

The trouble with the arabian horse community

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by [Bill Addis](#)

"The footing at the Nationals was terrible!"

"There should have been more shavings put in the dirt earlier."

"It is hard to keep horses sound if the footing is not right."

"The patron boxes were terrible."

"We need to go elsewhere with the Nationals."

"The problem with the Arabian horse business is that the trainers run things instead of the owners and breeders."

"The judging at the show was terrible."

"I showed my horse in 9 classes and the judges wouldn't use me any better than fourth."

"Unless you have your horse with a big name trainer you just can't win."

"We need more rich people in the Arabian business like we used to have."

"I quit breeding because I can go buy a finished horse cheaper than I can raise one."

"I quit breeding because I could not sell my foals for what it took to raise them."

"The cost of going to the class A show is so high that we got out of it."

Above is just a sampling of the complaints we hear year round. Every one complains about the problems but no one does anything about them. All the problems mentioned above are trivial compared to the real problem.

At one time we had over 40,000 members in Arabian Horse Association (AHA). As of December 31, 2009, we have 32,580 members. In 1986 we produced around 25,000 Arabian horses. As of December 31, 2009 we registered 5544 purebreds and 2056 Half-Arabians. Everyone has an idea what the other guy needs to do to fix his problem but no one is really talking about the 'elephant in the room'.

Folks, as I have said before, the Arabian horse community is in trouble. If we don't make some drastic changes soon, we will continue to see the number of members and registrations plummet. We don't need more rich folks involved. In the words of Mr. Tim Shea, a man I highly respect, "We just need more people involved."

We just finished our 12th annual November auction. Just a few years ago I could guarantee that if you put your horse in the auction we could get it sold. I couldn't guarantee for how much, but we could sell every horse. That is not the case today. We see some very nice horses in every auction. They may not all be show quality or may have yet to be started under saddle but are, over all, nice horses that will make someone a good companion. Those horses are harder and harder to sell at any price. The horses that are selling today are the ones that can go to nationals and WIN.



Whoever coined the phrase, "a house divided cannot stand" could have been talking about the Arabian horse industry. (We now have the halter people putting on their own show because they do not like the new scoring system. The performance people are planning on putting on their own show sometime in 2011.)

So, what is really wrong with the Arabian horse industry, business or community, or whatever you may want to call it?

1. AHA runs their entire overstuffed company by producing horse shows instead of being the promotional arm for the Arabian horse.
2. We have put too much emphasis on our national show and have made a class A championship mean little or nothing.
3. As the organization has gotten smaller the cost to show has skyrocketed way out of range of most people's budget.
4. We offer no kind of incentive for breeders to breed.
5. Fewer stallions breed more mares.
6. Backyard breeders can't sell their production.
7. An up-and-coming young trainer has little hope to make it training horses. It is difficult for them to compete with the handful of top trainers especially when everything revolves around the big dance (Nationals).
8. Our local shows have gotten smaller and smaller.

I had the opportunity to go to Shelbyville, Tennessee recently and met with the manager of the grounds that produces the Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration. Shelbyville is a town of 20,000 people and is an hour south of Nashville. When I went on the grounds I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the outdoor ring where they show their horses. It seats over 30,000 people!

I asked the manager if they are able to fill those seats. He said they did in 2002, but this last year they only had 25,000 spectators.

I asked how they did it.

He said back in 1939 the town wanted to have a community project that would help identify their town so the Chamber of Commerce along with the Lions Club, Rotary Club and other organizations went together to promote it. Now, can you imagine today having 25,000 spectators off the street at an Arabian horse



show? Do you think that much exposure would help the sales of all our horses?

Now I am not a big fan of the walking horse but you cannot help but be impressed with the job that Shelbyville has done.

We need this kind of mindset to build our breed, not everyone out to sell that \$1,000,000 dollar horse to the wealthy that make up a minute percentage of our membership. We need the local clubs to put on activities that are fun, hands on and affordable. That may even be an event other than a show. I have often said if we have a market for every \$1000 horse, the high end will take care of itself.

So, what are the answers to turn things around? I don't have all the answers but being in the auction business, I follow most all of the different breed's auctions. The

common denominator of most of the breeds that continue to do well is that they focus on young horses and monetary prizes.

In my opinion, here is what needs to be done to salvage our beautiful Arabian horse.

1. **Stop all shipping of semen.** When you see a class of 30 horses at Nationals and more than half of those horses are all by the same sire, something is not right. We have run all of the small breeders out of business with shipped semen. When a small breeder would have 5-10 mares of his own and then also breed some outside mares, it kept him in business by having some income

from mare care. It also kept our gene pool much larger and, if a small breeder had a good stallion, he could stay in business with the sale of breedings and the sale of his foals. The top stallions would rise to the top anyway. We need to get back to where a small breeder can breed a horse more cost effectively.

2. **Stop all embryo transfers.** If a mare is not able to carry a foal to term, don't breed her. And we should not allow multiple foals out of the same mare in one year. If you have a great show mare then show her. Then wait until she is done showing and breed her. It would make her foals that much more valuable.
3. **Hire a Show Manager to run the National Championship show.**
4. **Only the top 15 horses in each division are qualified for the Nationals.** Have a point system that allows only the top horses in the country to compete at Nationals each year. And require horses to re-qualify each year. Our national show is too expensive, too long, and too boring for the non-Arabian horse people sitting in the seats. If only the best 15 in each division were at Nationals, it would be an event, not just a show. We should only have evening classes and work to involve the local Junior League or other community groups to solicit people to be in the audience. We must have more exposure to the general public. We also need to change the way the horse show announcers work. They have announced for too many years to the exhibitor and not to the audience. We need to explain to the guy off the street what is going on. The only way we will ever draw any corporate sponsors is by having more bodies in the seats.
5. **Once a horse is declared national champion in any division, he can no longer compete in that division at the nationals.** One of the problems that we see in the national show is that the same horses come back year after year. So, consequently, there is little room for that next generation of horses to come up and win. Theoretically, when half the national Top 10 horses have been past national champions, there is only room for a few of the 18 regional champions to go top 10. If you look at all of the breeds that are still doing well, even in this economy, all of them revolve their competitions around young horses. If a horse does well in the Kentucky Derby he can't return the next year to run again. It is just for three-year-old horses. A log jam effect would happen if the same horses could come back. There would be no need for breeders to breed, no need for yearling sales, no need for trainers to start the next crop of colts. Our horses shown on the National level now have gotten older and older.
6. **Stop paying out Sweepstakes Money to horses after they are no longer a junior horse.** We cannot reward the breeder by continuing to pay sweepstakes money to 15-year-old horses. All of the breeds that are still successful put all of their emphasis on futurities of some kind.
7. **Do away with all regional horse shows.** Our regional horse shows that had 15 to 30 entries in each class a few years ago now have 2 or 3. Most Class A shows today have less than 80 horses at the show. If we did away with all the regional shows and put the emphasis to qualify a horse for the nationals at the class A level, it would raise the entries in the class A show. Whether on a point system or a monetary system, you would have to hustle to enough local shows to get your horse qualified for the big show. It would also return 'bragging rights' to the winners at those shows. Today, if someone tells us that their horse won several classes in local shows, it is hard to tell them that it really means very little. They only beat one or two horses to win. We need to have our local Class A Arabian shows get back to a larger number of entries where the upstart trainers have a place to grow their skills.
8. **AHA should have a 7 person board of directors, relieve all of the regional directors of their duties and get rid of the delegates.** We need to have a good board to be able to make quick and effective decisions. Look at NASCAR. It has grown from a Southeastern local sport to a major sporting event with millions of viewers. It is nothing more than watching souped up family cars go in a circle. Everything they do is to promote the sport and they come down hard on anyone or anything that is detrimental to the sport.
9. **More than anything we have got to have classes that are fun.**



Team roping continues to be the fastest growing equine activity. Next in line are the cowboy action shooting, the team sorting and team penning. There is no reason that our Arabian horse cannot be competitive in all of these disciplines. We have to appeal to those that want to have fun in disciplines that are easy to understand.

10. **It is imperative to have young horse trainers coming in to the Arabian horse business.** In 1980, the average age of Arabian horse trainers was around 24 years old. Today the average age is more like 50. If there was more emphasis put on the local Class A shows it would give these young people a chance to get in and show the horse people their talents. Everyone knows the economy in 2009 was not good. But even with the state of the economy and a 37% drop in sales from the previous year at the Keeneland auction, they still had a \$60,734 average on 3605 head. The 2009 Standard bred Yearling auction in Harrisburg, PA had a \$31,591 average on 1086 head. The running Quarter Horse yearling sale was down 15% from 2008 but they still had an average of \$8700 on 783 head.

To sum it up, we have to put more emphasis on smaller shows that are affordable to middle income folks and a place for the small breeder to be competitive and also have shows for up and coming trainers to show their talents.

Please keep in mind, we all have an opinion and the above is just that, my opinion.

Addis Equine Auctions, Inc has continually strived to supply a service to all Arabian horse owners and trainers. We have never varied from our main goal which is to sell Arabian horses. We have never excluded anyone. Addis Equine Auctions, Inc has successfully sold over 5,000 Arabian, Half-Arabian, and related bloodstock over the last 14 years.

Bill Addis, the president and founder of Addis Equine Auctions Inc, comes from a family of three generations of horsemen. Having been raised on a farm in Ohio, Bill grew up with horses and horsemen. He was active with his horses in 4-H as a kid and by the time he was 19, he was licensed by the United States Trotting Association as a driver. He switched breeds to the Arabian horse in 1975, and had been employed until 1991 as a full time Arabian, Half-Arabian, and National Show Horse trainer. He trained Half-Arabians and National Show Horses to over 80 national and reserve national championships.

Having a fascination for the chant of the auctioneer, Bill attended World Wide College of Auctioneering in 1986, and produced his first Arabian horse auction in March of the following year. In 1991, Bill put aside his training of show horses and pursued the auction business on a full time basis selling from 100 to 125 auctions per year of all types. Always being a competitor, Bill competed in several auctioneering contests, achieving his goal as a champion. Addis has presided as auctioneer for some of the most high profile Arabian horse auctions in the industry, both in the United States and Canada.

Today Bill and his wife Terry own and operate Addis Equine Auctions, Inc. out of their office in Edmond, Oklahoma.



Bill and Terry Addis