

## ARABIAN HORSE DISTANCE RIDING ASSOCIATION – “The Desert and Now”

They came from all walks of life: doctors, nurses, and veterinarians; school teachers and laborers; housewives and retired armed forces servicemen; horse farm managers and steel mill workers. They left all other disciplines, from polo to performance horses to the show ring. They had two things in common. They loved the Arabian horse, and they loved the sport of distance riding. Some of them are still around, still riding their elegant mounts in 25, 50 and 100 mile races all over the country. Some of them are retired from the sport but cherish the memories of days gone by. Still others have left us, but left behind stories that will be retold around campfires and at awards ceremonies forever. They are the men and women who founded the Arabian Horse Distance Riding Association, AHDRA.

John McDonald, a breeder of Arabian Show horses and the Wisconsin Arabian Horse Association (WAHA) delegate to IAHA, took a bold leap in the early 1970's by stepping out of the show ring and entering the world of the Upper Midwest Endurance and Competitive Rides Association (UMECRA). Eighteen years after Wendell Robie started the Tevis Cup, the oldest endurance race in the country, UMECRA was founded. In 1972, UMECRA sanctioned 6 weekends of rides, with competitive on Saturday and endurance on Sunday, in four Midwest states—Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota. Many of John's friends and neighbors were active UMECRA members. He invited Bonnie Kaufman and Virginia Rice, well-known and successful distance riders at the time, to attend a WAHA meeting and give a talk about distance riding. John's wife, Marian, had a gelding named Flint, by Habu, and John considered him too hot for the show ring. “We had to do something else with him or sell him,” Marian says. After hearing Bonnie and Virginia talk, Marian decided to condition Flint as a distance horse. “And the rest is history,” John says.

A few years later, John talked WAHA into including a distance division to the Year-End Awards. He devised a point system similar to UMECRA's. In 1978, Bonnie Kaufman's SA Maxzi (Sterling Pride x Ray Fana) won high point gelding over all, and Bonnie won high point exhibitor. “After that, the point system was changed so that a distance rider could never get the big award no matter how many rides you won,” recalls Bonnie, now Mielke, still a well-known and successful distance rider. As a result, it seemed that a distance rider was not having a fair voice in the Arab world while belonging to a show dominated club. The need for an Arabian distance riding organization arose, and once again, it was John and Marian McDonald who stepped up to the plate.

In 1978, John, then President of UMECRA, called a board meeting to be held at his house. Where else would you hold board meetings in those days except around kitchen tables with big cups of coffee and other Wisconsin beverages in hand? Taking notes on scratch pads and paper napkins, a handful of dedicated individuals outlined the bylaws for AHDRA. As Article II of the Bylaws states: “The purpose of the organization is to promote and encourage the use of the Arabian horse in distance riding and the activities of endurance riding, competitive trail riding, and pleasure trail riding, sports in which the breed naturally excel.” In January of 1979, the completed bylaws were submitted to and accepted by the International Arabian Horse Association (IAHA). Dr. Robert Beecher, an Iowa veterinarian and the chair of the Endurance/Competitive division of IAHA, was the first club President. John McDonald was Vice President, and an Illinois P.E. teacher, JoAnne Gernant, was Secretary/Treasurer.

Article III outlined the eligibility for membership. It stated, and still does to this day, “Membership is open to any individual or two or more individuals from the same household interested in promoting the Arabian horse in the sport of distance riding. Membership will be either as an Affiliate or an Associate.” One of the benefits of joining AHDRA as an Affiliate Member was that it included a membership in IAHA. This “perk” is still in existence, although IAHA is now the all-encompassing Arabian Horse Association (AHA). With this new club, distance riders passionate about their breed were allowed representation in AHA as a distance discipline. AHDRA is still allowed delegate representation. Members' mounts are eligible for Sweepstakes monies, and members can now participate in specific AHA Distance Programs. Numerous Arabians, who have never set hoof in an arena, have earned Legion of Merit titles through distance rides.

AHDRA sanctioned their first ride with the American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) and UMECRA in 1980. At the same time, UMECRA rides were growing in popularity and attendance. Many

UMECRA members were also AHDRA members, so much so that AHDRA considered UMECRA her Big Sister organization. Some other local clubs were not so successful, like the Iowa Arab Association that sponsored a distance race in the 1970's. The premiere award at that race was a handsome three-foot traveling trophy donated by Harry McGlothlen and awarded to the first purebred Arabian gelding to cross the finish line. But who was Harry McGlothlen and why is he so important to AHDRA and distance riding?

The history of the Arabian horse is available on AHA's website ([www.arabianhorses.org](http://www.arabianhorses.org)); in the navigation bar under Education, click on Breed History, then "In the US ARMY?" The article covers a brief history of the US Cavalry Remount Trials. During this period, representatives and supporters of many horse breeds challenged the army to endurance rides in hopes of proving their breed's worth. Mr. Harry McGlothlen, while not mentioned in the article, competed with his Arab mare at rides in Vermont in the later years of these trials. When he returned home to Iowa, he continued to support the natural abilities of his beloved Arabian horses and offered the trophy at the local race. The reasons why he chose to stipulate geldings are not for certain, but older AHDRA members believe it was McGlothlen's desire to show the gelding's value. Show breeders, who were interested in keeping "the best of the best", sold the majority of their horse colts. Perhaps McGlothlen wanted to prove that these breeding by-products had worth and value outside of the show ring.

When one looks at this trophy, the names—both human and equine—read like a "Who's Who" of the Endurance world. The first recipient in 1973 was AERC Hall of Fame member Louise Riedel riding her AERC Hall of Fame horse, Caprison. In 1979, Bonnie Kaufman and her horse, Maxzi, won the trophy. That year was also the last year for the Iowa club. McGlothlen then donated the trophy to AHDRA, and for the next 15 years, the trophy was awarded at the AHDRA sanctioned ride in Cascade, Iowa. In 1981, 82, and 83, the winner of the trophy was Jan Worthington on her all time favorite horse, Dan Yankee; besides being one of the original members of AHDRA, Jan has seen and done it all in the world of Endurance Riding—she has been named to National, Pan-Am, and World Teams numerous times. In 2011 she was inducted into the AERC Hall of Fame; in 2012 she was inducted into the UMECRA Hall of Fame. Although McGlothlen had stated that any horse and rider team to win the award three years in a row could claim it permanently, Jan chose to keep the trophy in circulation.

The next year, 1984, it was won by Joey Mattingley. Joey is the son of Grace Ramsey, Jan's close friend and business partner. Also an original AHDRA member, Grace is every bit as visible in the Endurance world as is Jan, but she is usually in the position of coach or crew. Interestingly enough, she was riding in 1984 when her son won the trophy. Things didn't go according to plan that year. Grace was on her beloved Ahab and was supposed to win, but young Joey on his spooky horse Czar Louis (called "Screwy Louis" by those who knew him) was encouraged by a throng of young fans to race his mom. He did, and he won. Joey and Louis went on to be the first UMECRA team to ever compete outside of the continent when he was chosen to represent the US at the World Equestrian Games in Sweden. His mom finally forgave him. The next year, the trophy was kept in the family when Grace's daughter, Wendy, won on CL Shurwill.

In 1990, the trophy went to a local rider, Herb Dolphin. He wasn't the winner of the race that year, but he was the first eligible finisher. Lori Windows was first across the line, about ten minutes ahead of Herb on a partbred Morgan/Arab cross named Flares Black Jack. Behind Herb was Joey on a big, ugly, knobby-kneed purebred named Galamon. This coarse headed Arab belonged to Jim "Nutsy" Leick, the host of the ride and owner of the property on which the riders camped. Jim so wanted to see his horse win the trophy, and felt that with a rider as capable as Joey, Galamon stood a chance despite his 17 years. After the ride, Lori felt Galamon represented everything McGlothlen wanted to prove with his incentive trophy. An Arab need not be *show* quality to be the embodiment of quality. Lori bought Galamon that fall, and for the next three years (his 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup>), the two of them took the trophy home.

The following year, 1994, the Cascade ride sponsored the IAHA Regional Endurance Championship. Lori had a new horse, Ibn Ben Bask—a little miss-marked son of Ben Bask and a Bask grandson on both sides. He was bred by Jean Atherton of Walnut, Illinois, but was undersized and had white in all the wrong places, but he was a Sweepstakes horse. Lori handed the trophy over to management when she arrived at the race—certain it was out of her hands for good. There were lots of horses there, all

after the lucrative Sweepstakes money. But once again, McGlothlen's idealism shone, and when "Benny" and she returned home that weekend, the trophy came with them. In 1995, Bonnie Kaufman was back with a new name, Mielke, and a new horse, Pieraaz (Pierscien x LL Windsong). Bonnie had wed another original AHDRA member, Bob Mielke, and he had bought Pieraaz for her after she rode the flashy horse at the 1994 IAHA National Championship in New Mexico when he was still owned by Jan Worthington and Grace Ramsey.

The year 1995 was also the last year for the Cascade ride. By this time, AHDRA managed two to four rides a year and the McGlothlen trophy made the trip from Iowa to Illinois to be awarded at the first AHDRA ride of the year. In 2005, another rider came back with a name change and new horse—Joey Mattingley, now all grown up, had become Joe Mattingley, and he was now riding SA Laribou. He reclaimed the trophy after a 21 year break, won it again in 2006, and then went on to represent the US at the World Equestrian Games in Germany. Needless to say, many equines and humans have not only engraved their names on a trophy, but also in AHDRA and the endurance world history. For more on McGlothlen recipients and a complete list, please refer to the AHDRA website and read the names and stories of all the winners.

In October of 2008, AHDRA hosted the AHA National Competitive Trail Championship. It was quite an undertaking for manager, Tony Troyer, and one that he accomplished with style. Premiere riders and horses came from all over the eastern half of the country. The trail was challenging, the vetting impeccable, the food and facilities comfortable, and the awards impressive. It was a great experience for all who attended. AHDRA has come a distance from John McDonald's kitchen table.

As we enter a new year of competition, we are striving to increase our membership base. AHDRA would love to become a truly national organization, for although we have a few members in the west and the far south, most of our members live and compete in the Midwest. More memberships create a greater say in AHA, and more of a chance to promote our sport.

Why join AHDRA? First of all, to make your voice heard. Currently we have two delegates to AHA. The programs AHA offers to members are many and varied for the distance rider. AHDRA's Year-End Awards are impressive. Blankets, chairs, jackets, rain coats—all with attractive embroidering—are in evidence at distance rides all over the county. Watch for them! Every member of AHDRA has a vote in the management of the club. It is a member-run organization.

Rick Nelson, past UMECRA and AHDRA President, has been a distance rider most of his life, riding his horse across the hills of Nebraska where he grew up long before he had a driver's license. In his late 60's, Rick still competes and volunteers at numerous rides throughout the year. While researching this article several original members were asked why they like the Arabian horse so much. Rick replied, "Because they are the most capable and willing to do the work I want them to do; because they are the most *willing* to make me happy." The Arabian—beautiful, graceful, intelligent, the very epitome of endurance. There is no day which seems so wrong that spending time with our Arabs can't make right.