

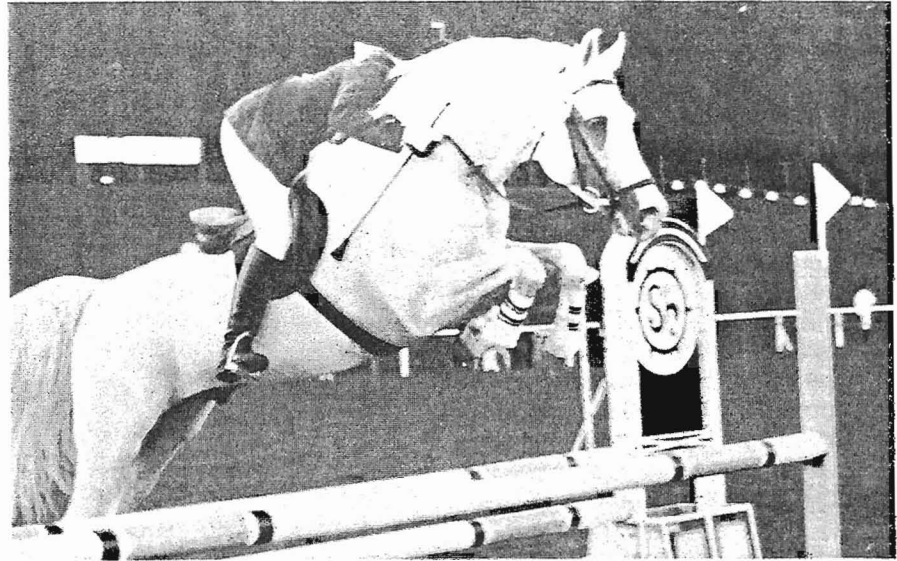
The Shagya - Europe's 'New-Old' Breed

By Acere Furby

Right-The Danish-bred Shagya, Shagal, Champion Stallion at the International Shagya Show in Switzerland, 1986. Shagal is now in Germany, where he is approved for Trakehner, as well as Shagya breeding. Photo by G. Waiditschka

Shagyas are new, because they are being rediscovered around the world, and old, because Shagya breeding began 200 years ago, in 1789 with the founding of the Babolna State Stud in Hungary. The Shagya was developed to be an elite horse for the Austro-Hungarian monarchs, as well as an all-purpose military horse (for driving and riding). The Shagya was also an 'improvement' horse, used to upgrade other breeds.

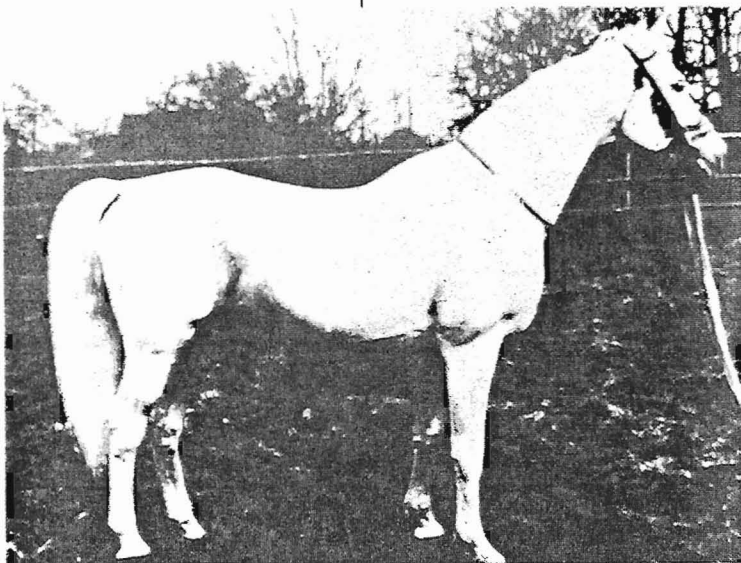
Based largely on desert Arabian bloodlines, traces of several Transylvanian light horse breeds as well as Lippizanner and English Thoroughbred can be seen in Shagya pedigrees. The breed actually acquired its name from an Arabian stallion foaled in 1810 in the Bani Saher tribe of Syria. This original *Shagya* stallion was from the Koheil Siglavay strain, and was imported to Babolna in 1836. *Shagya* was almost 16 hands, and of such



remarkable quality, that he exerted a strong influence over the development of the breed.

In 1978, the name *Shagya*, was adopted and the group of breeders became the *Purebred Shagya Society International*. Until this time, the breed had been known in Europe as 'Araberrasse' (Arabian-bred), 'Babolna Arabians', or 'part-bred Arabs'.

Below-Gazal VII, Shagya stallion who stood at the Hanoverian State Stud - Celle. Photo courtesy of the book: *Die Beruhmtesten Hengste Deutschlands* by Holger Heck and Lars Gehrmann



The Babolna State Stud developed the Shagya's sport horse qualities and genetic strength through very effective methods. Firstly, a rigorous set of performance tests for both mares and stallions before they were accepted for breeding. This included a 480 mile ride in 10 days across plains, forest, and mountains; 2-mile sprints, and long-distance driving.

Mares as well as stallions were sent to the headquarters of cavalry regiments near established hunt clubs and officers would ride them in the hunting field. A careful record was made describing the horse's jumping speed, condition, disposition, as well as how good a keeper the horse was. Mares and stallions which did not meet high standards in these performance tests were all sold at auction.

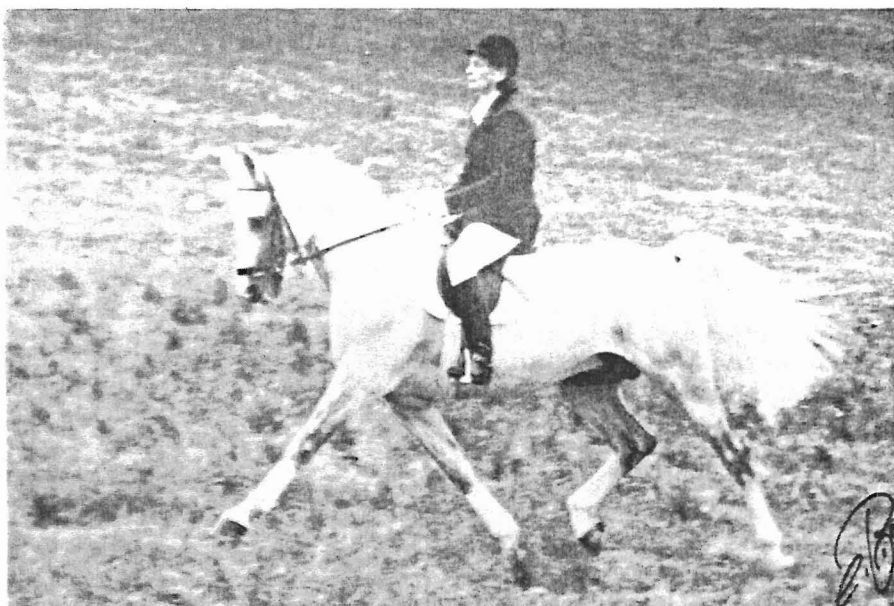
Besides strict culling and performance testing, the Hungarians used extensive progeny testing. New desert Arabian stallions were bred to 30 mares for three successive years. These mares were made up of 10 of the stud's best quality, 10 middle quality, and 10 of the lowest quality mares. At the end of the three year period, all 90 offspring were brought up before the breeding committee for evaluation. If the offspring were not judged to be good enough, the entire group was sold. The committee had strict standards, consequently,

very few stallions were actually allowed to continue in the breed

Right-The 16H German-bred Shagya stallion, O'Bajan 1-10, is now in Switzerland with owner/rider Andrea von Nordeck. Photo by Elisabeth Binz

Finally, the Hungarians maintained athletic ability and genetic strength through judicious linebreeding coupled with careful and regularly repeated (usually once every 4 generations), outcrossing to purebred Arabians. This method insures genetic predictability as well as protecting against the dangers of inbreeding. The classic genetic principal of 'three times in and one time out', is exemplified here.

Tragically, for the Shagya, during World War II, many were killed or slaughtered for food, while others were captured as prizes of war and eventually lost. Fortunately, knowledgeable horse breeders in Western Europe were able to salvage some of the best Shagya bloodstock, and the torch of purebred Shagya breeding passed on to other countries in Europe and America. West Germany, with over 500 breeding animals, has the largest number of Shagyas. Another 500 breeding Shagyas are scattered amongst the other Purebred Shagya Society International countries.

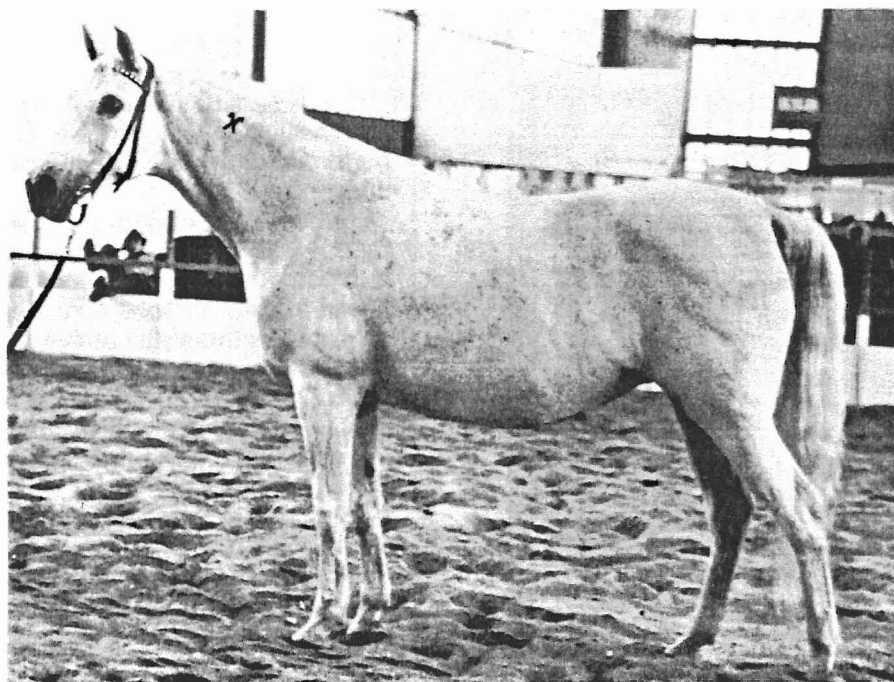


In Germany, Shagyas have developed as sport horses to a high degree. They compete regularly at 100-Day Stallion Testings against the Warmbloods. In 1982, the Shagya stallion Koyano, by Neron, won the 100 Day Test at Warendorf.

Shagyas have contributed significantly to the development of the European Warmblood. The Shagya mare Jordi, bred in Poland by the Plater-Zyberck family, in 1937 produced Ramzes. Ramzes is by the English Thoroughbred Rittersporn. In Europe, Ramzes is considered 'A stallion of the Century'. (Article on Ramzes, this issue).

Gazal VII, head stallion at the Babolna State Stud for many years, was imported to Germany in the 1960's. Gazal VII produced several approved sons and grandsons who stood at the Hannoverian State Stud at Celle. They were also used as improvement stallions for Trakehners, Holsteiners and Wesfalens. A Gazal VII grandson, Amor was also leased to the Austrian State Lippisanner Stud in Piber to improve that breed.

Description-the Shagya ranges in size from 15-16.1H, and is of distinctly Arabian type. However, the Shagya has improved sport horse qualities: increased bone, a longer, more sloping pelvis, prominent withers, improved coupling, and a better topline. Shagyas are not just large Arabians; nor are they elegant, imitation Warmbloods. Shagyas must be seen to appreciate their elegant and free-flowing movement, coupled with their proud, yet down to earth, workmanlike disposition.



Left-Shagya mare Anka, by Shagya XXXIV, 36th stallion of the Shagya sire line to serve as chief stallion at Babolna. In Germany, Anka produced Duftgarde. States Premium mare by Duft II.