

Another Reason to be Careful about the Arabs we use in our Shagya Breeding

A prominent Arabian horse breeding operation based in the United Arab Emirates recently became the first to publicly announce one of its stallions is a carrier of cerebellar abiotrophy (CA). Albidayer Stud released the news that World Champion Arabian stallion Marajj is a carrier for the inherited neurologic disease, for which a DNA test recently became available.

"We decided to test Marajj because a foal of his was suspected of having CA," said Dawn Martin, Marajj's breeding manager. "The decision to make an announcement wasn't really a difficult one to make. An announcement like this, about a horse of his caliber, will only help the breed, as well as the research into CA."

Mare owners who plan to breed to a known carrier are encouraged to test their mares to discern each animal's genetic status. Carriers bred to other carriers have the potential to produce an affected foal 25% of the time.

Cerebellar abiotrophy causes head tremors and a lack of balance by killing neurons in the cerebellum (which plays an important role in the integration of sensory perception, coordination, and motor control). There is no treatment, and affected horses are usually euthanized.

Lisa Goodwin-Campiglio, who has been an Arabian horse breeder for 48 years, has had five affected foals in her care and works to educate Arabian horse owners and breeders about the disease. "Now that a World Champion Stallion has been disclosed as a CA carrier and the situation was handled in an extremely diplomatic way, which so far has been very well-received and applauded by many ... I am hoping that other mare and stallion owners will follow suit and test for CA," she said.

According to Cecilia Penedo, PhD, who leads research into the disease at the University of California, Davis, 20 affected foals have been referred to her lab in the past five years. She and her colleagues have analyzed data from more than 250 horses related to the affected foals, and found that 30% of those animals are carriers of the disease.

Submitted by Nancy Skakel, Feb. 17th, 2009