

by THERESA CARDAMONE

Rae-Dawn Arabians: The Rainbow's End

For Murray and Shirley Popplewell, winning at Scottsdale is a highly coveted honor. "This is always one of the toughest shows on the circuit," Murray informs. "And that's what it's all about. There was exceptional quality, and you had to be the best to win it. That is what makes a horse show. Win, lose, or draw, it was nice to be there...even though it was hard to recognize people because of the masks!"

After a curtailed 2020 season due to COVID restrictions, the Popplewells have every reason to be pleased. Rae-Dawn Arabians was the 2021 Scottsdale Leading Breeder of halter champions and second Leading Breeder by number of winners. As owners, they were second in number of purebred winners, and third overall, in both cases tied with industry giants Al Shaqab and Orrion Farms. In Murray's opinion, the Show Committee did an amazing job bringing in entries representing programs from all over the world despite the pandemic.

The senior mare class was a perfect example of the international complexion of the show. The Rae-Dawn team were thrilled with the performance of their homebred Bey Ambition daughter, multiple United States and Canadian Reserve National Champion Mare, RD Marciea Bey. Perfectly presented by Alcides Rodrigues, the "Queen of Rae-Dawn" pranced her way into the hearts of the audience, finishing second to the eventual Scottsdale Champion Mare,



AJ Kharena, who was also the Brazilian National Silver Champion. Standing third in a very deep class was the Polish-bred World Champion, Pinga. "It's always good to have that kind of competition in a class," Murray wisely states. "It's good to be right there with the best in the world."

Alcides also had the pleasure of bringing Bey Ambition out for the crowd one more time. Now 15 years old, the multi-National Champion dazzled. "We just wanted to show him again," Murray explains. "He loves to show—he grows bigger every show you take him to—he just loves it!" In addition to his numerous halter winners, Bey Ambition also sired performance winners in the hunter and western pleasure categories. "Those are the kind of things that are rewarding as a breeder," muses Murray. "Not that we bred them all, but our stallion was involved; that's always rewarding."

Murray and Shirley have both had great success as amateur handlers, but Murray gives Shirley all the credit. "She has a unique way of showing horses," he praises. "She doesn't get rattled the way that I do. In fact, we both showed Bey Ambition daughters in the Breeders Club 2-Year-Old Filly class. Shirley was champion with RD Kalaya, and I was reserve with RD Yazzna, a full sister to RD Marciea Bey."

Shirley also rose to the top with RD Nova JP in the hotly contested Signature Stallion Yearling Filly class, which uses elimination rounds to whittle down



Bailarina AS & Alcides Rodrigues

Passion...

noun: a powerful emotion or its expression, especially the emotion of love and joy.

the huge field to a final event stacked with talent. Murray and Shirley didn't think twice when they first saw Nova at Greg Knowles' training barn. "She looked very expensive!" Murray exclaims, "But we weren't leaving there without her!" When he realized Nova was bred by Jack Perry, Murray was even more pleased. "He is one of the nicest, hardest working people in the industry," he states. Although she was the youngest filly in the class, Nova and Shirley brought home the Signature Stallion championship. "She won it!" celebrates Murray. "Our farm has never won that before; we were happy to get to the top twenty! We thought Nova had a good chance, but she showed her socks off and won!"

Murray was also delighted with the performance of another new purchase, Alesia ENB; bred by Mike Weinstein. Shown by Alcides Rodrigues, she captivated all who saw her with her grace and presence. "Trotting out there, showing to the judges, she was amazing," Murray smiles. "Weinstein is a great breeder. We had so many people come up and tell us how awesome she is. That's the reward."

Next on the horizon for Rae-Dawn is the Arabian Breeders World Cup. Usually held in Las Vegas, the ABWC is now scheduled for April 8-11 in a new location—the polo field in Scottsdale. Murray, a Board member of the ABWC, explains the change, "Due to COVID, we decided to move

the show outdoors and give it a more European feel, with green grass and white tents. Our show committee deserves a round of applause. They had to put things together very quickly, securing the polo field and hiring a strong slate of international judges."

Murray continues with a final thought, "In today's reality, you never know what the new plan will be for the next day. COVID is temporary. Storms don't last forever. If you want to get to the end of the rainbow, you have to be willing to ride through the storm."



Shirley, Bey Ambition & Murray



Alesia ENB



RD Marcelina



RD Nova JP

Rae-Dawn Arabians

Murray & Shirley Popplewell
Alcides Rodrigues, trainer

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Canada
Scottsdale, Arizona U.S.A.