

The Shagyas Are Here!
By Nancy R. Skakel

Shagyas have arrived. Not many people have had the opportunity to meet one of these rare horses, but the Shagya breed is now well represented in Central Oregon.

The Shagya-Araber was developed in Hungary as an outcross improvement for the Austro-Hungarian cavalry. Foundations of the breed were desert bred Arabians and native “Oriental” mares. Shagyas were used to add Arabian thriftiness and nobility without sacrificing size or bone. Over the past 200 years Shagyas were selected for temperament, a large frame with substantial bone, and a longer, sloping croup. While the breed retains the thriftiness and tractability of the Arabian, the modern Shagya is generally taller with a deep and broad body, the joints large and strong with tight tendons, a short, well muscled back, and a noble, charismatic self-carriage. Today’s Shagya is genetically indistinguishable from the purebred Arabian, but the distinctive characteristics of the Shagya are obvious by comparison.

Many European sport horse breeds carry Shagya bloodlines. Shagya stallions have been used in Hannoverian, Trakehner, Holstein, and Dutch, Belgian, Bavarian, Danish, Hungarian, and other warmblood breeds. Shagya-Trakehners have been successful in Olympic show jumping and eventing. Even Lipizzans used Shagya blood in the early foundations of that breed. During the 1980’s, a Shagya stallion was introduced back into the Lipizzan breed – the only outcross accepted in over a century.

Their kind and intelligent temperament, natural balance and strength, reliability, and medium size, make the Shagya an ideal companion for the amateur rider in a wide variety of sports. While best known across the US in endurance circles, Shagya owners are also participating in dressage, CTR, combined driving, eventing, and fox hunting. Shagya admirers have sponsored informational booths at national exhibitions and conferences in the Midwest, California, and Oregon and Washington. Shagyas compete in open dressage and Three-Day Events. Shagya/half-Arabians have done very well at Arabian Sport Horse shows. The 2006 World Champion Endurance Horse was the Shagya gelding, Hungares.

Shagyas have a long and romantic history. World War II and the subsequent Communist occupation of Hungary came close to ending that illustrious history. The dedication of famous horse breeders across Europe rescued Shagyas and established private breeding programs in Germany and Denmark. Many of the former Imperial and State Studs throughout Eastern Europe continued breeding Shagyas on a smaller scale. Today Shagya registries exist across Europe, in Israel, South Africa, Venezuela, Columbia, Japan, and the United States.

Toni Jones of Prineville purchased the Shagya stallion, O’Biwon, in 1997. O’Biwon is the son of the well-known imported Shagya stallion, *Oman. Toni placed “Boo” with Dr. Thomas Ritter in dressage training. Later, she decided to concentrate on riding, not breeding, and gelded O’Biwon in 2004. Today you can find them eating up the trail at many of our regional endurance rides. During his breeding career, O’Biwon sired a number of half Shagya foals in Central Oregon. Judy Elkins, noted local Hannoverian breeder, put her two Hannoverian mares to him. Judy states that the two colts produced,

“Are the best I’ve ever had!” Debbie Whaley, also of Prineville, bred two partbred Arabian mares to O’Biwon. Debbie says she chose him because “...of his great disposition and movement.” Her geldings are currently in endurance training, with the possibility of dressage in the future.

Holly Rouska, from Terrebonne, became intrigued with the Shagya breed through Toni and O’Biwon. She now owns the lovely Shagya mare, Malvasia PFF. Holly says of her young mare, “She has much more suspension than my Polish Arabian and I think she will be a great dressage horse.” Shagya breeder Hallie Goetz made this comment when she saw photos of Holly and Malvasia, “Wow - what a beautiful mare! If we as breeders can breed more horses like this, that are attractive and fun to ride and Shagyas - then the word will get out and more people will want one.”

Last year, Karen Bish of Bend, started her Shagya breeding program with the purchase of the young Shagya stallion SW Daniel and four Shagya mares. Karen is concentrating on setting up her breeding operation this year, but she also has an eye toward both endurance and dressage competition. Her first Shagya, Omega, is a partbred *Oman daughter out of an appaloosa mare.

There are Shagya owners and breeders throughout the northwest, in the Mid Columbia, eastern and central Washington, the Seattle area, and Idaho. Nancy Skakel, in the Columbia River Gorge, stands four Shagya stallions with a herd of twelve Shagya mares.

The American Shagya Verband, www.shagya-arabian-horses-asav.org, is hosting Tamas Rombauer, the Director of the Hungarian State Stud, Babolna, birthplace of the Shagya breed, and Carolyn Tucker, owner and trainer of the imported Shagya stallion, *Oman, at their annual membership meeting this year.