

How to Train an Arabian Racehorse

By Paul Simmons

Arabian Racing is one of the fastest growing equestrian sports in the UK. More and more people are starting to compete in this friendly but still competitive sport but what of those who don't know where to begin? There are many different approaches to training horses for racing and the important factor to remember is that every horse is an individual and needs to be treated accordingly.

When considering Arabians for racing it is important to remember that Arabs are highly intelligent creatures and therefore easily bored. Whilst their Thoroughbred counterparts are quite happy to canter up the same all weather track again and again, an Arab will often question why they need to. Martin Pipe is one of the greatest National Hunt trainers of the modern era and used the interval training method extensively on his jumpers. This method of repeatedly doing short bursts of work has been phenomenally successful for Pipe during the last two decades. Mick Channon is one of the UK's top flat race trainers and was also formerly a Premier League football player. He once said he applied the same techniques of increasing his fitness as a football player to that of training racehorses and the results he has had as a trainer have proved to be very successful.

I have trained Arabian racehorses off and on for nearly ten years. When I decided as a teenager that I wanted to train Arabian racehorses I knew that I needed to get a decent background in the principles of training racehorses to peak fitness. Luckily for me leading National Hunt trainer Philip Hobbs lived just down the road, so I rode out there at weekends. I then spent my year out before University working for top National Hunt trainer Nicky Henderson in Lambourn and a leading flat trainer in New Zealand. I learned that the key to training horses was a slow build up of fitness of the equine athlete which, once achieved, can be built upon through fast work to achieve the core development of the right muscle groups.

When I trained I was lucky to have the steep hills of Exmoor at my disposal. Aliesha and Sweet Simplicity were naturally of quite a decent fitness in 1999 when I started training, I got them in 1998 and backed and hacked them out all year. In 1999 I proceeded to put in 3 weeks hill/road walking at the start, then 2 weeks hill trotting and finally about 4 weeks cantering, again up nice long hills. After this I started their fast work - usually two good fast pieces a week approximately 3 weeks before their first race. You need at least a half mile (4 furlongs) stretch to do a proper piece of work, in order to let them really lengthen out their stride. 1999 – 2000 were two good years racing. Simplicity won on only her third ever race start (at Stratford in the Heart of England Maiden Stakes) and Aliesha was placed numerous times. Their regime included lots of hacking round the countryside to keep their mind fresh, and this also helped to keep their minds balanced and relaxed.

In 2005 the stud relocated to Surrey and I resumed training in 2006 but unfortunately the lack of facilities meant I could not achieve the required fitness levels needed to compete in racing. I didn't have a decent stretch of land to gallop the horses on and so they didn't achieve the results I had hoped for. The lesson I learned from this is you need the time, energy, commitment and facilities in order to do justice to your racing athletes.

Sam Davison

Sam is one of the UK's leading Arabian racehorse trainers. She and her partner Adam have been training Arabian racehorses for nearly six years at their picturesque yard outside Marlborough Wiltshire. They have trained winners at all levels including two Dubai Day listed handicap winners (Almost All for Linda Cross and Shuhood for Beverley Patterson), a Group 2 winner (Nokomys for owner/breeder Jane Haddock) and Premier Handicap winner WFA Leopard (for Dublcheck Ltd). Sam says that the importance of training Arab racehorses is in assessing every horse as an individual and monitoring their development as their fitness progresses.

"My regime usually starts in January for the unraced maidens. They do 4- 6 weeks walk and trotting, then slow cantering for 4 – 6 weeks and fast work twice a week 3 weeks before their race. Each horse is treated differently with a mixture of stamina and sprint work. I keep an eye on their progression and see if they are struggling to cope with the work, and I ease off to avoid them becoming stale."

Angela Colledge

Angela Colledge has been training Arabian racehorses for over a decade. She has been the Leading West Country trainer for the past five years and has trained winners at all levels and landed the valuable Jebel Ali Gold Final Listed race last year with Estival for owner/trainer Colin Banks. Angela's yard is based in the beautiful setting of Bovey Tracey, Devon on the outskirts of Dartmoor. Her training regime benefits from the abundance of hills and tracks available. She says:-

“I usually start training at the beginning of January for the babies who have never raced before. I do six weeks of road work to strengthen their tendons, which helps to develop the cardio vascular system, and lots of hill work. Horses that have raced previously start mid- February (as they develop their fitness quicker) and they are all cantering by end of February. This way they all end up ready for fast work at the same time. Each horse is different and allowances are made for those that struggle and it depends on the horse and how they develop. One of the keys is not to over do the fast work at home.”

The key is to develop a training plan that suits you, your horse and your lifestyle. I found it difficult to work full time and train last year and was frequently riding Comete very early in the morning; I soon realised that Comete like myself was not a morning person. I switched and started riding her in the evening and she began to enjoy her training more. Wraith opted for morning exercise as she didn't care when she was exercised as long as she was exercised. When a horse is ready to race you can tell, they are buzzing and full of energy and they seem to “ping” when you ride them. I remember this with Simplicity before the last piece of work I did on her, I told my friends that Stratford was her “judgement day” and Simplicity and I went on to win. These are dreams that can't be bought so good luck to all those racing this year.

If you are unsure of training asking your local ARO Area Rep for advice.