

ALL THE FACTS: ARABIAN HORSE CHARACTERISTICS – NOT YOUR ORDINARY HORSE

By Randy Meyer. Randy Meyer, along with his family, are well-respected breeders of high-quality, beautiful purebred Arabian horses on their farm, Red Oak Arabians. www.redoakarabians.com

The Arabian horse is a breed of horse with a reputation for intelligence, spirit, and stamina. With a distinctive head shape and high tail carriage, the Arabian is one of the most easily recognizable horse breeds in the world. It is one of the oldest horse breeds, with archaeological evidence of horses that resemble modern Arabians dating back 4,500 years. Throughout history, Arabian horses from the Middle East spread around the world by both war and trade, used to improve other breeds by adding speed, refinement, endurance, and good bone. Today, Arabian bloodlines are found in almost every modern breed of riding horse.

The Arabian developed in a desert climate and was prized by the nomadic Bedouin people, often being brought inside the family tent for shelter and protection. This close relationship with humans has created a horse breed that is good-natured, quick to learn, and willing to please. But the Arabian also developed the high spirit and alertness needed in a horse used for raiding and war. This combination of willingness and sensitivity requires modern Arabian horse owners to handle their horses with competence and respect.

“The Versatile Arabian” is a slogan of the breed. Arabians dominate the discipline of endurance riding, and compete today in many other fields of equestrian activity. They are one of the top ten most popular horse breeds in the world. Arabian horses are now found worldwide, including the United States and Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, continental Europe, South America (especially Brazil), and its land of origin, the Middle East.

A Beautifully Built Head and Neck

Arabian horses have a distinct beauty that is cherished today, just as it was centuries ago in the Middle Eastern desert by the ancient Bedouins. This beauty is not only cosmetic but the Arabian horse's build also give it some great advantages.

Let's take a look at the head and neck of the Arabian:

- A refined, wedge-shaped head that is finely chiseled
- A broad forehead
- Large, lustrous eyes that are set far apart
- Large nostrils
- Small 'teacup' muzzles
- Lips that are fine and thin
- Ears that are smaller in stallions and of good size in mares. They are set evenly together and they have great flexibility.
- The skeleton of the head is characterized by a relative shortness of skull, slender lower jaw, and a larger size brain area within the skull.

The Arabian's head has always been considered a thing of beauty and the Arabian's face really sets it apart from other horse breeds.

The majority of Arabian horses display a distinctive concave or "dished" profile. Also, many Arabians have a forehead bulge between their eyes, known as the Jibbah. The Islamic people believed the Arabian horse was a gift from Allah and that the forehead bulge held his blessings. From a physical standpoint, the forehead bulge gives the Arabian extra sinus capacity, a plus for endurance. Another characteristic that helps with breathing and endurance is the arched neck with a large, well-set windpipe set on a refined, clean throat latch. This high-arched neck often signified courage to the ancient Bedouins and Islamics. The cheek bones are spread wide apart at the throat, typically between five or six inches. This enables the muzzle to be drawn in without compressing the Arabian horse's windpipe, and permitting the animal to breathe easily when running. As you can see from some of the characteristics that an Arabian has in its head and neck, this horse is built for long rides and running.

A Powerful Body, Bred to Perfection

Arabian horses have a broad chest and a short, but strong back and sloped shoulders which give them power and floaty gaits. In general, all horses that are bred to gallop or run need a good length of croup (posterior or backside) and a good length of hip for proper attachment of muscles (as a rule, both go together). Typically, a good-quality Arabian has both a relatively horizontal croup and a properly angled pelvis with good length of croup and depth of hip (or length of pelvis) to allow agility and impulsion. Of course, within the Arabian breed there are variations:

An Arabian horse with wider, more powerfully muscled hindquarters is more suitable for intense bursts of activity such as reining.

An Arabian horse with longer, leaner muscles is better suited for endurance riding or horse racing.

Size and Colors

Arabian horses typically stand between 14.1 and 15.1 hands (57 to 61 inches) tall. Of course there will be an occasional horse that is over or under this. Therefore, all Arabians, regardless of their height, are classified as horses even though 14.2 hands is the traditional cutoff height between a horse and a pony. A common misconception is that the purebred Arabian isn't strong due to its smaller height. Their bone density, though, is much greater than that of many other breeds. This gives the Arabian breed physical strength that is comparable to many taller animals.

For color, Arabian horses are bay, gray, chestnut, and black and sometimes roan. Common markings on Arabians include:

- * Stars, stripes, or blaze faces
- * Snip noses
- * A white foot or more, or white stockings

Arabian horses that appear white are actually gray since their skin is black. White hair on horses grows out of pink skin. Arabian horses follow suit and any white markings found will show white hair growing out of pink skin.

A Pleasant Disposition

Arabian horses are well known for being affectionate and bonding well with humans. This goes back to their early history with Bedouin tribes in the Middle Eastern desert. The ancient Bedouins and Arabian horses lived inter-dependently as a means of survival. The Bedouins often prized these animals and sheltered them from the harsh elements of the desert by keeping them in their family tent. A strong bond formed and through the centuries, the Arabian breed has kept its gentleness and its willingness to learn and please. This makes purebred Arabians perfect for activities such as riding and showing and it makes them a perfect horse for children and families to enjoy. Having such a mild and gentle temperament makes Arabians one of the few breeds that the United States Equestrian Federation allows children to exhibit stallions in nearly all show ring classes, including those that are limited to riders under 18.

A High Intelligence to Boot

Arabian horses are classified as a "hot-blooded" horse. Even though they are in the "hot-blooded" category, most Arabians have a natural tendency to cooperate with humans. This category includes other refined, spirited horse breeds that are bred for speed such as Thoroughbreds. Like other hot-bloods, the sensitivity and intelligence of Arabians enable them to learn quickly. It also enables riders to communicate with Arabians more easily than other horse breeds. Thus training them is typically easier than other horse breeds.

A Perfectly Engineered Horse

Throughout the ages, romantic myths and stories have been told about Arabian horses that give them near-divine characteristics. The ancient Bedouins and Islamics considered these horses perfect, prizing them for their unparalleled beauty, sturdiness, stamina, high intelligence, and friendly nature. Virtually unchanged through careful breeding, Arabian horses still exemplify these same characteristics today and their popularity continues to grow.