



LEFT: Visitors experience the sweet temperament of an Arabian horse at Royal Arabians.

CENTER: Stonewall Farms stallion Selket Marque.

RIGHT: Gemini Acres sales presentation.

BELOW: Chris Culbreth of Culbreth Equine presents the flag at his Open House. Photo by Victor Ricigliano.



Best Winter Getaway for Horse Lovers

ArabHorse Farm Tours of Scottsdale is an annual must-attend, five-day series of events for horse lovers. Event producers Scott Bailey and David Cains of ArabHorse.com are the brains, heart and soul of the event I've wanted to attend since its inception in 2007. What Midwestern snowbird wouldn't want to flock to the desert Southwest at year's end?

BY JANET DE ACEVEDO MACDONALD

Scottsdale's Sonoran Desert Guide for visitors described normal early winter temp ranges of the 40s to the 70s. Eager to escape snow and subzero temps for desert sunshine and warmth, watching the changing landscapes through the car window established I was no longer in Minneapolis.

The eighth annual ArabHorse Farm Tours rang in 2015 with unseasonably cold temperatures that forced even the hardest horse show-toughs into hats, scarves, gloves, puffer jackets, and fleece-lined jeans tucked into knee-high boots.

Overcast days with wind, rain, and nocturnal freeze warnings were uninvited guests in Scottsdale.

Every year an increasing number of horse people trek to Scottsdale for behind-the-scenes access and presentations featuring world-renowned Arabian horses from some of the Valley's most prestigious farms. Barn tours are free and open to the public for five days. Showings are not judged, so the relaxed "home turf" atmosphere means more chats between visitors, owners and trainers happy to answer questions and share some upcoming season plans.

Unfazed by the afternoon's teeth-chattering drizzle, emcee Rory O'Neill of O'Neill Arabians welcomes guests to Sandspur Ranch with his wit and repartee. Soon all were laughing at his jokes and swaying to his music selections before we were redirected to the day's purpose: admiration of one of the oldest horse breeds, one developed in the desert climate.

Kathrin Hampe-Klingebiel of EOS Arabians, who traveled from Germany with her husband, stood next to me at the rail. Collectively boggled by the cold, we reviewed the proffered list of 65 plus horses, 30 of which were slated for presentation. We shared an easy laugh over the fact that had we stood nearer the carrot bunches set out to treat horses, their warm snorts would have periodically warmed our hands. Carrots and peppermint candies are currency, and we had neither to trade.

Later, Kathrin and I would learn we were Facebook friends. And that's how it is at this five-day event — open to the public, well advertised locally — where you meet people from all walks of life with the shared thread of equine love. "Equine" because some know little about horses, while others were snowbird retirees. Some guests owned Morgans, Paso Finos, Mustangs, Quarter Horse cutters, and even grade horses. Still, all figured attending an Arabian horse farm open house was a good way to spend a long holiday weekend. At every stop, guests were also well fêted — if you went away hungry or thirsty, it was your own fault.

One of the most commonly posed questions by newbies during Q&A sessions was, "What does it cost to buy an Arabian horse?" The most courteous, factual reply I heard was, "That depends." You could equate horse shopping to car shopping. What are you going to do with it? What is it made to do? Is your budget Maserati, hooptie ride, or something in between?

Chris Petford was another of the tour's master storyteller emcees pressed into service by more than one farm. His engaging manner and mastery of pedigrees guaranteed all would gain fascinating insights when Petford was at the mic.

Greg Knowles of Arabian Expressions was initially scheduled to kick off the farm tours until the weather gods frowned.



ABOVE:
Stallion Bey Ambition presented by Claudenei Machado of Rae-Dawn Arabians.

RIGHT:
Author Janet de Acevedo Macdonald and Buddy. Photo by Riyan.



“On Thursday, I stood here and cried,” Knowles recounted while standing in his presentation arena on Sunday’s sunny, but cool morning. “This was flooded, we just could not host anyone and we had a \$2000 catering bill. I’m glad I got to have this redo.”

Knowles was a happy raconteur who regaled guests about the beauty, history and lifestyle of the Arabian horse industry.

Despite the weather on the opening days, ArabHorse’s spokesperson Riyan Holte shared that this year’s crowds swelled from 200 people at opening to near 400 visitors per farm on the weekend days.

Scott Bailey, ArabHorse.com president/founder, was also pleased with the outcome.

“The ArabHorse Farm Tour annually supports charitable foundations including the 5th Annual Benefit Auction for Healing Hearts Animal Rescue & Refuge, which raised over \$20,000 to help horses in distress, abandoned, or abused.

This year’s tour also included a New Year’s Eve party benefitting Phoenix Children’s Hospital Cancer and Blood Disorders that raised over \$200,000 for the charity,” reported Bailey.

WHEN YOU VISIT

WestWorld, the site of February’s Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show, served as one end of my “measuring stick.”



Most of the following farms are within a 5-17 mile radius. The farthest is less than 25 miles south in Mesa.

Farms in the greater Scottsdale area may range from two to 30 acres, but most typically, farms consist of five well-organized acres. Naturally, realtors abound, but a quick Internet search showed farms priced from \$800k to \$38 million, with \$1.5 million looking like a good bang for your horse property buck.

The Sonoran Desert and its 300-some different cacti cover a good third of Arizona. The Giant Saguaro, familiar to viewers of Road Runner and Wile E Coyote cartoons, only grow wild here. In Scottsdale, the most recognizable varieties are the paddle-shaped Prickly Pear and the squat, heavily thorned Barrel Cactus. Acacia, mesquite, and palo verde trees replace my familiar oak, maple, and blue spruce. The region’s color palette runs warm with its predominant reds, pinks, and yellows dotted with cooler green, blues, and purples. Even highway overpasses and freeway retaining walls are adorned with colorful imprints of native Southwestern succulents and desert inhabitants.

Central Scottsdale

Sandspur Ranch, home to Pegasus Arabians, Rivero International, and Tara Carpio & Cari Thompson Training, sits on 20+ acres about 7 miles from WestWorld. It’s more metropolitan than most of the tour locations, situated near the 101 Pima Freeway near Cactus Road.

Also in this très chic neck of the woods of Cactus Acres are Arabian Expressions, more boutique in size and owned by Greg Knowles, and Midwest Training Center, owned by David Boggs.

To the southeast, sitting on 10 acres at the cusp of Scottsdale and the outlying community of Fountain Hills, and near the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, is Rae-Dawn Arabians owned by Murray and Shirley Popplewell. Architecturally, it reminds me of a Spanish Colonial Costa Brava villa, but that belies the activity of this full-service facility.

Cave Creek & North Scottsdale

Cave Creek is about 10 miles north of Scottsdale and home to three farms on the tour. Managing partners Montana Henke and Muteb Saad run Signature Equine. Halter aficionados Sandro Pinha and Gil Valdez operate Arabians International. Jim and Sally Bedeker’s Gemini Acres with its magnificent green saw-dusted presentation runway is reminiscent of the final night at US Nationals.

Not far from Pinnacle Peak, one of Scottsdale’s most scenic mountains in north Scottsdale is Gary and Jennifer McDonald’s McDonald Arabians. The McDonald youngsters presented its Scottsdale-ready horses as daddy did the announcing, his foot was in a walking cast. Baritone

OPPOSITE TOP:
Gil Valdez leads one of the youngest residents at Arabians International.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: The stallion Apalo is presented by Greg Hazelwood at Regency Cove Farms.

RIGHT: Belly dancer at Regency Cove seems immune to the frosty weather!



crooner Monty Moore serenaded guests with Rat Pack favorites.

Northeast Scottsdale

Seventeen miles north of WestWorld and the McDowell Mountain Regional Park, continue east on Dynamite Boulevard toward Rio Verde Drive for a scenic mountain view. Not too much farther to the right is the USDA-sanctioned breeding facility Silver Spurs Equine owned by Michael and Michelle Miola. Best known for its elite line of American Quarter Horse reiners, it recently added a US National Arabian Champion Reining Stallion to its fold.

Prepare for a desert off-road experience when you turn off Rio Verde Drive north or south to visit any of the following farms. The unpaved red sand roads undulate and dip for washes, which play essential roles in rainier seasons. Dress shoes of any brand or type are best traded for sturdier, lace-up footwear. Scott Bailey and David Cains’ perfectly landscaped Stonewall Farm is nestled here near the truly untouched wilderness that is the McDowell Mountain Regional Park.

Venturing farther, near the northern part of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, are three neighboring farms: Chris and Michele Culbreth’s Culbreth Equine; Laurie Martin Performance Horses, owned by Laurie Martin and Michael Brock; and Regency Cove, owned by Jack and Elizabeth Milam. In the same area, just east of Pinnacle Peak and north of McDowell Mountain Regional Park, is João and Annette Rodrigues’ Rodrigues Training Center.

Number 15 on the ArabHorse Farm Tour, and this year’s title sponsor, is Royal Arabians. Owned by Cindy McGown and Mark Davis, this beautiful, large, full-service facility is located about 20 miles southeast of WestWorld in Mesa.

The ArabHorse Farm Tours are a horse lover’s delight. Guests will see well-bred, splendid examples of not only what’s being readied for February’s world-famous Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show but previews of what industry leaders are breeding to train, show, and sell. Let Scottsdale embrace you in mid-winter and show off its many treasures. Pack sunscreen and a warm coat... being too warm is a nice problem to have in the dead of winter. 🐾

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