



(Photo by Laurelle Anderson)



The horse show features more than 1,000 competitions. Tristan Wikel, 16, of Ohio, was the high point winner in her age category at last year's show.

(Photo by Gleen Schatzberg)

All the *Pretty* Horses

Scottsdale hosts the largest Arabian horse show in the world

By Letaah Woldoff

The largest Arabian horse show in the world began as a small event for Arizonans who owned Arabian horses.

The 1958 inaugural show, organized by the Arabian Horse Association of Arizona (AHAA), was held at the Arizona Biltmore and featured 80 horses and more than a dozen exhibitors from Arizona and neighboring states. Today, Arabian horse enthusiasts from around the world come to Scottsdale, considered the mecca of the Arabian horse world, to kick off each year's season of competitions. More than 2,400 Arabian and half-Arabian horses and their owners are expected to compete for

more than \$2 million in prizes at the 63rd Annual Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show, to be held February 15 through February 25 at WestWorld. More than 300,000 people attend the event each year, according to Taryl O'Shea, AHAA executive director.

In addition to more than 1,000 competitions held in seven arenas, the event also features a variety of activities, an international cuisine court and more than 300 vendors and trade booths offering products ranging from lavish jewelry, artwork and clothing to boots and custom saddles. Guests can take a behind-the-barn tour to learn about how the breeds prepare for competition. There's also an expanded

family fun zone, which includes pony rides and a petting zoo. A Meet the Horse experience offers an opportunity to pose for photos atop a horse. Except for pony and camel rides, there is no extra charge for any of these activities. "We've really tried to make it an inexpensive family event," O'Shea says.

Activities vary each day and include a dog adoption station from the Arizona Humane Society, demonstrations from the Scottsdale Police Department's Mounted Unit, riding seminars and dog demonstrations. "Every day we have something a little different," O'Shea says. AHAA also

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The Scottsdale show features more than 300 vendors and trade booths.

(Photo by Wendy Peterson)

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hosts a children's art contest and a photography contest; the winners receive prize money and the submissions are displayed during the show.

The Scottsdale show is where owners, breeders and trainers unveil their superstars for the new competition year, according to O'Shea. Attendees are introduced to the new horses and can purchase and sell horses. In the weeks leading up to the show, breeders and horse owners from around the world bring their horses to Scottsdale via specialized equine air travel. Many of the owners have purchased homes in the area and after the Scottsdale show, they travel throughout North America to compete in other shows. The season culminates in November with the World Championships in Paris.

Charitable mission

AHAA, a nonprofit based in Scottsdale, was founded in 1955 with a dozen members and now has about 500 members. Throughout the year, it offers seminars, clinics and educational programs, as well as raises money for several charities.

The Scottsdale show, which utilizes more than 400 volunteers, is the largest of AHAA's five shows. Proceeds from ticket sales are donated to charity; the 2017 show raised more than \$100,000, according to O'Shea. This year's show will raise funds for the March of Dimes, the Scottsdale Community College Equine Program, Ryan House, Horses Help and Warrior Horses.



On certain days of the show, children can paint their own ceramic pony as part of the show's expanded family fun zone.

(Photo by Wendy Peterson)



Attendees of the Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show have opportunities to meet the horses.

(Photo by Laurel Anderson)

AHAA is the largest Arabian horse club in the Arabian Horse Association (AHA), an umbrella organization formed in 2003 as the result of the merger of the Arabian Horse Registry (founded in 1908) and the International Arabian Horse Association (founded in 1950). AHA, based in Colorado, is the official Arabian horse breed association and registry in the U.S. and Canada, with more than 26,000 members and more than one million registered Arabian, half-Arabian and Anglo-Arabian horses.

An "amazing" breed

Arabian horses are originally from the Arabian Peninsula and were bred by the Bedouins as war mounts for long treks and quick forays into enemy camps, according to the AHA. Some of their physical characteristics come from living in harsh desert environments, such as their large, wide-set eyes to help them see predators and their large nostrils to take in more air and cool their bodies. Other identifiable characteristics of a purebred Arabian horse are a finely chiseled head, dished face, long arching neck and high tail carriage. They're also known for their endurance and intelligence. "The Arabian horses are known as the most beautiful breed on Earth," says O'Shea, who owns four Arabian horses and says they are like dogs in the sense that they prefer to be with people. "I would not own any other breed," she says. "They're amazing."

The Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show takes place February 15 through February 28 at WestWorld, 16601 N. Pima Road, Scottsdale. Admission is free for children younger than 12 and general admission for adults is \$10 (\$7 for seniors and members of the military). Admission is free to all military families on Tuesday, February 20, and to families at Family Night on Friday, February 23. For additional information, including a schedule of events, visit scottsdalshow.com. ■