middle Eastern sources, increasingly we hear from native Arab breeders and writers that strains are NOT synonymous with types.

So what is right? First, one must remember that the culture and its people are ultimately the ones who define what comes from them. However, within individual families or strains of a very strong influence, one type may become popular and be fixed by repeated use of that strain or family, whether in appearance, character, or athletic



KUHEILAT AAFAS, 1990 grey mare sired by Hamdaany and out of Kuheilat Aafas 170. Owned by the Emir of Bahrain. Joe Ferriss photo.



A Muniqi Hedruj stallion of the Tai.



A Muniqiyah Sbailiyah mare owned by Abdul Muhsin Nasif.



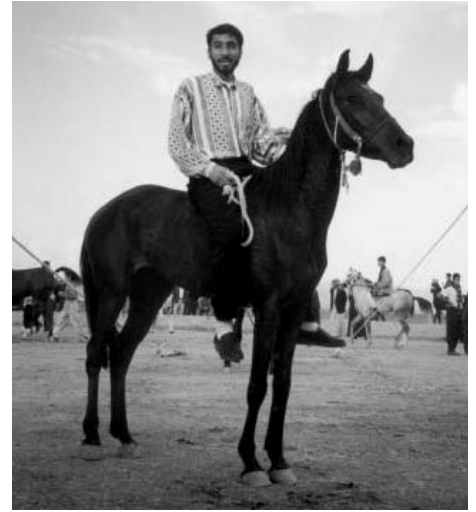
Atiyah, a Muniqi Sbaili Ibn Safain stallion owned by Basil Jadaan



A young Muniqiyah Sbailiyah mare at the Basil Al-Assad stud in Damascus.



Ma'anaghieh 981, yearling filly in the stud of the Emir of Bahrain.



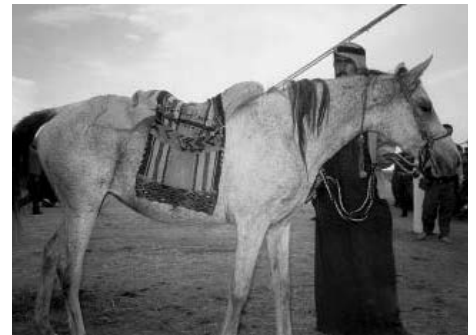
A Hamdaniyah Simriyah mare of the Tai tribe.



A Hamdaniyah Ibn Ghorab mare of the Shammar tribe.



Hassan, a Hamdan Simiri stallion owned by Hisham Ghrayeb.



A Shuwaymah Sabbah mare of the Tai tribe.



Shuwaimaan 800, stallion owned by the Emir of Bahrain.

All photos on this page are by the author, taken at different times under different circumstances. Though not to be compared to today's show horse photos, these illustrate the range of variety found within same, similar or related strains.

References:

- 1 Raswan, Carl. *The Arab and His Horse*, 1955, Published by the author, pp. 24-31
- 2 Al-Jabri, Mustafa. "Origins of Strains and the Bedouin's Breeding Method" *Khamsat* Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 57.

ability. Arabian breeders of the past just as those of the present who commit themselves to breeding to a vision of their ideal will always develop an identity. For this reason female lines

that emerge as strong families will always "lay in a rope" of their own uniqueness whether by strain or any other name.