

# \*ESTOPA

## The Om El Arab Story

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PHOTOGRAPHY OM EL ARAB ARCHIVES UNLESS STATED

My feelings about \*Estopa and El Shaklan run deep, to the core of my being. Both have had a profound effect on my life. Both left an indelible imprint on my heart. Both have given me the inspiration and passion to make the breeding of Arabian horses my life's ambition. El Shaklan, born the same year as my daughter, was always like a son. I feel an overwhelming sense of pride when I think of him, like the parent of a child who has risen to prominence. I am immeasurably proud of El Shaklan's achievements, both as a show horse and a sire.

My feelings about \*Estopa are equally intense, but different. She enriched my life in ways beyond what my words can describe. Her personality is woven inextricably into the fabric of my life. She inspired and enchanted countless breeders and admirers around the world. She gave selflessly, protected fiercely, and fully appreciated a scratch and a soft word as a gift grander than all else. In the December 1999 issue of *Arabian Horse World*, \*Estopa was selected by writer/researcher Bette Finke as one of Europe's Top 10 Most Influential Mares of the Century. I would have liked to convey to \*Estopa, in our own private way of communicating, the profound significance of that wonderful honour. But, she probably wouldn't have given it more than a moment's thought. That was \*Estopa.

\*Estopa and I met in 1970. I was 19 and Estopa was five. I was in Spain on an Arabian horse buying trip during summer break from



Estopa in Santa Ynez.

university with my boyfriend, Heinz Merz. The Arabian horses being bred in Germany at that time were few and quite expensive. Mostly breeders were using Crabbet, Polish and Egyptian bloodlines. We were aware that there were several Arabian breeders in Spain and that their marketing had been hampered over recent years with an outbreak of African horse sickness closing Spain's borders to exportation. Breeders across Europe were also aware that the Arabian horses being bred in Spain had not

yet been approved by WAHO. During the Spanish Civil War, registrations and records were lost or burned and horses

scattered. Breeders were sceptical to buy these Arabians for fear that WAHO might not eventually approve the reconstructed records and refuse to endorse their pure-bred status.



Shaker El Masri.

The trip to Spain that pivotal summer for my life was inspired by the famous writer Erica Schiele, who recommended that we

contact Maria Paz Murga, the Secretary of the Spanish Registry. Maria then introduced us to her niece, HRH Teresa de Laula de Bourbon. Teresa was kind enough to organise and accompany us on a visit to the farms of several Arabian horse breeders.

Before we arrived on the farm of Don Miguel Osuna Escalera, she explained that he was a very difficult person, but a wonderful breeder. It was on that day that I met Estopa. She was dirty, full of scars and very thin. She had some wounds on her legs from the hobbles she wore daily to keep her from escaping the unfenced fields. But there was a special radiation about Estopa, even in that condition. On Teresa's recommendation and with her help with negotiations because Miguel didn't want to sell her, we were able to purchase Estopa.

On that trip we purchased 18 mares from five different farms. When these mares arrived in Germany, we were scoffed at by other breeders for buying the "Spanish Armada"; we knew we were taking a risk in buying so many horses because WAHO had not yet approved the Spanish Registry. Shortly after the mares arrived, five were quickly purchased by my parents. One mare, Mecca V, went into my ownership.

Our mares went to be boarded on a farm in Schwaebische Alp owned by the family Schule, about 2½ hours from where we lived. My parents kept their mares at home in their remodelled garage in the town of Rastatt, where I grew up and my father would lead them to neighbouring pastures to graze during the day.

We wanted to breed Estopa (Tabal x Uyaima by Barquillo), but before we could do so she had to be evaluated by the authorities of the German Registry. We bathed her for her first debut in Germany and transported her to the location of her official inspection. It was our impression that these inspectors were Egyptian breeders who were sceptical of Spanish-bred Arabians. First they evaluated

Estopa from nose to tail, ears to hoof and then they asked us to turn her loose. Estopa danced and floated and, with neck held high and tail over her back, she cast a spell on her inspectors. It was on that day that the legend of Estopa first began.



Om El Beneera (Sharem El Sheikh x Estopa) Last foal of Estopa.

Later that year we went to Poland to see what was available for our new-found breeding programme. We purchased the \*Naborr son Laos and the two mares Zbroja and Campina.

In the spring of 1971, Estopa was transported to the farm of Carl-Heinz and Constanze Doemken in Northern Germany for breeding to their Nazeer son, Ghazal (by Bukra). Three months later, Estopa lost her foal so we decided to bring her to Berlin, where we were at university. We found a riding stable and enrolled her in dressage training. I rode Estopa nearly every day. She was a hot mare and I an inexperienced rider; when she felt like it, she bucked me off. Despite my fears, I loved to ride her into

the Grunewald, the forests around Berlin. Estopa was the most beautiful horse in the stable. When a delegation from Animex, the horse sale organisation in Poland, came to the stable during a visit to Berlin, Estopa was shown, captivating another group of experts.

In the fall, Heinz and I travelled to Egypt with the goal of adding some straight Egyptian blood to our new herd. There we purchased the \*Morafic son Shaker (ex Zebeda) and five mares. When Shaker arrived in Germany we renamed him Shaker El Masri, which translates from Arabic as thankful to Egypt.

In 1971, Heinz and I married. We took over my parents business and formed a partnership with them for their horses. I named our new horse business Om El Arab, which means Mother of Arabians in Arabic. In the meanwhile, we had moved Estopa from the riding stable in Berlin to one of the stalls at my parents place at Rastatt. To give all of our horses and our new breeding programme a proper home, my parents bought a charming, romantic farm in the nestled in the dense woods of the Black Forest. My parents lived there and enjoyed managing the farm. Heinz and I spent our time working on the business in Rastatt during the

week, travelling 75 minutes every weekend to be with the horses on the farm.

Estopa was bred in the spring of 1972 on her new farm to Shaker El Masri. We were delighted when we received the news that she was in foal. Estopa quickly rose to become the alpha mare of the herd, at times behaving like a stallion, challenging and teasing the other mares. My father thought that this behaviour might trigger hormones that could affect her pregnancy, so he brought her out of the herd and into the barn. He rode her every day out into the forest – my father was an excellent rider and Estopa enjoyed the rides as much as he did. As everything was moving smoothly with Estopa and her pregnancy, I received a gut-

wrenching shock. A German businessman offered Heinz a huge sum to purchase Estopa. The amount was many times more than was paid for her and WAHO had not yet made a final decision about the purity of the Arabians bred in Spain, so Heinz was ready to agree to the sale. I argued that we should never sell Estopa and believed that she was our best mare. I prevented the sale and to protect her from ever being sold, Heinz and I formally completed an exchange of assets that resulted in Estopa going into my name alone. We drafted a formal contract and sent this document to the German Registry. From that time, Estopa was registered in my name and later all her offspring as well. In the summer of 1972, we travelled once more to Spain to attend the first official WAHO Conference held in Sevilla, Spain. It was during that conference that WAHO acknowledged that their research of records proved the purity of the Arabian horses bred in Spain and Estopa was officially granted pure-bred status. In 1973, I experienced the biggest tragedy of my young life. My mother had developed Hodgkin's Disease two years before and passed away in the February. She was only 39 years old and I was 22. My mother had been the focal point of our family and I was grief stricken. My father eventually moved away from the farm and we hired a farm manager. A ray of light came into the darkness, a blessing in the shape of Estopa's delivered her first foal, a filly. We named her Estasha. We were still spending our weeks in Rastatt so we couldn't see the filly until the weekend. I remember thinking what a beautiful face the filly had and such long legs. Estopa amazed me with her ability as a mother. She cleaned and licked her filly and had an abundance of milk. She always stopped whatever she was doing to let her foal drink. When her foal slept, Estopa stood patiently overhead, with her muzzle just inches above the little body. In the truest sense, she guarded her foal with her life. When Estasha got old enough to eat hay and grain, Estopa would always allow her filly to eat what she wanted first and then she would take her turn. It may have been partly from my feelings of losing my mother, but Estopa, with her kind character, her fierce protective nature and strong sense of nurturing, had truly found her way into

my heart. Just as important, whatever caused Estopa's reproductive difficulties during



Om El Shaina, Om El Jimala and Om El Beneera.

previous years seemed to have vanished. With Estasha at side, Estopa went quickly back into foal with Shaker El Masri. In the fall of 1973 we took Estopa, Shaker El Masri and eight other Arabians to the first horse show held in Germany, held in Verden/Aller. We were total novices to showing, washing the horses at home and showing them in-hand with bridles and bits; we wore our riding pants and had two of our drives help show the horses for us. Estopa and Shaker El Masri both earned Top Tens, but while Estopa



Sanadik El Shaklan.

enjoyed the experience, Shaker El Masri did not and that was his one and only show. Estopa's second foal was another filly even more exotic than Estasha. When she was born, I thought that she had the most beautiful face I had ever seen. When she started moving this precious little girl was poetry in motion. She was also shorter in the back and longer in the hip than her older sister and had a wonderful shoulder. It was evident that Estopa produced large foals – Estasha had developed into a tall yearling filly and the new filly, Estawa, was also big. With Estawa at side, Estopa went back in foal to Shaker

was the most beautiful colt I had ever seen. Estopa had created another masterpiece. I

seductive. Her eyes were large, round and soft black. Her character was a contradiction of terms. She could have, at times, the nature of a nurturing babysitter or the fierce demeanour of a warrior. Estopa was very people oriented and loved being the centre of attention. Shaker El Masri was much smaller, finer boned and somewhat standoffish. The combination of these two different individuals produced offspring that were taller than both and more exotic than



Bint Bint Estopa (Sanadik EL Shaklan x Bint Estopa).

named this colt El Shaklan, taking the "E" from Estopa and the "Shak" from Shaker El Masri. What had become apparent was Estopa's ability to out-produce herself. Her combination with Shaker El Masri produced sheer magic. Estopa was a big mare for her time, standing 15.1hh. She was a little long in her back. Her face, like the Mona Lisa, was arresting, enchanting and

either with shorter backs and longer hips. It is my belief that Estopa was the dominant parent, with Shaker El Masri adding refinement and his dose of fiery character. Together, Estopa and Shaker El Masri produced a new dimension of Arabian horse for Europe, a dimension that had previously only danced on the pages of books of artists or were frozen in bronzed animation on coffee tables. With El Shaklan at Estopa's side, Estopa went back in foal to Shaker El Masri. The Estopa daughters Estasha and Estawa were developing into spectacular young mares growing up in pasture. What would later be regarded as the Golden Cross of Spanish



Estopasan (Rastano x Estopa).

El Masri. In September Estopa needed breeding and our farm manager was on vacation. It was getting late in the year and I had to get Estopa back in foal. With minimal breeding skills and the assistance of a friend, we covered Estopa with Shaker El Masri day and night for six days. Our amateur efforts paid off and Estopa was checked in foal. The result of that breeding arrived in August of 1975 as Estopa delivered her first colt. His face was delicate and fine, as pretty as Estawa's, like a filly's face. I was in awe of this colt; he



Om El Exquisite by Sanadik El Shaklan.

and Egyptian bloodlines, the Estopa dynasty was taking shape. But so far the breeders in Germany and the rest of the world were largely unaware of their existence. Estopa's best friend was Mohena: in the spring of 1971, we had brought seven mares to Marbach State Stud to be bred to the Nazeer son, Hadban Enzahi. The very first foal Om El Arab produced was a very pretty filly we named Mohena (ex Morisca V) by Hadban Enzahi. Estopa and

Mohena were stabled next to one another and they would spend all day grazing and socialising together out in pasture. Notably, Mohena is the dam of \*Sanadik El Shaklan (by El Shaklan). Both Estopa and Mohena were heavily in foal in the spring of 1976. Mohena was due earlier and delivered her foal in the stall next to Estopa. The walls of the stalls came up only chest high, so Estopa watched Mohena deliver her foal. Within a few minutes, Estopa lay down and began to deliver her own foal. Unfortunately she was only eight months along and a lovely filly was born too premature to survive. We believed that it was Estopa's sensitivity and sheer will power that caused her premature delivery. This was a huge loss for us and from then on Estopa was kept away from other mares during foaling season. And once again, she was put in foal to Shaker El Masri.

In the August of that year, the horses of Om El Arab made an impact at a small international show that would set events in motion that would bring our relatively unknown breeding programme into the international spotlight, and would quickly have a profound effect on Arabian horse breeding around the world. We brought Estopa, Mohena, Estasha and El Shaklan to the international show in Vlimmern in Belgium. At show's end, Mohena was crowned Champion Mare,

his wife Johanna of Lodge Farm in England. The Maxwells were captivated by our horses and about a month later, they visited our farm.



**Om El Shaina (Carmargue x Estopa).**

They were spellbound by El Shaklan and tried desperately to buy him. Heinz was prepared to sell him with the reasoning that Estopa and Shaker El Masri could produce another



**Om El Beladeena (Al Lahab x Om El Benedict), half-sister to Om El Bernadette. Four-year-old mare, who will compete in Las Vegas this year.**

Estopa placed second in her class, Estasha was Junior Champion Filly and El Shaklan placed second in his class. Also exhibiting at the show were Major Pat Maxwell and

colt like him. I objected and fortunately El Shaklan was not sold, but we agreed to lease him to the Maxwells for three years. A couple of months later, in December of

1976, we brought Estopa, Estasha, Estawa and El Shaklan to the show in Paris. The show was simply called in those years the Salon



**Om El Bashara (Om EL Shahmaan x Om El Bandeira) 2008 chestnut filly.**

du Cheval, Paris; the same show is now the venue of the World Championships. Estopa was crowned European Champion Mare. Estasha and Estawa both won their classes with named European Junior Champion Mare with her sister Estawa reserve. El Shaklan placed fourth. The Maxwells were exhibiting in Paris also and El Shaklan was loaded onto their van after the show and started his journey to their farm in England. In August 1977, we travelled to the international show in Vlimmern again to

watch El Shaklan show, where he gained international stardom winning the title of Supreme Show Champion. This was also



**Om El Shadiva (Sanadik El Shaklan x Om El Shaina).**

one of my life's galvanizing moments as I realized that Estopa and her family were an extraordinary gift bestowed upon us. While many breeders in Europe were being swept along with the breeding straight Egyptians, I understood that the Estopa family, crossing Estopa's robust Spanish

heritage with the refined Egyptian qualities of Shaker El Masri, was my life's goal and destiny.



**Om El Shahlimar (Sanadik El Shaklan x Om El Shaina).**

While we were at the show all aglow with El Shaklan's triumph, we called the farm

to share the great news. We were told that Estopa had just foaled: El Shaklan had a baby brother. We raced to the farm that Sunday afternoon, a 10-hour drive from the show and I imagined another exotic little face like El Shaklan's. When I first saw this sturdy little fellow – there was nothing feminine about him – I was taken aback. My mind still held images of El Shaklan, elegant and ethereal, winning the championship just hours before. By comparison, I remember thinking that this new colt was even a little homely. With El Shaklan away, I was determined to make friends with Estopa's newest little boy. In time he developed characteristics resembling Estopa, where El Shaklan and his sisters were more a unique combination of sire and dam. I named the little boy Ibn Estopa and he moved like a dream, quickly turning white. Estopa again went back in foal to Shaker El Masri.

In 1978, our breeding programme, which had been enjoying a steady rise in international acclaim with many championships and El Shaklan's popularity spreading like wildfire in England, suffered its first major tragedy. Shaker El Masri died. He was out playing on a hilly pasture and reared, lost his balance and fell badly onto his back. He injured his kidney and lived only a few days. I was devastated. My dream for our breeding programme was shattered. The fairytale story of Estopa and Shaker El Masri was over. For a while, I questioned my commitment to be a breeder. Losing horses was just too painful. Rachel Kydd, a breeder in England,

helped rally my spirits. She said that breeders are not only involved in giving life, but they too must experience loss and death. I thought of Estopa, with her unconquerable spirit, who gave us living masterpieces and asked for little in return. Based upon that spirit, our breeding programme went on.

We were without a stallion for the 1978 breeding season, so the Maxwells graciously

returned El Shaklan to us even though their lease was not yet over. He arrived back on our farm in the summer, fresh after winning the title of British National Junior Champion Stallion. About that time Estopa delivered her final foal with Shaker El Masri, another pretty filly. Overall the filly was high quality, but she was not as exotic as her sisters were; we named her Estara. In December, Germany was host for the WAHO conference, providing a special opportunity for German breeders to showcase their Arabian horses and the German National Show was scheduled in conjunction with the conference. We



Al Azeem (Al Lahab x Om El Beneera, out of Estopa).

brought Estopa, with Estara at foot, El Shaklan and Bint Shaker (Shaker El Masri x Estasha), our first second generation and inbred to Shaker El Masri, as well as several other horses to the show. In front of a gathering of thousands of international breeders and spectators, Estopa was crowned National Champion Mare, El Shaklan won the titles of National Junior Champion Stallion and National Reserve Champion Stallion with Bint Shaker taking the honour of National Junior Champion Filly. Estopa, El Shaklan and the Estopa family had won the hearts of breeders around the world. One of the spectators, Izabella Zawadzka representing Poland, confided years later that when she saw Estopa that day in Hamburg, she vowed to herself that she would



Om El Jinaah (Al Lahab x Om El Jimala-two time US Reserve National Champion mare).

one day infuse the blood of Estopa into the Polish breeding programme. Years later, she accomplished that goal with the importation of frozen semen of Sanadik El Shaklan to the Janów and Michalów Studs and the

result of that promise Izabella had made 22 years earlier.

Estopa took a break from raising foals during 1978 and 1979. In 1980, she conceived to her son El Shaklan and in 1981, she foaled another lovely filly. The filly strongly resembled her mother, so we named her Bint Estopa. It was about that time that Estopa's health began to decline. We had been plagued for several years with some of our mares developing a chronic cough. It was only among the mares that came from Spain and we believed that they developed an allergy to our hay and for some reason, these mares seemed less adaptable to the change in climate

2000 Polish National Champion Filly and European Champion Filly El Dorada is a

from Spain to our cooler, wetter weather in the Black Forest. For years, it didn't seem to bother Estopa, but our veterinarian diagnosed her ailment as emphysema, cautioning us that she was not likely to live long with that condition. It was necessary to keep Estopa's environment dust free. Our pastures were lush, deep grass and her stall was not dusty, so the only source of dust was our hay, which we began to soak. But it was clear that Estopa was losing the battle with the damp and cold climate of the Black Forest.

We were very pleased with Bint Estopa and our inbreeding to Estopa, so we rebred Estopa with El Shaklan. While we were breeding her, I recognised that Estopa's behaviour with teasing and breeding had changed. When she was teased and bred with Shaker El Masri, she was very cooperative and she seemed to like her chestnut mate of all those years. When we began teasing and breeding her with her son El Shaklan, she became very hostile. El Shaklan was a large, imposing stallion, but he was intimidated by his mother. From then on, Estopa became a very difficult mare to tease. It was as if she had a love affair with Shaker El Masri and now he was gone, she wanted no other. In 1980 we brought El Masra, the full sister

to Bint Shaker, to Paris, the first year that the show was billed as the World Championship.

oak trees and the weather was ideal. I heard that this area enjoyed mild weather year



An Om El Exquisit colt out of an Al Lahab daughter.

El Masra was awarded with the first World Champion Mare title ever given. In February 1982, I travelled with a girlfriend to see the big show in Scottsdale. The magnitude of competition, the size of the classes and the level of excitement at the show was thrilling. After the show, we drove to California and visited the Santa Ynez Valley. I loved the romance and charm of the Black Forest, but there was a western magic about the softly rolling hills studded with

in the mould of his sister, Bint Estopa. He was also a pretty, almost feminine colt, and he reminded me of his sire as a newborn. We named him Estopa Son.

I couldn't get my experience in the United States out of my mind. Santa Ynez seemed like the perfect place for Estopa to recover from her illness and she could hopefully live a very long life there. The horse shows were huge, with a different type of Arabian horse being shown. The country was abuzz with Arabian horse activity and perhaps it was time to join this new frontier. After breeding to a full book of mares in 1982, El Shaklan left Europe for America. He went to the kind, capable care and training of our friend Doug Dahmen in the Santa Ynez Valley. Doug, as young trainer from America, had visited Om El Arab for the first time in 1974 when I was pregnant with my first child and Estopa was pregnant with El Shaklan. Doug returned a couple of times to help us show horses. We initially wanted to send Ibn Estopa over to America to show and keep El Shaklan at home where he was so busy breeding. But Doug had fallen under the spell of El Shaklan and felt that American breeders would become spellbound as well, so we decided to send El Shaklan and seven relatives to join our show string in the United States.

\*El Shaklan became very popular and many American breeders were seeking out our bloodlines. A photograph of Estopa graced the cover of the March 1983 issue of *Arabian*



2010 colt (Om El Exquisit x Om El Shanelle by Al Lahab).

round; Santa Ynez had enchanted me. Later that year, Estopa delivered a colt very much

Horse World. Then publisher Nat Gorham wrote an article on the Om El Arab breeding

programme and Bette Finke wrote an article titled *The Estopa Family*. We decided it was time to buy a farm in the United States and we purchased land in Santa Ynez in 1983,



Ridden gelding by Shahmaan.

building a large, Spanish-style barn there the following year.

Estopa did not conceive to \*El Shaklan in 1982 after delivering Estopa Son. In 1983, \*El Shaklan was in the US and Estopa's health continued to deteriorate in Germany. Transported semen was not available and I didn't want to further stress Estopa by taking her to another farm for breeding. With no options, Estopa was left open in 1983 for the second year in a row. I was relieved in March 1984 when we could arrange to transport Estopa, with her best friend Mohena, from the cold and dampness of Germany to the warm, dry Mediterranean climate of Santa Ynez, very similar to the climate in Spain where she was born.

On a previous visit to Estopa's birthplace, Don Miguel Osuna Escalera's farm to Spain, I saw a beautiful mare, snow white and very refined, with a beautiful face. Her name was Arilla (Malvito x Kayan). She had produced a yearling colt the year before and I wanted to buy him for our breeding programme, but he had already been purchased by an American breeder. That colt's name was Rastano (by Jaguay). When \*Estopa arrived in Santa Ynez, \*Rastano was on another farm nearby and the choice of stallions for \*Estopa was easy: it was time to preserve her Spanish heritage and the perfect opportunity presented itself with a handsome stallion bred by \*Estopa's emphasey, she had a chronic cough and was always a little thin. Within weeks, she was filling out and her cough went away

her. A solution presented itself: embryo transfer. That year a fertilised egg from \*Estopa was implanted into a big, plain quarterhorse mare.

\*Estopa's recovery on her new farm in Santa Ynez was nothing short of miraculous. Over her years with

and never came back. Her stablemate was her favourite friend, \*Mohena. For the first time in her life, \*Estopa became an easy keeper; my heart danced. It is my belief that the move to Santa Ynez saved \*Estopa's life.

In 1985, an elegant colt was born to his surrogate mother. He was the first of \*Estopa's pure Spanish offspring and we named him Estopasan. I was so pleased



Om El Bellissimo (Om El Shahmaan x Om El Benedict) 2007 colt.

with this colt and so happy with \*Estopa's overall well being that \*Estopa was bred to \*Rastano again to carry this foal herself.

\*El Shaklan was immensely popular and his dam was flourishing in the warm California climate. Our horse endeavours were running smoothly, but my marriage with Heinz was at an end. In the summer of 1985, we decided to go separate ways. What I thought might be an easy divorce turned out to be a bitter battle. Unlike most divorces, our disagreements concerned more the custody of the horses than custody of our two children. At the centre were \*Estopa and \*El



Om El Shahmaan.

Shaklan. In the United States all the horses had been put in a corporation and during our divorce proceedings, Heinz found a buyer for \*El Shaklan. I tried to prevent the sale arguing that even though our marriage was over, each of us could continue to breed horses and that \*El Shaklan was vital for both of us. Our attorneys battled in court and it seemed as though I could prevent the sale, but with a sudden change of legal tactic, the judge agreed to the sale and \*El Shaklan was swept out of my life forever in February 1986. Later that year, \*Estopa delivered a second colt by \*Rastano. Eventually, the rest of our horses in America were divided between us with the exception of \*Estopa and \*Sanadik El Shaklan, whom we agreed to share custody of. In the division of horses, I was able to keep two \*Estopa children, Estopasan and \*Bint Estopa. I feel like my breeding programme and my life as a breeder has two distinct eras. The first era involved the discovery of Estopa and Shaker El Masri, the birth of the Estopa family and the international recognition of

the Om El Arab breeding programme. The second era begins with the move to the United States and \*Estopa's recovery from her long-term illness. Against formidable odds, I began to piece together a breeding programme with the few horses I had left which included 50% ownership of \*Estopa and 25% of \*Sanadik El Shaklan. There were many wonderful individuals in our breeding programme on the Black Forest farm such as the \*Estopa children, Ibn Estopa, Estopa

Heinz shipped his horses back to the German farm. There he began the task of nullifying my ownership and erasing 15 years of work and breeding efforts. He visited the office of the German Registry and removed the contract between us that had formally put Estopa in my name. For tax reasons in Germany, we had a division of business and personal property. Heinz had 97.5% of our business assets and I had 2.5%. The personal assets were put in my name and I was the owner of the Black Forest farm. Our agreement stated that if either partner were to leave the company, the other partner would receive everything. Prior to moving to Santa Ynez, I had left three blank pages signed by me, but not dated, for our farm manager on the Black Forest farm to use for farm necessities. Using one these blank pages, Heinz forged a contract in which we supposedly applied the terms of the laundry business to our horse business. It was backdated to January 14 1973. With this contract, Heinz petitioned the German courts to award him the entire breeding programme on the Black Forest farm, roughly some 60 horses. This ploy proved victorious for him and the Registrar of the German Registry removed my name from 15 years of breedership. I won one small victory, fighting in a German criminal court to prove that the contract used to remove my ownership was a forgery. I won, proving

Son and Estasha. With the addition of some of the horses in Germany, I felt that I could



Om El Shahmaan.

rebuild a smaller, but similar, breeding programme to our original one. After the division of horses in America,

with authentic handwriting samples from 1973 that they did not match the signatures on the contract. Heinz was ordered to pay a

penalty and admit his forgery. Unfortunately, the German civil court would not reverse its verdict because the time for an appeal had run out and so all of the breeding stock in Germany was lost to me.

In 1986, \*Estopa delivered a second colt by \*Rastano. She had no difficulties during gestation, had an easy delivery and she loved being a mother again. The California climate and her happiness on the farm brought her to a level of health I had never seen – she was 20 years old and looked and behaved like a mare half her age. She was still blossoming. Her rule in the herd was undisputed. If anything had changed, it seemed as if she derived immense satisfaction in observing. She would watch the foals or just gaze into the mountains. She preferred her time out in pasture and began to fret in her stall when she had to come in at night, so we decided to let her live outside in a covered paddock during the night, which she preferred. The vision that I have of Estopa is of her staring for long periods at the mountains. Each day we would spend quiet time together; she liked to rest her head on my shoulder and almost purred when I would pick small scabs from her coat. \*Estopa had been my constant companion for over 15 years and it warmed my heart to see her feeling so well.

In 1986, we didn't have the convenience of shipped semen and mares often had to be transported great distances to be serviced by the chosen stallion. At 21 years of age, it was obvious that \*Estopa was in optimum health and could tolerate one last long trip to an ideal stallion somewhere in the country. We decided that Ruminaja Ali (Shaikh Al Badi x Bint Magidaa) was that ideal stallion. Besides his overall quality, he was straight Egyptian and I hope to produce another Golden Cross superstar. Ruminaja Ali lived in Texas, a three-day drive from us, so we purchased two breedings so that we could transport one of Estopa's friends on the trip with her. We loaded \*Estopa and her daughter \*Bint Estopa into our two-horse trailer and drove them to Texas. Both mares arrived in good health and in heat and we went to the location where the collection was to be done. A veterinarian prepared them, still in the trailer, and bred them without unloading them. The breeding was done and neither mare seemed much aware that anything had happened to them. \*Estopa had always been a very active participant in

the teasing and breeding procedure. With this method of breeding with no teasing or association with the stallion, I knew that \*Estopa would not conceive.

It was unbearably hot and humid in Texas, so we thought it best to bring the mares home after ovulation and within a few days, we were back home. As I feared, neither conceived. \*Estopa suffered a slight colic

proven she could produce with Egyptian bloodlines. A magical opportunity was lost with both mares failing to conceive – the result may have had profound effects on breeding today.

In 1987, the decision was made to once more breed \*Estopa to a Spanish stallion to preserve her heritage. This time, the choice was \*AN Malik (Galero x Ispahan),



credit: Kimerice Curyl

**Om El Jimala (Sanadik El Shaklan x Om El Jazira).**

on the trip back home and that underlined our decision that the trip to Texas was to be \*Estopa's final long trip. Looking back now, I still believe that Ruminaja Ali was the ideal choice to create what \*Estopa had already

a previous Spanish National Champion Stallion of extremely high quality and already the sire of many regional and national winners. I transported \*Estopa for the one-hour drive to Greengate Farm where \*AN

Malik was the senior stallion. \*Estopa had rarely been out of my care until that stay and I was worried that she would be stressed in a new environment, away from home and her regular companions.

The staff at Greengate did a wonderful job of caring for \*Estopa and she came home in perfect shape and in foal after one cycle of breeding.

While \*Estopa was carrying her \*AN Malik foal and enjoying her 22nd year in the company of her equine friends, Heinz decided that he wanted to move her to his girlfriend's backyard or possibly to a farm in Minnesota, 2,000 miles away where it is cold and snowy. He also petitioned the court to grant him the right to sell \*Estopa at public auction. We fought another battle in court and this time, I prevailed. The court supported my right to object to any sale of \*Estopa and I was awarded the physical custody of her. I pointed out that at

In 1988 \*Estopa delivered a lovely filly by \*AN Malik. It was wonderful to see her in her glory of motherhood again. The filly was \*Estopa's only pure Spanish daughter



**Sanadik El Shaklan who's legend continues at Om El Arab International.**

and would be a tremendous breeding asset, but unfortunately, because she wasn't in the division of horses and could not be divided into two, this unique filly, Malika Estopa,



credit: April Visel

**Om El Beladeena displays the extreme 'type' that Om El Arab has become known for.**

22 years of age \*Estopa's robust health was maintained by careful daily management. I also argued that a forced sale of \*Estopa would be an emotional hardship for our two children who had known and loved her all of their lives. I believe this verdict gave \*Estopa several more wonderful years of life. Heinz moved back to Germany and has not returned since.

had to be sold. The previous year I had travelled to England to see a stallion that had been receiving praises for his exotic type. His name was Carmargue (White Lightning x Velvet Shadow) and he had been awarded the title of World Champion Stallion in 1985. I understood that many breeders had tried unsuccessfully to lease him after his win

and I wanted to see this stallion in person for myself. At first glance, it was obvious that he was everything he was described to be: very typey, charismatic, ethereal, a porcelain-

white stallion. I took an immediate liking to his owners, Alun and Mary Prothero, and not mincing words, Alun advised me that Carmargue was simply not for lease. He told me the story of how Carmargue had nearly died on lease in Spain in 1985 and barely recovered in time to compete and win the World Championships. After getting Carmargue back home in England, Alun had promised his stallion that he would never need to travel again. But after some discussion, Alun surprisingly agreed to

allow Carmargue come to the United States – \*Estopa was the key. Alun philosophised that it was a great honour for Carmargue to win the World Championship and it would be an even greater honour for Carmargue to have the opportunity to breed \*Estopa and the \*Estopa family.

\*Carmargue arrived and \*Estopa was covered by him in 1988. The following year, she delivered another filly, another masterpiece. This filly was everything I had hoped for: ultra-typey with a finely-dished face, long legs and she was well balanced. After making sure that \*Estopa and filly were fine, I left with our children for a few days of summer vacation. When we returned, the little filly was near death, having developed a terrible diarrhoea during \*Estopa's foal heat. The attending veterinarian wasn't aware of how serious the condition had quickly become, with our usual veterinarian also just returning from vacation. With one look at the filly, we loaded her in the back seat of our truck and drove her to the clinic. She was barely alive and her kidneys had shut down. We all slept with the filly through the night with drips and monitors attached to this precious little girl. The following day we had the good news that her kidneys had started again and she was showing some interest in life. As the days went by, she recovered. We named the filly Om El

Shaina for our two daughters, Shannon and Janina. Shaina can proudly brag that her sire is a World Champion and her dam



Sanadik El Shaklan aged 25 years old.

a National Champion and producer of a World Champion.

With Om El Shaina at her side, \*Estopa was 24 years old and her heats were becoming more irregular. Though \*Carmargue stayed with us until 1990, we were unable to produce another pregnancy with this cross. After \*Carmargue returned to England, we covered \*Estopa with \*Sanadik El Shaklan, but still no pregnancy resulted. Our veterinarians advised us that her reproductive days were over, that she would have no more foals. \*Estopa seemed to agree with them. She developed a large follicle on one ovary that just stayed there month after month. \*Estopa refused to be teased by any stallion. I just couldn't believe that she would have no more foals. \*Estopa thrived on motherhood and she blossomed caring for her foals. She was showing more stiffness from arthritis and it was evident that her

suspensory ligaments were weakening in her hind legs. I had always paid close attention to \*Estopa's diet and tried to include a variety of things that she enjoyed, such as watermelon, cantaloupe, apples, lettuce and carrots. In \*Estopa's later years, I began to add fresh garlic for her arthritis, grinding it up and adding it to a warm bran mash in her evening feed with apples

and carrots. In time, it became difficult for \*Estopa to push herself off the ground to stand after taking a nap. We had a sling made for her out of wide nylon webbing that she wore, with large rings that we could hook onto. We built a hoist in her paddock. After a nap of about three hours \*Estopa would wait for us to hook onto her sling and hoist her on to her feet. We did the same with our tractor when \*Estopa napped in pasture. We would lift her up, she would give a big shake and whinny, and off she would go to join her friends. I continuously tried to find ways to help \*Estopa feel better. Thinking that acupuncture might be of help, we enlisted a specialist to treat \*Estopa. The



Om El Jinaah (Al Lahab x Om El Jimala).

acupuncturist marvelled at Estopa's overall condition and attitude for her age. After hearing of her infertility, he gave me a bottle of women's precious tea pills from China to try with her. I ordered many bottles over the coming months and added them to \*Estopa's evening feed.

In the summer of 1991, we imagined that we detected a change in \*Estopa. Everyday we walked the tall chestnut stallion, \*Sharem El Sheikh (El Shaklan x Samanna), by \*Estopa's pasture. It seemed as though \*Estopa was beginning to show interest in him. We asked our veterinarian to check her again and to all of our surprise, the old follicle was gone and a new one was building. \*Estopa was in heat for the first time in three years. She began to walk to the fence to nicker at Sheikh when he walked by. She was telling us that her reproductive years were not yet over. She was telling us that this chestnut stallion reminded her of her mate of so many years ago, Shaker El Masri. During that heat cycle, we bred \*Estopa with the mate she had now chosen, \*Sharem El Sheikh. She was quiet and nickered during breeding, unlike the ferocious manner she had rejected the advances by other stallions for years. When we checked \*Estopa a few weeks later, she was pregnant. Our veterinarian was shocked, but reminded us that although \*Estopa was pregnant, it was unlikely that she could carry the foal to term at her age.

In February of 1992 I formally purchased the other 50% of \*Estopa back. At last I was confident that no one could ever take her away from me. I was unsure how many years she had left, but I would not take even one

day for granted. On 7 July that year, \*Estopa delivered a precious little filly. She foaled without the need of assistance, and, for the first time in years, \*Estopa pushed herself off the ground with ease and stood to protect and mother her newborn daughter. We couldn't believe our eyes. Summoning the incredible strength of character that I knew well, \*Estopa was defying her years. As we



Bint Bint Estopa (Sanadik El Shaklan x Bint Estopa).

had named \*Estopa's previous filly for our two daughters, we called her newest filly Om El Beneera for Benni, our son. In the months that followed, \*Estopa became a young mare again; there was much work to do as a mother. She loved the company of the other mares and their foals. She was the

guardian of the pasture. And she will always remain the guardian of the pasture. \*Estopa passed away in 1993 and we buried her alongside her pasture. A white marble gravestone bears the words *you are the wind beneath our wings*. I believe that Beneera was her farewell gift to us and somehow, she found a way to enjoy motherhood one last time. During the 23 years that \*Estopa

graced my life, we rarely spent a day apart. She was my closest friend, my truest confidant. She is still my life's longest companion. During those 23 years, her personality was inextricably woven into the fabric of my life. And she still is. A visitor from the Middle East came to our farm several few years ago. He described their family's belief that the name given to a child imparts some special chemistry, some energy of its own to the child. The name and the child become entwined. And so a grey filly was born in the Andalucia region of Spain in 1965. She was given the name "Estopa". From what I have been told, estopa is a very strong fibre that can be used to make rope. On her hip, she was branded with an elongated circle with a ladder crossing through it. Looking back over \*Estopa's life, it is clear to me that the strong fibre was a golden thread that would be woven through my life and through champions and breeding programmes around the world. The ladder on her hip was symbolic of the climb that \*Estopa would make to become one of the greatest mares in the history of the Arabian breed. ❖