

# **The Missing Third Arabian - The Shagya-Arabian Horse**

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The World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO) recognizes three separate breeds of the Arabian Horse. In North America, most Arabian aficionados are acquainted with the purebred Arabian and the Half-Arabian breeds. But a large majority of people world-wide are unfamiliar with the third and rarest Arabian Horse that is known as the Shagya-Arabian.

Its origins derive from purebred desert Arabians that were developed more than 200 years ago from selective breeding and performance testing when the Austro-Hungarian monarchy needed a superior cavalry mount back in 1789. The ideal horse had to be pre-potent for its type so that it could be used to improve other native breeds. As a result of an edict from the Emperor, the Babolna stud farm was founded 36 miles west of Budapest.

The conditions for creating a superior breed were perfect at the time, since the stud was managed by Hungary's talented native horsemen, the Magyars, who had highly developed skills as horse breeders.

By crossing quality cavalry mares of oriental type with imported purebred Arabian Horses from Syria, in particular, with a purebred Arabian stallion named Shagya, a new warhorse was created. The breed was originally known as the Araberrasse (Arab breed) or Arab Fajta Horse. The Magyars kept meticulous records of the breeding program in their studbooks and English Thoroughbred, Anglo-Arabian and Lipizzaner blood was carefully added. The breed was consolidated many generations ago so that it breeds consistently true to type. Shagya turned out to be such an influential stallion that eventually the breed was renamed to Shagya-Araber which was authorized by WAHO at the 1978 convention at Hamburg. It is now known in the United States as the Shagya-Arabian.

Historically, the Shagya-Arabian was bred in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, specifically in the main military stud farms of Bâbolna, Radautz and Piber in Hungary. Later on, stud farms in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria also bred Shagya-Arabians. The Shagya-Arabians not only served as cavalry horses, they were also used as parade horses for European royalty. Every royal guard or officer regarded it a privilege to be able to ride a Shagya. The Imperial guards of the Habsburgs in Vienna were always mounted on elegant Shagya-Arabians, and the Royal Guard of Budapest rode the Shagya-Arabian.

The breed was nearly wiped out during WWII, along with the Lipizzaner, but one can still admire many statues in Hungary commemorating the heroic deeds of these horses and their riders. Currently, all Shagya-Arabian breeding world-wide is overseen by the Internationale Shagya-Araber Gesellschaft e.v. ( ISG) and horse must be approved before being used as breeding stock. In 2000, the total number of Shagya mares was estimated at approximately 1,500 horses world-wide.

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However, the Shagya-Arabian has been rather slow to establish itself in the U.S. Following several new imports since 2001, the breed is finally producing more quality horses and the Shagya-Arabian is rapidly finding new interest and new breeders. What started out as only a handful is now an amazing number of Shagya-Arabians that are doing well in the sport horse world. In 2002, three Shagya-Arabian stallions were imported from Europe as valuable new genetic material for the American Sport Horse breeder who would prefer not to use the purebred Arabian for crossbreeding. The Shagya breed is still very rare and fewer than 250 horses exist in the U.S. as of 2008 with only 25 of these being approved stallions.

Those people familiar with Arabian horses who see the Shagya-Arabian for the first time are often not prepared to see a large, very robust, oriental-based horse with swinging gaits and a quiet, calm nature. Shagya-Arabians are taller, have a larger rectangular frame, are stronger and possess better riding horse qualities than purebred Arabians. The Shagya-Arabians combine the advantages of the Bedouin Arabian; elegance, hardiness, endurance, and inborn friendliness toward humans, with the requirements of the modern riding horse; sufficient height, excellent movement and enormous jumping ability.

Shagya-Arabians stand 14.3 to 16.1 hands high but are most commonly found in the 15-16 hand range. They have a very harmonious appearance with a wide forehead and concave profile that often gives the head a very oriental look. The small, pointy ears are situated high on top of the head and the eyes are very expressive. The gracefully arched neck is often long with a slight poll. The withers are not very high, but reach far into a soft back. The shoulders are sometimes short and not very slanted and the haunches are short and strong. The croup is melon-shaped and fairly short with a high tail attachment. The hooves are small, well-formed and hard. The mane & tail is abundant and silky fine as is the rest of the body hair. They are predominantly gray in color, but can be bay, chestnut or black, although black Shagya-Arabians are rather rare.

Shagya-Arabians are known for having light, basic gaits and a good jumping disposition and have also proven themselves to be successful in open competitions against warmbloods in dressage, jumping, and 3-day eventing.

Shagya-Arabians are now being used to refine other warmbloods. Following the European method of Warmblood Sport Horse breeding, quality Trakehner, Dutch Warmblood, Thoroughbred, and Arabian mares that have been approved by the American Trakehner Association (ATA), the [American Shagya Arabian Verband Inc. \(ASAV\)](#), the North American Shagya Society (NASS), and the International Sport Horse Registry (ISR) are being bred to purebred Shagya-Arabian stallions. When the Shagya is used, the very first generation shows refinement without the loss of size or bone and the Shagya adds many of the good characteristics from the Arabian. The offspring from these crosses are accepted by most of the Verbands and the genes will modernize the sport horse that is sought after today, but NONE of these crosses may ever be used for purebred Shagya-Arabian breeding.

The Shagya-Arabian stud books have been closed for over 200 years and only purebred Arabian blood has been added. Currently, purebred Shagya-Arabians can have up to 9 purebred Arabian ancestors out of the 16 ancestors listed in the 4th generation. Before 1985, the ISG accepted Shagya-Arabians with up to 12 Arabian ancestors, but now those are registered in the Appendix book as part Shagya-Arabians. Today, some Shagya-Arabians have four or five generations of straight Shagya breeding before you will find a purebred Arabian in the pedigree.

#### ***About Crystal Eikanger***

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