



Scott TREES

Early one morning, shooting for Al Aryam Arabians in Abu Dhabi we turned this stallion Baccarat loose on a beach. He was having a great time running and playing which made for some great photographs.



REFLECTIONS ON PHOTOGRAPHING ARABIAN HORSES

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY RENOWNED
PHOTOGRAPHER SCOTT TREES

In my life, there has never been a period of time when horses have not been a presence in one fashion or another. I grew up in the horse industry. My Mother had World Champion Saddlebreds, my brother showed American Quarter Horses.

The Arabian horse came into my life when I was 13. I had been riding open jumping horses; however, my mother and stepfather had a common bond with a love of the Arabian horse and that gradually became the main direction of their program. My mother had an eye for good Arabian horses and vision as a breeder. Together, they bred some great horses with a Polish and Crabbet bloodline cross long before it was popular. They were best known for a cross between *Serafix and *Muskatella producing four stallions: Muskateer, Cavaleer, Travaleer, and Buccaneer. These four brothers had impressive show records and their bloodlines can be found in some of the great show horses of today.

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My interest in photography began in college and once the photography bug bit me, all I wanted to do was take pictures.

I was actually a psychology major, but knew that if there was any way possible, I wanted to make my living with a camera. I didn't start out with a goal of photographing horses. When I started taking photographs, it was a film based medium. Film and processing were not cheap and early on in the game I figured I had to make photography a business if I wanted to take photographs on a regular basis. As a result, I did all kinds of sessions. I started a business shooting parties at fraternities and sororities that paid for college. I also shot college sporting events, portraits, commercial work, anything that would give me experience. I really enjoyed photographing architecture, and would eventually be able to fulfill that desire while living in the Middle East.

However, early in my photographic experimentation, I started photographing sale horses for my Mother and gradually began to understand that I had talent in that area. I also knew that a specialization in any photographic venue would offer a better likelihood of making it a career. I think it is fair to say that I really started photography as a business first and the artistic aspects developed as I gained more experience and confidence within my photographic ability.



ABOVE: Mares in Fog (Front View)

I was shooting a series of mares standing next to each other with studio lighting and fog machines. This is the front angle of the mares I was shooting, less one mare.



ABOVE: Dune Mare

I scouted locations for two days, looking for the right dune and the proper background. Waiting for the light to get just right, we turned this mare loose, Estashama, and I knew that she would come back to her barn buddy that was just out of frame. It made for a beautiful setting.

At the age of 24, I accepted a horse show referral from noted equine photographer Polly Knoll. Little did I know that accepting that show would be the beginning of a four-decade-plus career that would literally take me around the world several times.

I think it is important to share that my approach to photographing horses started from an advertising and promotional standpoint. This influence started at the beginning of my career when I did commercial based photographic assignments. Working with art directors, I learned the importance of a unique image for getting attention in advertising. That simple fact still holds true today. This approach allowed me to bring my artistic vision and talent to my sessions.

When I began, the most common advertising image of a horse was a conformational side body shot. Equestrian breed publications had page after page of them. Essentially the same pose, just a different colored horse. They required a lot of skill to do properly, but I wanted to do something different, something outside the box. In my opinion, an Arabian horse is the high fashion model of the industry. For this reason, Arabians lend themselves to a more exotic type of session and this suited my desires perfectly.

In the early stages of my career with Arabians, that “different” approach began with liberty shots; horses just respond differently when they aren’t fettered to a human being. For me, it offered a much better opportunity to capture expression from a horse. The freedom of movement allowed the horses to manifest their full personality via body language and expression.

In the 80’s, the Arabian horse industry had a huge upswing. It was perfectly timed for me as I had come into my own as an artistic photographer and the market was very receptive to my ideas



ABOVE: Best Friends

One of the more incredible experiences shooting was when we turned loose these two stallions, Danton & Bakkaratt in a protected inlet. From a previous effort I knew they would be OK together, they were good buds, even though mature stallions. I was hoping for a shot of them running out of the water together. I got that shot and a lot more! They ended up cavorting in the water and beach together for well over an hour! It was beautiful to see and experience.

for unique types of images. It was amazing really. Anything I could visualize to shoot, there was a client that would want it done.

Thus began my direction of looking for a more artistic approach using exotic locations, studios, anything that would be different from what everyone else was showing in a magazine. My goal was to take something people see every day and show it to them in a way they had not seen it before. Thus began a hallmark of my style. Whenever possible, I look for the unusual--I combine my deep understanding of horse behavior and an artistic approach with my lighting and composition.

A common remark I hear about my images is they look back at you, drawing a viewer into the shot. They also seem to evoke a strong emotional response.

This isn't something I do consciously, rather it's an innate response I have to what is in front of my lens regardless of the subject matter. More often than not I am creating an image for an advertisement of some sort. Essentially, I consider myself an advertising photographer that happens to specialize in horses. As such, I am constantly considering the market I am shooting for, which is female, and looking for shots that will capture attention and convey emotion.

Throughout the years, I have been fortunate to have opportunities that allowed me to create a large quantity of iconic images in the Arabian Industry. If I do say so myself, early in my career I had a significant impact on how the Arabian horse is photographed today. I was the first in many categories to do something different when it came to photographing the Arabian horse. For that reason, I am often brought in to try and create a defining image of an Arabian horse, usually a breeding stallion.

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TOP: Another desert setting with the wind adding to the mood of the photo.



BOTTOM: Warrior Mare

In the office of the Imperial Egyptian Stud, I noticed this halter hanging on the wall. We grabbed a broodmare out of the pasture that I thought would be right for the shot and angle, lit the set, and brought in the mare. This was shot on film and is shown exactly as shot.

Early in my career, a photograph that put me on the map was a studio series done of the stallion *Gokart. I rented a commercial studio near Santa Barbara, California, lined the floor with rubber mats and brought *Gokart into the studio. He was a very laid back stallion and was not the least bit concerned about what I was trying to do. Six studio strobes were used to light the set and he tolerated all of the lighting tests and setups with great dignity.

I had a tease horse waiting outside the studio with a door open, and when he unexpectedly turned to see the tease horse for the first time, I immediately saw this angle and took the shot. This was in the film era, and there were only two frames taken. But I knew when I took it that it was going to be a special shot. The final image generated a tremendous buzz in the Arabian industry when the ad ran, and the artistic career began!

Working with the great breeder Sheila Varian provided a different sort of photographic opportunity. Sheila had many great horses and photographs of them, so her desire was for something different. After scouting potential locations, we went out to a field next to her main barn and I experimented with a blur effect. Again, shooting on film, I had no idea if it would be effective. I talked up the idea but in all honesty, I was not exactly certain just how to do it! I remember thinking, "If this doesn't work, your career is over!". When I saw the proofs, I was ecstatic. This turned out to be one of Varian Arabians' most popular and enduring advertising images.

I can't talk about photographs that helped boost my career without talking about the image of Barbary++/. He was an incredible English horse, and once again, I wanted to find a different approach.

The set was actually in their hay barn, with studio strobes, and again, shooting film, I had to shoot the image as I wanted the final shot to appear. I set up my lighting, used fog machines, put a red filter over one of the lights and the first time he came through the fog, he really could not see what was on the

other side. When he saw me, his eyes got bigger and this was the first shot I took in the series.

It became "The" shot that was used on a cover and took the industry by storm. In today's digital age, I need to point out this photograph is exactly as was shot. There were no post production effects added.

Another iconic shot long used by the Arabian Horse Association in the United States, is a shot of a little girl kissing her favorite mare. We were actually prepping the mare for an ad shot. The little girl arrived with her grandmother to watch, got out of the golf cart and walked directly over to see her favorite horse. I thought to myself, "that's cute" and I took one shot. Looking at this image from a compositional aspect, I find all kinds of faults. But the emotional connection of this little girl and horse overpowers any compositional flaws. The photograph says a lot about the Arabian horse and its connection to people and has probably been one of the most popular images I ever took.

Fast forward many years later when I was doing a lot of work in the Middle East. I had the opportunity to photograph Escape Ibn Navarrone-D. Several days earlier, I found the desert location I wanted and from scouting, knew when the light would be right. Escape Ibn Navarrone-D is a very dynamic and territorial stallion. Knowing that, I used another stallion for teasing, and when confronted, Escape Ibn Navarrone-D let out a bellow and challenged what he considered an adversary. This photograph turned out to be one of Escape's defining images and certainly brought me a lot of worldwide awareness. I chuckle to myself and think that when I die, they will say, "You know, he's the photographer that took that desert shot of Escape Ibn Navarrone-D!".

The challenge with a horse is there is only so much that can be done, safely. Horses are probably one of the most difficult subjects to photograph.



TOP: Stallion in a Dream

This was shot during the same session as the Mares in the Fog series. This was the first pass the stallion made through the fog. The sun in the background was actually one of the lights for the set.

LEFT: Barbary++/

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ABOVE LEFT: Escape Ibn Navarrone-D

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ABOVE RIGHT OPPOSITE PAGE: Again on another shoot for Albidayer Stud, we turned this mare loose in an ocean inlet. I was standing chest deep in the water, Dawn swam the mare further out, turned her around to face the beach and let her loose. I got the shot on the second attempt. A couple of weeks later when we were discussing the shot with some friends, they informed us that that area was known for having sharks!



ABOVE: Sheila Varian and Desperado V in motion.



ABOVE: *Gokart in the studio.



The only predictable thing about a horse is their unpredictability. Acquiring the types of shots that I create is a team effort. It requires the desire of the owner and the cooperation of the trainer, assistants, grooms and photographic assistants to make them happen. I must admit that when a shoot comes together and I see the final result, I still get as excited as I did when I first started taking pictures.

I mentioned earlier that I started photography more as a business than as an art form. Fortunately, over the years, time and circumstance allowed me to become an artist as well. Today, my time is divided between photographic sessions, speaking, and selling my work to equestrian enthusiasts and collectors. I love taking photographs and while there is also a strong video side to my business endeavors, photography is and will always be my one true passion.

I always share with my friends, "You will know I am dead when you wave a camera under my nose and I don't quiver!"



Scott Trees has been one of the leading International Arabian Horse Photographers for over four decades. When not traveling, he resides with his wife in Fort Worth, Texas. Scott has traveled the world shooting commissions and assignments. He also teaches a variety of photographic workshops where he openly shares his knowledge and experience. In recent years, he has become a sought after motivational and inspirational speaker. To view his work, order Scott's teaching DVD's, prints and gifts, or contact Scott, please visit www.treesmedia.com.