

*El Shaklan

Words by Sigi Constanti
Photography on El Arab archives

Sigi Constanti, the breeder of El Shaklan, shares some of her significant moments of the legendary stallion's life.

On 10 August 1975, *El Shaklan was born in Germany on our farm in the Black Forest. He was the third foal produced from the mating of Shaker El Masri to *Estopa. He was *Estopa's first colt and, despite my few years as a breeder, I could tell that he was extra special. His face was fine and chiselled and he looked like a filly.

As a yearling, in August of 1976, we brought *El Shaklan to an international show in Belgium. It was there that Pat and Joanna Maxwell of England saw him and came to our farm to purchase him. They offered 20,000DM, which was a nice price for an unknown colt with an unproven gene pool. My then husband wanted to accept the offer. We had another business that required considerable capital and the offered money came at a time when it was needed. He also reasoned that we had both sire and dam and we could make another. I refused to agree to the sale and adamantly proclaimed that if *El Shaklan would be sold, I would go with him. To this day Major Pat Maxwell acknowledges that he came very close to owning *El Shaklan, if only I hadn't interfered.

In December of 1976 we agreed to the lease of *El Shaklan to Pat and Joanna and he left the farm in the Black Forest to live at the Maxwell's Lodge Farm Stud in England for two years. In the fall of 1978, he returned with several show titles including British National Junior Champion Stallion. *El Shaklan had become a stallion of international acclaim.

In October of 1978, *El Shaklan went to the German Koerung (stallion licensing exam), which was required before we could stand him at stud in Germany. He was awarded the highest marks of any stallion given the exam. The following summer of 1979, he went to Marbach State Stud for the 100-day Stallion Performance Test, where a Marbach rider rides each horse to score suitability under saddle, including dressage, jumping and cross-country race gallop. During the race gallop, *El Shaklan pulled up with a bowed

tendon. Despite not finishing the race gallop, he received the highest score of the test for rideability and disposition.

It was then that *El Shaklan, at four years of age, came home to the Black Forest. He required considerable care to repair his tendon injury. For three months, he was to be kept in a stall. It was during those months that we bonded and grew to enjoy the company of

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one another. I spent hours every day working on his tendon and talking with him. He was the sweetest patient during all that time. After three months, I began to take him for long walks around the farm. We walked together every day and over the time that his tendon was healing, I realised that we had become



the best of friends. After the three months were up, I began to ride him at the walk around the farm and through the forest.

*El Shaklan, along with his siblings and get, were enjoying enormous popularity and success in shows across Europe and Australia. We decided that it was time to compete in the United States. In October 1982 *El Shaklan, along with his dam and several relatives, left Europe for the United States to begin his show and breeding career in California. After making frequent trips to visit *El Shaklan, in 1983 we decided to move to California and bought a farm in the Santa Ynez Valley.

My divorce in 1985 bought about one of my life's saddest moments – the forced sale of *El Shaklan. After months of legal battles to prevent his sale, my former husband prevailed and the court approved the sale. *El Shaklan was sold to Nagib Audi in Brazil. In February of 1986, *El Shaklan left our farm in California and was transported to his new home faraway in Brazil. I believed at that time that I wanted to stop breeding horses. It had already been

hard to accept the loss of *El Shaklan's sire, Shaker El Masri, at an early age from a fall in

fans and those who had come to buy his get at the sale. With a cruel twist of fate, our

purchase agreement was ignored and *El Shaklan was offered for sale. A telephone call delivered the unbelievable news that *El Shaklan had been sold to Count Federico Zichy-Thyssen of Argentina. I had lost *El Shaklan for the second time and realised in my heart that he would never come home again.

In March of 1999, we visited *El Shaklan on Count Federico's farm in Argentina. Although it was obvious he had to deal with the pain of his infirmities, *El Shaklan looked happy and content. He was king of the farm and



Sigi with El Shaklan.

pasture just a few years before.

*El Shaklan's departure was the loss of my biggest joy in my life as a breeder. It was *Estopa, with her unconquerable spirit, that helped me rekindle my love for breeding. Slowly over the following years, we developed our breeding programme based upon *El Shaklan and his dam, *Estopa. In October of 1991, I received a call informing us that Nagib was dispersing all of his Arabian horses, including *El Shaklan. Two days later we flew to Brazil to buy *El Shaklan and bring him home again. Seeing him was both heartwarming and heartbreaking. It was a joy just to be able to share some time together. Sadly, I discovered that he had foundered and was in considerable pain. I felt that was all the more reason to bring him home. After many hours of negotiation, we signed a purchase agreement that would soon enable *El Shaklan to finally come home. I would spend time with him again and would see that he would get well, as we had so many years before. I returned home happy with the knowledge that *El Shaklan would become a big part of my life again.

The following weekend *El Shaklan was to be presented at the Audi sale to thrill his many

was treated royally and respectfully. I was very thankful to Count Federico for his wonderful care, but couldn't help but wishing that I could take him home to care for him during his last years. I longed for the long blissful walks we had and my mind flooded with memories of the countless hours we spent together. As I watched the big, glorious sun set proud and fiery on the Argentine plain that evening, I knew that I was saying goodbye to my cherished friend, who had become one of the greatest stallions alive, forever.

Though *El Shaklan is gone, his spirit,

his pedigree, his unique qualities and his personality will live on forever in our breeding programme. At the core were the *El Shaklan son, *Sanadik El Shaklan, and his half-brother, Estopasan. We were also blessed with three *Estopa daughters, *Bint

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Estopa, (by *El Shaklan), Om El Shaina (by *Carmargue) and Om El Beneera (by *Shareem El Sheikh). Nearly every individual in our breeding programme carries at least one line to *El Shaklan or to his dam, *Estopa.

This August, *El Shaklan would have been 35 years old. I will probably take a long walk around our farm, admiring our beautiful mares and their young foals in the pasture. Some will grow to become major champions somewhere in the world, just as they have for over 40 years now. As I walk, I will remember some of the times that we spent together and thank *El Shaklan for blessing my life then, just as he continues to do now ❖

