

Rare horse breeders

Stouffville pair's Arabian tale

By DENISE McDONALD

He came from a family that had little, if any, interest in horses. She had never even seen a kitten born before she met her future husband.

But together, Ross and Mary Ann MacDuff have been responsible for establishing one of the most successful Polish Arabian breeding farms in Whitchurch-Stouffville, as well as Ontario.

According to Mr. MacDuff, his initial involvement with the equine breed began at age 14, when he drove heavy draft horses in a lumber camp.

"After a lapse of about 20 years, I acquired my first Quarter Horse," he said. "But after a year and a half, I found out the Arabian is much prettier and more intelligent. I know I'm going to take a lot of flak from the Quarter Horse community because of that statement, but that's my own personal opinion."

In October of 1973, Mr. MacDuff surprised his wife with the announcement they were off to buy their first Arabian, an Ontario-born, six-month-old purebred filly, Neden Gaiaan.

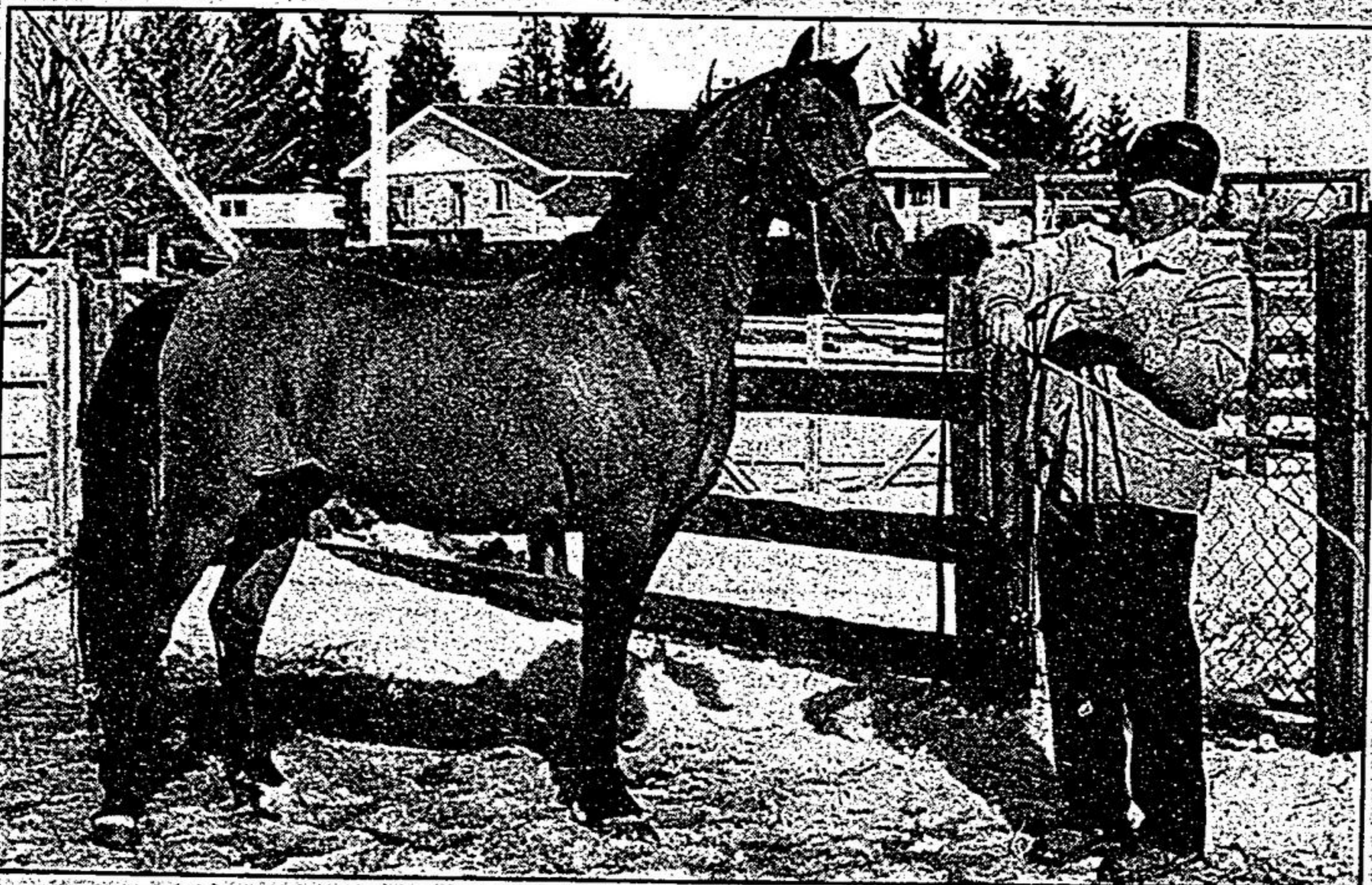
"Although we did acquire a number of Arabians from Ontario, the characteristic of the breed was not as well-bred or well-defined as it could have been," he said.

Choosing to look elsewhere, the MacDuffs travelled across the United States in their search, until they found three outstanding foundation broodmares, Rayona, Felina and Ellona.

In 1979, Ellona was sent back to the United States to be bred to renowned champion Polish stallion Bask, (the asterisk in his name identifies him as an imported horse) whose stud fees at that time were in the five figure range.

"We really liked his offspring, but at the time it cost so much to acquire one," said Mr. MacDuff. "So we decided to take our own mare down to be bred to him."

The result was a bay colt (male), Bask Sequel. The MacDuffs had been hoping for a filly which would someday become foundation mare



of their breeding program.

After living his initial growing years in leisure, Sequel made his show ring debut in 1986. Shown in halter by Mr. MacDuff and in English Pleasure by Wendy Graham, he captured wins in both divisions and was Reserve Champion Stallion at the Tulip Festival Show in 1986.

However, his best performances have been at home during those years before he was shown, where he was used as a breeding stallion.

He is the sire of MDA Kirby, awarded many championships, including the 1985 Eastern Canadian Arabian Breeders Reserve Champion Stallion award. (The MDA signifies the stable to which the horse belongs: MacDuff Arabians.)

At the 1986 Canadian Arabian Breeders Show, his daughters, Bask Antoinetta, bred and owned by George and Eleanor Leslie of Kheg Arabians in Brooklin, and the MacDuff's MDA Fascination, stood first and second respectively in a class of 17-yearling fillies.

At the age of seven, Sequel was sold to Harry Sheftel of Silver Hill in Calgary.

"Mr. Sheftel could do more for him than I could," said Mr. MacDuff. "He's now hired a trainer and will be entering Sequel in all the big shows this year."

Yet their involvement with this prize stallion hasn't ended yet, they've retained breeding privileges for the next three years, and anxiously await prospective foals.

In the interim years between Sequel's birth and sale, the MacDuffs packed up their breeding facilities in Englehart, near Kirkland Lake, and took up residence on Highway 48, Stouffville in 1980.

"The government said if I moved here, I could be classified as a business, but it's since reneged on that promise," he said. "But it is much nicer. It's an ideal location and a lot closer to the market. Anywhere on this ridge is horse country. I get a lot of traffic in and out of here."

Mrs. MacDuff jokingly refers to the following six years as a time they kept their heads down and their butts up.

"We had to renovate the cattle barn from standing stalls to boxes, build a new arena and house, and put in miles of fencing which I haven't even finished yet," said Mr. MacDuff.

Although they own three stallions and 13 mares, as well as housing several boarders, MacDuffs specialize in selling horses to the Arabian market.

"The objective on our farm is to have horses for sale from \$3,000 to \$20,000. Everything here is for sale, except for me and the cat," quipped Mrs. MacDuff.

"When people come here, we always ask them: what they want the horse for," she added. "We want to make sure we sell them one that is capable of doing what they want it to. Our intent is not just to sell a horse, but to sell one that is com-

patible with the owner."

"More importantly," she continued, "we like to keep a low profile and make friends when we breed or sell a horse. When we were at a show nine years ago, a lady came up to me and said I had bought a horse she used to own. It was Ellona. We still keep in touch with her as well as a lot of people we've done business with over the years."

When asked what particular qualities the Polish Arabian possesses to make it so popular, Mr. MacDuff said: "The temperament is number one. Because of that we get 20 per cent more when they're sold than a regular Arabian. Their athletic ability is also superior. They're called the versatile horse. They are also very easy to train."

To prove his claim, he relates a story of one of his horses. "Just the other day a girl got on the back of one of my stallions and rode him around the arena. He'd never been ridden before and he didn't buck once."

"The Poles have definitely been doing their homework over the last 45 years," he continued. "They will not breed a horse that does not have a good temperament. It's what they're noted for."

At present the MacDuffs are anxiously awaiting the birth of two foals due in April; the offspring of their recently imported stallion Mentor AA.

"This is our first step into breeding the pure Polish strain, the rest are all Polish-related," he said.

"We're just keeping our fingers crossed on these two, to see what they turn out like."

Although seen as superior business people and top breeders in their fields, the MacDuffs are also sympathetic to the less fortunate horse lovers within the community.

"If there's anybody who wants to stay in the field, who doesn't have a horse of their own, they can come up and work with mine, free of charge, until that particular horse is sold. If they still want to continue, I'll just put them on another," said Mr. MacDuff. "That way they can keep in shape and give my horses some handling as well."

The look of eagles

Mentor AA, (top photo), one of Ross MacDuff's three prized stallions, (the initials signify the Arabian stable he came from) was imported to Ontario early last year, and has since sired a number of champion foals, including two pure Polish get anxiously expected this April. (Bottom left,) Bask Sequel, the son of World Champion Polish stallion Bask and Ross's favorite horse, was recently sold to a new owner in Calgary who Ross claims could do more for him in the way of training. Before his sale, Sequel sired many of the MacDuff's prize-winning stock, including one stallion presently standing at stud, MDA Kirby. (Bottom right,) Mentor AA proudly displays one of the Arabians more noted characteristics, second only to their temperaments, their beautiful dish shaped face.

Top photo by Denise McDonald

Bottom photos courtesy of Ross and Mary Ann MacDuff

