

Arabians enter dressage ring

By DENISE McDONALD

Battling century-old myths and long-established traditions, Les and Marny Wagschal are helping establish the Arabian horse as a national contender on the recognized dressage circuit.

In 1982, while attempting to overcome initial prejudice towards Arabians in the dressage world, the Wagschals, owners of Shalom Farm Arabians Inc. of R.R.1, Gormley, formed CADENCE (Canadian Arabian Dressage Enthusiasts Club East).

"CADENCE was created to provide a home base for anyone serious about the Arabian horse and his/her riding," explained club member Margaret Sansom. "Anyone who either owns, rides or just has an interest in the Arabian horse can belong."

According to Ms. Sansom, Arabians have never possessed a good reputation in the dressage world, largely because North American breeders and trainers have never attempted to maximize the breed's show ring potential.

"The Arabian is thought to be more at home in costume, park and side-saddle classes and it's this thinking that's earned them the reputation of a circus horse," she said.

"Yet at the same time, Germany who leads the world in dressage competition, developed this enormous placid horse that could compete at Grand Prix levels and jump as well," Ms. Sansom continued.

She also pointed out how people interested in purchasing a horse are more apt to look for one that'll do well at a show and guarantee success.

"What better horse to choose than one used by the top leading riders, namely the German horse," the equestrian said.

Yet while most dressage riders today look for the large, placid horse for a dressage prospect, European military riders of 300 years ago began on the backs of small Mediterranean horses such as the Arabian, Barb and Turk.

"These animals were very small yet possessed tremendous strength," Ms. Sansom said. "When military men had to march 1,000 miles they wouldn't conceive of doing it on the back of a great lumbering beast like a Shire. Pound for pound the Arabian is by far the strongest horse."

However, club members have faced difficulties associated with promoting the Arabian in the dressage world. Their temperament and excitability can sometimes be detrimental for a horse required to perform intricate movements under complete control.

Claiming CADENCE has been making strides in the industry, both Ms. Sansom and Mrs. Wagschal agreed: "More and more all-Arabian shows have started to include dressage classes in their competition."

"In 1984 we took our Arabians to the States to compete in a national dressage competition. There were only 12 horses entered and at one point the numbers were so low they had to cancel," Mrs. Wagschal said. "But last year they had 57 entries in the same class. I definitely think Arabian participation in the dressage world is on the upswing."

Students stage new operetta

Students at Ballantrae Public School present the operetta *Alice in Oz* tonight (May 6) and tomorrow at 7:30 p.m.

Joan Wideman is directing this musical adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

Student art work is on display in the school's hallways in conjunction with the shows.

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