



MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

by THERESA CARDAMONE

For more than a thousand years BCE, the capital city of Ma'rib was a thriving oasis in the ancient kingdom of Saba' (also known as Sheba) in what is now Yemen. Construction of a massive dam in the northern mountains, an area thought by many to be the origin of both the Arab people and the Arabian horse, provided irrigation for the flourishing civilization in Old South Arabia. As one of only two places in the world that produced the coveted frankincense and myrrh, the Sabaeans monopolized the perfume trade, controlled the trade routes, and thrived in what came to be known as Arabia Felix, or "Happy Arabia."

Omar Ali, originally from Yemen, travelled to the United States long before the ongoing war ravaging his homeland began in 2015. Now an American citizen, he grieves for the Yemeni people's plight and encapsulates his love for his native land by calling his Arabian horse breeding program Felix Arabia. Omar explains, "I wanted my farm name to be about something more than myself. I'm very proud of my Yemeni heritage, the home of all Arab people, and the motherland of the Arabian horse. Hence the name 'Arabia Felix' made perfect sense, as it represents the rich history of both the Arab people and the Arabian horse...culminating in 'Felix Arabia' as the official name for our breeding program."

As a boy, Omar was always passionate about horses, but hardly ever exposed to any. He always knew it was in his destiny to acquire one "when he got older." Years later, he learned that one of his cousins was involved with Arabian horses. Omar immediately began a journey throughout California to find himself an Arabian horse. He was stunned to learn of the abundance of Arabian horses, and that American breeders produced the key foundation stock for modern breeding programs all over the world.

As a new enthusiast, Omar knew he had to work with the best stock available but wasn't sure where to turn for advice. He read all that he could find and looked at over 50 horses, traveling to the corners of the state of California, before falling in love and buying his first mare: GDA Ribbons and Roses, who was a Magnum Psyche daughter out of Good as Golde, a five-time U.S./Canadian national champion in both halter and performance. The two began to establish a relationship as trail-riding partners. "She was a lot of trouble," Omar confesses. "She came out of the halter show ring, and I did not know much of anything about horses. So, I took a lot of lessons and finally figured out how to communicate with her. I quickly learned she was not interested in someone who wanted to boss her around; she was looking for a partner. We bonded during that experience. I made so many mistakes, and she was so forgiving and patient." Omar began to think about breeding her.

He moved his mare to a new barn, where he met Anita Enander. A one-time CEO of an Arabian horse breed journal, she became a mentor to Omar and, more importantly, a gateway to some critical connections. "Anita was gracious," he recalls. "She advised me on horses and told me to reach out to Cindy Reich, a judge with 35 years' experience who has a great eye. I called Cindy, she was a kind and knowledgeable person I am grateful to know. She began reviewing photos and videos of horses I was interested in. We went through that rigorous evaluation process on over 20 horses—none of them passed Cindy's criteria. She said, 'Omar, I know you're excited, but you're making terrible decisions! You shouldn't be looking at these horses. Don't waste your money and burn yourself out.' She gave me reality checks and reminded me not to get ahead of myself. It is good advice for all new breeders."

Cindy Reich credits Omar with being a good student. "A large part of Omar's success as a breeder is that he listens, absorbs, and then executes," she explains. "He was very wise to pick out a handful of people with a lot of experience and ask a lot of good questions, and watch, and listen, and look at horses, and learn. And he's made decisions that have worked out really well. His filly and colt that won at Scottsdale were from his first and second foal crops as a breeder. It was jaw-dropping, even for those of us that have been around the block a few times. I don't think he's produced a bad foal yet; he uses different stallions and gets the same great results."



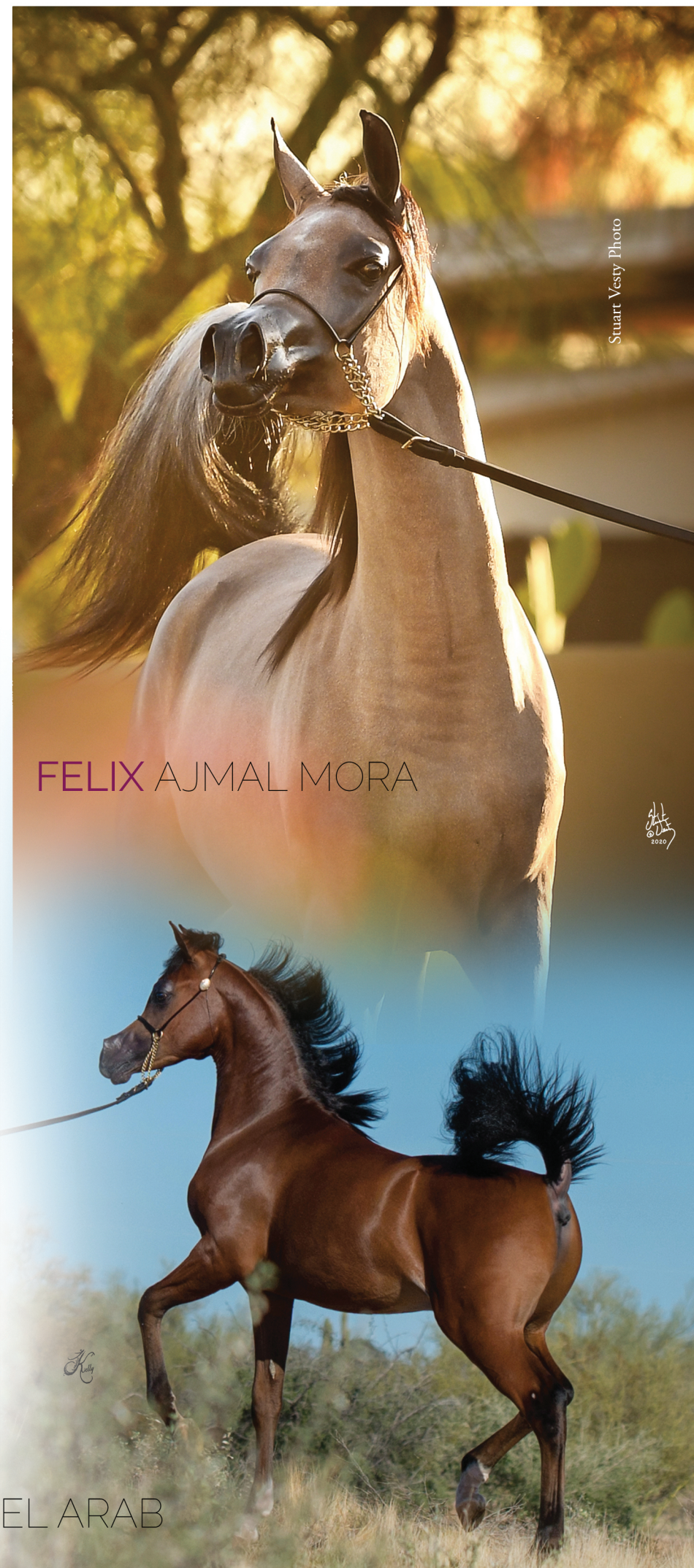
Cindy referred to Omar's homebred duo of 2021 Scottsdale Gold Champions: International Arabian Breeder Egyptian Heritage Yearling Colt, Felix Jamal El Arab (Magic Magnifique x Om El Beladeena), and International Arabian Jr. Mare, Felix Ajmal Mora (RFI Farid x Janeenah). Sandro Pinha did a masterful job showing Jamal to his win. His quality, conformation, elegance, and presence negated the developmental disadvantage of being born in July. Omar has big plans for Jamal, including sending him to compete in Europe a year from now after allowing him time to grow and mature.

Andy Sellman, who presented Felix Ajmal Mora was liberal in his praise. "This filly is one in a million!!" he enthuses. "From nose to tail, she is truly special. Her face is as beautiful as I've ever seen, her neck shape is outstanding, her topline extra-smooth, her tail is perfectly straight and always elevated. She's just a star!" Cindy agrees. "That filly is off the charts," she relates. "As a baby, she was incredible, and she's even better as a young mare. She is one of the most beautiful fillies I've ever seen. There's an other-worldly aspect about her that is hard to describe, particularly her expression. She's very, very special." Andy agrees, "The sky is the limit for her future. I was so proud to show her in Scottsdale. It was her first time competing, and she handled herself beautifully. She is a very rare horse that I think can compete to win anywhere in the world."

Felix Ajmal Mora will join Felix Jamal El Arab in representing Felix Arabia at the 2021 World Cup in April. From there, the plans get very exciting, indeed. "We haven't been promoting American breeding the way the other countries do," Omar counsels. "I haven't seen many big farms actively engaged in showing horses in the United States over the last five years. I want the American market to reclaim its greatness and re-attract buyers and breeders from around the world. We have made the greatest contribution to the breed over time. We have the modern look, along with the strong, complete, balanced, well-structured bodies that the Arabian horse should have."

Omar can think of no better way to showcase American breeding than by showcasing his horses in the most prestigious international settings. He hopes to do just that. Once the World Cup has ended, he plans to send Felix Ajmal Mora and perhaps Jamal to Europe for the season. On the agenda are Menton, Aachen, and the World Championships in Paris. "I am humbled and excited to promote my own stock in these venues," Omar smiles. "I give credit to God, who has blessed me with everything, to Cindy Reich, Michael Weinstein, Michael Byatt, Andy Sellman, who has been an incredible friend, and Sandro Pinha; all have all contributed to our success at Felix Arabia."

Omar Ali encourages other new, small breeders to step into the industry. "It is doable," he assures. "Be patient and put your investment into the right horses, consultants, and experts. There are no shortcuts. I consider buying the best embryos from the best-producing mares available, a cost-effective choice to produce the best possible results. Remember, to go to the top; you have to go for the best." If the Scottsdale results are any indication, the challenge remaining for Felix Arabia is to maintain the momentum to stay on top.



FELIX AJMAL MORA

FELIX JAMAL EL ARAB