

# ARABIAN HORSE WORLD PRESENTS



## Grand Arabians Linda Mehney

B Y M A R Y J A N E P A R K I N S O N

**M**uch like a child impatiently waiting for Christmas, Linda Mehney looks forward to foaling season and probably marks the calendar each day until the first of her mares is due to foal. Since 1983 and the high of the first Mehney-bred foal, Linda finds more and more joy in each foaling season, never less. “Each foaling is a high for me,” says Linda. “I can’t wait to see how that carefully planned creature will look, move, and react to people, to see which qualities come through from each parent. An experience you can’t beat.” Linda has reveled in that high nearly 100 times.

As a horse-crazy child, Linda did the usual activities associated with that state of mind: borrowing horses, renting horses, racing horses, overnights, and gymkhana events. Then in high school, hot-walking a boyfriend’s Arabian and to be allowed to just sit on that Arabian (without touching the reins) was a thrill beyond thrills.

After college, Linda met and married Dave Mehney, a Grand Rapids, Michigan, entrepreneur. Linda was most understanding when their children (five sons, one daughter) begged for a pony, so they got ponies and an assortment of riding horses. In the early 1980s, Dave and Linda’s oldest son wanted the experience of raising a foal, so Linda and Dave bought a pregnant seven-eighths Arabian mare. She needed a barn of course, and a pasture, and that led to the purchase of a small farm with a five-stall barn.

With that, Linda began educating herself about the Arabian breed. She found a willing instructor in Toik Halberg (Halberg Arabians, Iron, Minnesota) and Linda credits him with much of her success. Linda, Toik, and Leila Halberg spent hours at local shows, Toik tutoring her in the study of Arabians. They ranked each class from the bleachers and analyzed each entry for conformation and motion. “Toik was such a great breeder, teacher, and friend, and I still have ten horses related to the mares

I purchased from him,” Linda notes. Linda studied every piece of paper on Arabians that she could buy or borrow. Through these studies, she developed standards she would apply to her own breeding program.

The Mehney interest soon sent Linda and Dave shopping. (“Just looking,” you know.) At Midwest, Bob Boggs presented \*Padron, United States and



*Grand Arabians’ foundation mares, Hal Ane Versare (Hal Thats Amore x G-Amaka), and Hal Mio Mi (Hal Thats Amore x Hal G-Wisz), purchased from Toik Halberg. Hal Ane Versare produced Padrons Mahogany, a fancy bay colt by \*Padron.*



Canadian National Champion Stallion. “I just melted,” Linda remembers, “the most charismatic creature I’d seen in my life.” Two Halberg mares were at Midwest to be sold: Hal Ane Versare (Hal Thats Amore x G-Amaka by G-Amigo) a.k.a. “Annie,” and Hal Mio Mi (Hal Thats Amore x Hal G-Wisz by \*Derwiz). When Dave and Linda came home from that just-looking trip, they were owners of Hal Mio Mi and a \*Padron syndicate share. Hal Mio Mi produced a filly for the Mehneys and, as they learned later, Hal Ane Versare produced Padrans Mahogany, a fancy bay colt by \*Padron.

So the Mehneys were well out of the just-looking mode. In 1985, they bought Hal G Melody (\*Hal Gazal x G-Amaka by G-Amigo), a full sister to Hal Gibby, Canadian National Reserve Champion Western Pleasure and United States and Canadian Top Ten Stallion.

Naming the Arabian horse venture was easy: “Grand Arabian Farms.” The farms include a second facility at nearby Gun Lake. In earlier years, Linda and her children enjoyed trail rides there. Eight years ago, the Mehneys built a new barn there and the farm is a second setting for the breeding program. “The farm has a lot of land, land just right for family trail rides. Plus more pastures,” says Linda. “The second farm is particularly useful when we wean foals. We leave the weanlings at the Grand Rapids farm and move the mares to the lake. They love it there. This arrangement seems to cause a minimum of stress for both mares and foals.”

Since that first foaling, that one-horse, one-barn, small-farm operation has developed into an internationally respected breeding operation with abundant show wins to back up the reputation of the Mehneys as breeders.

*Padrons Mahogany (\*Padron x Hal Ane Versare by Hal Thats Amore), sire of 373 U.S. registered purebreds and 30 Half-Arabians — eighteen of the purebreds have wins at U.S., Canadian, Youth and Sport Horse Nationals. Mahogany himself brought in the titles Canadian National Top Ten Futurity Colt, Class A Show Champion Halter and English Pleasure Horse, and Scottsdale Champion Get of Sire. He is pictured with Joy Hatten up. Joy has worked for Grand Arabians for 22 years. Everyone at the farm is mourning the recent passing of Mahogany and will forever hold him close to their hearts.*

Two Grand Arabian stallions — Padrans Mahogany (\*Padron x Hal Ane Versare by Hal Thats Amore) and Minotaur (\*Menes RASB x Amurath Selari by \*Ramses Fayek) — found their fame and the fame of their progeny at Grand Arabian Farms.

Soon after Padrans Mahogany was foaled, Bob Boggs sent snapshots to Linda and pointed out to her what she had missed by not buying both the Halberg mares when they were offered. He was convincing, Linda remembers, and at Scottsdale 1987 Dave negotiated with Don Boggs for three days to buy Annie. When Mahogany was a yearling (shortly after she’d purchased Annie), Linda saw him, beautifully presented in his floral collar and ribbons from a recent junior championship. Bob felt strongly that Linda should buy him. Linda remembers: “I kept hearing the phrase ‘chance of a lifetime,’ and in opposition, ‘Why buy this colt when we have the factory to produce another like him?’ Eventually the ‘lifetime’ argument won out and Dave and I, along with friends and business associates, formed a small syndicate to buy the colt.” Mahogany has lived at Grand Arabians ever since, with occasional treks to shows and special showings. “I have never doubted the wonder of this animal,” says Linda. “He is always well-mannered, and only had to be shown once what to do in the showring, in the breeding shed, and day-to-day living on the farm.” In the show arena, Mahogany brought in the titles Canadian National Top Ten Futurity Colt, Class A Show Champion Halter and English Pleasure Horse, and Scottsdale Champion Get of Sire.

In 1995, Linda (by then an accomplished and astute shopper) went looking for a stallion for the Mahogany daughters and to buy a breeding package for her clients. After a few trips to breeding farms in Europe, she came to appreciate the worth of the \*Menes RASB progeny. Those thoughts led her to the 1986 bay stallion Minotaur owned by Roger Belton of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. On a cold, cold April day, Linda saw Minotaur sons and daughters and the stallion himself and was completely taken by him. The owner, Roger, promptly informed her that his kids, the dog, and Minotaur were not for sale. Later, he recognized the opportunities that would be afforded Minotaur as a sire in the Grand Arabian Farms setting, and by October 1987 Minotaur was the property of the Minotaur Syndicate (a partnership of Roger and Linda).



*Left: Minotaur (\*Menes RASB x Amurath Selari), with Keith Krichke. "Minotaur loves kids," says Linda Mehney. "I really was sold on him when I got the video from Roger Belton who owned him, showing his 11-year-old daughter riding him. The girls would go into his stall and wrap their arms around his front legs. It made me nervous but Roger assured me that Minotaur would never hurt them. In the 14 years we have had him we have found this to be true. When a foal is born we will walk it down to his stall and he talks softly to it. He is just a love."*

*Bottom right: GA Grand Geronimo (EVG Gentry x GA Bey Ane Versare by Bey Shah), a 2008 chestnut colt, brought in some fancy halter wins this year: a Class A championship, Region 13 Reserve Champion, and Canadian Top Ten.*



*GA Mi Grandlady (Minotaur x WN Mahogany Lady by Padrons Mahogany) and her 2010 foal Mi Grand Valentino [pending] by DA Valentino.*



"I have several Mahogany daughters that have crossed exceptionally well with Minotaur, producing halter champions and western pleasure winners, and several that have done well in open reining," says Roger. "My own riding gelding Mentor is a beautiful, tall, and athletic horse who has won at both halter and western pleasure. He is by Odyssey SC out of my champion Minotaur daughter Mi Miss Moxie, a Regional and Class A winner. My Minotaur horses are like their sire — pretty, athletic, and great-minded." On the partnership with Linda, Roger notes: "I'm so lucky to be in partnership with someone of impeccable integrity. She is a shining light in the breed."

Minotaur arrived at Grand Arabians with the halo of 40 halter championships and 20 first places in most-classic competition, then went on to United States and Canadian Top Ten Stallion, Region 13 Champion Stallion, and Regions 8 and 5 Reserve Champion Stallion. Keith Krichke, who showed Minotaur to his National wins, says of the stallion: "Minotaur's warm personality, along with his great physical attributes, made him an exciting individual to present at the National level. I thank Linda Mehney for giving me the opportunity to show Minotaur. He was a tremendous show horse and he aided in launching my career."

Both Padrons Mahogany and Minotaur are now 24 and retired from breeding outside mares. Minotaur's injury from a trailer accident, on the way to Nationals, slowed him down. "We weren't sure if he'd be able to walk, let alone show again," Linda remembers, "but he bounced back. He lives in our front pasture where he can see his mares and daily activities on the farm. He is such a good stallion and enjoys all the attention he gets from everyone. It doesn't matter if it is rainy or cold, he is a happy horse. On the other hand, we spoiled Mahogany and when it starts to rain, he wants into his shelter. He still thinks he is a two-year-old and never disappoints us when we turn him loose for visitors. We love them both, and they will be with us all their lives."

Waiting in the wings are two two-year-olds that Linda will use in her program. GA Grand Geronimo (EVG Gentry x GA Bey Ane Versare by



*Left: PS Rose Mahogany (Padrons Mahogany x VP Elation), a 2000 chestnut mare, owned by Marci and Paul Meheuw, Grass Valley, California. She was 2004 Canadian National Champion Mare AAOTH.*

*Below: GA Master Mahogany (Padrons Mahogany x DLC Barbarella), a 1995 bay gelding, with Linda Mehney and her granddaughter Riley up.*



*Left: GA Grand Odysseous (Odyssey SC x GA Mi Grandlady), a 2006 chestnut stallion, pictured in 2007 at Region 13 where he was named Reserve Champion Yearling Colt. He is now being trained in western pleasure and is headed back to the showing in 2011.*

Bey Shah), brought in some fancy halter wins this year: a Class A championship, Region 13 Reserve Champion, and Canadian Top Ten. GA G-Wisz Brilliance (MPA Giovanni x GA Gwisz Mahogany by Padrons Mahogany) is a Regional Yearling Sweepstakes Champion and a 2010 Scottsdale Top Ten. He'll be at Scottsdale 2011 with trainer Keith Krichke.

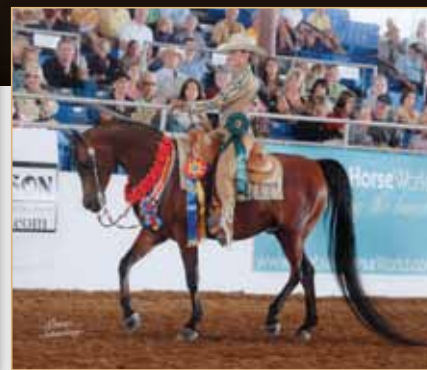
Three up-and-coming youngsters are headed for show competition: Mi Grand Valentino (DA Valentino x GA Mi Grandlady by Minotaur), a 2010 colt on his way to Scottsdale; Grand Anastasia (DA Valentino x GA Mi Annastasia by Minotaur), a 2010 bay filly, going to Sweepstakes competition in 2011; and GA Galileo (EVG Gentry x GA Bey Ane Versare), a 2009 chestnut colt who was Top Ten at the Minnesota Fall Festival, and will go to Scottsdale with Andy Sellman.

Linda has taken full advantage of the learning available through visiting foreign breeding programs, and she has visited many farms in several European countries. "I have a lot of respect for the Polish breeding programs," she says. "The Poles are real students of pedigree and are accomplishing outstanding results. It was wonderful seeing what each stallion contributed to his foals, as well as the merits of the mare lines coming

through the generations. When I returned home from the Polish National Show, I bought \*Perkusja (\*Wojslaw x Premiera by \*Piechur), a pure Polish mare, from Tomasz Skotnicki, and she produced a wonderful filly by Padrons Mahogany that we sold." European breeders who utilized the Mehneys' semen depot there were objects of Linda and Dave's visits to several countries. In Argentina they visited with Gina Pelham and saw a Mahogany daughter loving her new home there. "We sold a colt (O Danny Boy) to New Zealand and were most fortunate to watch him win the championship at the New Zealand Nationals," Linda recalls. "Clients have become friends and several have come to the United States for visits. GA Marlana Bey (\*Marwan El Shaqab x GA Bey Ane Versare by Bey Shah) was sold to Dubai, and the new owners visited us last summer, and we'll visit there sometime. It's so easy to become friends with new people when you have Arabian horses in common."

The family aspect of Grand Arabians is evident each day. Linda and Dave's sons and daughter all grew up with horses, and all helped with the haying and had responsibility for their own horses. The current count of grandchildren is 19 with No. 20 on the way. Six grandchildren are now eight years old, and Linda will give them riding lessons when they are ten. "Although he doesn't involve himself in the day-to-day running of the farms, Dave helps me so much and is very supportive," says Linda. "He keeps the books, enjoys feeding the horses treats, and generally likes having the horses around. We had

Top left: "We sold both of these horses for clients and were thrilled when they were named 1999 Canadian National Champion and Reserve Champion Western Pleasure AAOTR 40 and Over together," says Linda Mehney. They are: Michal T Mahogany (Padrons Mahogany x MC Zia Jabask), a 1992 chestnut stallion, then owned by Tamara Renner, Cassopolis, Michigan; and KB Brigadier (Minotaur x KB Nastassja), a 1991 bay gelding, then owned by Pat Ronyak, Litchfield Park, Arizona.



Top right: GA Gwisz Jullyen (\*Jullyen El Jamaal x GA Gwisz Mahogany) a 2000 bay gelding owned by Michael and Tiffany Kurth, Cave Creek, Arizona, was named 2010 Region 2 Champion Western Pleasure AAOTR 18-35 and Champion Western Pleasure AATR 18-39 and Region 7 Champion Western Pleasure AAOTR 18-35, and 2010 Scottsdale Champion Western Pleasure AATR 18-39.



Bottom left: Over the years, there have been many proud moments, Linda notes. Among them: Winning 1995 United States and Canadian National Champion Futurity Colt with GA Hal Psyche (Padrons Psyche x Hal Ane Versare), a 1992 chestnut stallion, bred and owned by Grand Arabians. GA Hal Psyche was later sold to Rojo Arabians, Port Orange, Florida.

Bottom right: Sacred Torch (Padrons Mahogany x Araya), a 2000 chestnut gelding owned by Natalie Dixon, Santa Ynez, California, has earned more points than any other Padrons Mahogany foal. At the 2010 Youth National Championships he was Champion Walk/Trot JTR 10 and Under and Champion Western Seat Equitation Walk/Trot JTR 10 and Under.

25 kids and grandkids for breakfast one weekend last summer, and Dave convinced them all that he is the best pancake-maker in the world. The rule is that the kids eat their age in pancakes. So much for dieting at Grand Arabians."

Like any breeding operation, the employees are essential to success. Here, Joy Hatten who has been with Linda for 22 years, shines. "Joy breeds, rides, trains, and anything else that is necessary for a farm to work. She's always available if I need help with foaling, and she cares about the horses as much as I do," says Linda. "Kris Hiller Keech has been with me for 17 years. She lives at the lake farm

and rides and does everything else that needs to be done. She'll stay up through the night to care for a sick horse, and she too cares for the horses as much as I do. How lucky can I get?"

Abel Lopez and Luis Lopez are Linda's always-there employees. "They are able to repair just about anything with the most amazing materials," Linda notes. Cindy Angus works at both Mehney farms, and Ann Rienke is a valued help to Linda.

Over the years, there have been many proud moments, Linda notes. Among them: Winning United States and Canadian National Champion Futurity Colt with GA Hal Psyche, bred and owned by Grand Arabians. Winning get-of-sire and produce-of-dam competition many times at Scottsdale. Selling a horse to and becoming friends with Wayne Newton; breeding his mares to Padrons Mahogany. Being the first one to buy a breeding to Padrons Psyche and valuing his several foals at Grand Arabians. Quickly buying a breeding to Odyssey SC (Versace x Latoura Echo by Echo Magnifico) after seeing him in the Shada barn at Scottsdale before he was shown, an emotional move on Linda's part ("I was just wowed"), as was the breeding to Padrons Psyche.

The current Arabian population at Grand Arabians is 22 horses: two stallions, four colts, 11 mares, a weanling filly, and four geldings. In 2011, that population will be enlarged by three foals sired by Om El Al Azeem (\*Al Lahab GASB x Om El Beneera by Sharem El Sheikh), Beijing BHF (Falcon BHF x Felisha BHF by Falcon BHF), and DA Valentino (Versace x DA Love by Padrons Psyche).

What's down the road for Linda and Grand Arabians? "I will continue to breed and show, always striving to produce the best — pretty, typey, athletic, big-eyed horses with excellent dispositions, good shoulders, good legs, excellent motion, and high-set tails. All this on a three-circle horse. I just want it all," says Linda. "And I love learning, so I'll continue to go to seminars and visit farms and shows in my quest to find the perfect match. This process is a lot of fun."

Can anyone doubt that Linda will find that perfect match — perhaps in the 2011 foal crop at Grand Arabians — and that she will have fun every step along the way?