

ARO 2008 Season Review

The Season Gets Underway

The opening meeting at **Taunton** took place amid glorious sunshine.

A first visit to this picturesque west country track for a number of years, the meeting attracted 53 runners, and proved to be a successful occasion for Gill Duffield, who took both maidens impressively, including Baseerah (pictured below). The meeting also featured the first Royal Cavalry Of Oman Series Qualifier, which was won emphatically by Noble Athlete (pictured below right) by no less than 8 lengths, ridden by leading amateur Rhys Flint.

Early Return for Champion No Risk Al Maury

No Risk Al Maury (pictured left) makes a successful reappearance at Nottingham in May, ridden by Phil Collington. He was soon back in action to take a Group 2 (PA) at Newbury in June before successfully defending his Shadwell Dubai International Stakes (Group1 PA) on Dubai Day. A further success at Lingfield, winning The Doha International Stakes (Group 2 PA) ensured he secured the rightful title of Champion Purebred Arabian in 2008.

Rain, Rain, Rain

Despite the sunny start at Taunton, as in 2007 the weather played a big part this year; the second meeting at Nottingham was once again plagued by wet weather and although many meetings were blessed by sunshine, Exeter was once again a very dismal setting, with both wind and rain dominating. The second Huntingdon was also badly effected by rain, and although both Dubai Day and the Qatar Festival at Lingfield were lucky with the weather, the poor summer came back with a vengeance in September to wipe out both Market Rasen and Stratford fixtures. Fortunately only 1 meeting was lost, however, as Wolverhampton were able to accommodate the Stratford fixture at the last minute. Blessed by good weather, it was a relief for all concerned to be racing again after a month's gap after Lingfield.

Glimpses of Summer

Hereford, which was the host of 2 ARO fixtures this summer, bucked the trend of the summer by being hot and sunny on both days. This picturesque track, well situated on the eastern edge of Wales, provided some great finishes on both occasions, notably in the longer distance races, where Debrett (pictured below in the blue and green chevrons), trained by Sam Davison, put in 2 fantastic and game performances over 1 mile 6 furlongs and 2 miles. On the first occasion he beat Operatic by a length after a game front running display, however, Notid, (below right) proved to be more of a problem, and would not be denied, scraping home by a whisker to land the spoils, in what was indisputably the tightest finish of the season.

The first Hereford meeting also saw the first win of the season for Oman trainer Julian Smart, whose charge Muhal (below left) scraped home by a nose from the fast finishing Musaayer, trained by Bill Smith.

Dubai International Arabian Raceday



Once again Dubai Day proved to be a great success, attracting more racegoers than ever before to a very sunny Newbury. Some of the best Arabians in Europe and also from the Middle East, including Oman and Qatar, competed for nearly £100,000 of prize money. No Risk Al Maury (pictured below left) confirmed his status as the reigning Champion for the second consecutive year with an emphatic win in Shadwell Dubai International Stakes (Group 1 PA), putting Qatar raider Jaafer in his place for the second time this season. This performance helped ensure that only 2 races went to foreign runners, which was a great result for the UK. The handicaps were as competitive and unpredictable as ever, although trainer Sam Davison is making a habit of taking the opening Emirates Airline Premier Handicap, winning it for the third year in succession, on this occasion saddling the first 3 (won by Pepita De Carrere (FR)). Gill Duffield came away with 3 winners on the day, including Aljaareh who won The Jebel Ali Racecourse Premier Handicap Stakes for the second year running.



Qatar International Festival

The inaugural running of The Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club International Arabian Racing Festival at Lingfield in August also proved to be a great success, attracting a record crowd for an Arab meeting at the track. Although the Group & International race fields were small, the meeting attracted the best Arabians from the UK and the Middle East, including the multiple Group winners Madjani and No Risk Al Maury who both won their races impressively.

The 3 supporting Premier Handicaps were all hotly contested, particularly The Ras Laffan Premier Handicap Stakes 0-95 over 6 Furlongs, which went to the incredibly game and consistent Angel Picamer a winner of 3 races this season.

New Venue

ARO paid its first visit to Great Leighs in September, for The Royal Cavalry Of Oman Arabian Racing Stakes (Group 3 PA). An excellent field went to post for what turned out to be a fantastic clash between 2007 Group winner Nokomys, trained by Bill Smith for owner breeder Jane Haddock, and Angel Picamer, also trained by Bill Smith for owner breeder Zelda Angel. It was Nokomys who prevailed by a head.



Close Finishes

In addition to those already featured, a number of thrilling finishes took place this season, including the following examples. The first day of the season at Taunton also provided tight 3 way finish; in this instance it was the maiden The Way To Go who took the honours, just ahead of Anganate Safinat and Serabitibi; both were subsequent winners. Bonham, twice a winner in 2007, just got the better of Benny The Dip after a thrilling battle at Hereford for owner trainer Chris Culleton. Deolali came with a late burst in what looked like anybody's race at Exeter – there was only a head, head and a neck between the first 3 home on that occasion.

Notable Winners

Angel Picamer, already a success story in 2007; this game mare proved to be a force to be reckoned with this season. Having won impressively first time out in a conditions race over 6 furlongs at Wolverhampton, she went on to win a further 2 races, finishing with a win over a mile at Wolverhampton. Evidently a very effective all weather performer, Bill Smith's charge was only out of the frame on one occasion from 6 runs.



Merwah proved to be another with improved form this year; having stormed home by 11 lengths at Nottingham in May, this 6 year old mare went on to land valuable The Come Racing At Newbury Premier Handicap at Kempton (pictured above). Shuhood, winner of The 2007 Emirates Airline Premier Handicap Stakes, was another notable winner this season. Although only a winner on one occasion, this game front runner (pictured above right with white face) landed The Royal Cavalry Of Oman Premier Handicap Stakes (Series Final at Newbury), after a titanic battle with the Julian Smart trained Alize Safinat. This 5 year old was in the money on all of his 6 runs, netting over £4,000 in prize money.

Open Races

Although there were several promising newcomers to the Open Race circuit, for Thoroughbreds, Anglos & Part Breds, it was the 2007 recruit Son Of Sophie who proved to be this year's Champion. Although beaten by Reminiscent in a fascinating clash at Wolverhampton in June, he can be seen below left beating that rival at Nottingham in May. Son Of Sophie remained unbeaten in all his other starts, culminating in a convincing win in The E-quester.com Open Race Championship at Warwick in October. Marbaa was another new recruit who proved to be successful this year, seen below centre (in orange), when just failing to catch Son Of Sophie at Wolverhampton in September. In a very competitive season the only other Thoroughbreds to win more than one race were the much improved Megabond (for owner, trainer, rider Mark Cooper) and Extra Cover, seen below right winning at Huntingdon in August.

Breeders Cup

This went to Gill Duffield and Sheikh Hamdan for the second year in succession. A slightly disappointing field of 4 from over 20 entries made the line up at the meeting diverted from Stratford to Wolverhampton, but there was never any doubt that Inshaad would take the honours from stable companion Alsharq. Both winners previously, Inshaad scored by a comfortable 4 lengths, and looks to be an exciting proposition for 2009.

Jebel Ali Day

This year's Gold, Silver and Bronze Finals proved to be highly competitive races which all contributed to a fantastic end to the season. The rapidly improving Few And Far (pictured below left) took the Gold honours, with a comfortable win over the immensely game Al Mamoon, who stayed on bravely to hold second, having made nearly all the running. Debrett ran a fantastic race to take third, with Balladore back in fourth. The Silver final proved to be the tightest finish of the day, with Blu By You just managing to repel the persistent challenge Operatic, who had also led from the front. Both were all out but the line came just too soon for Operatic as Blu By You won by a head, making it a double on the card for Wall. Pavot Al Kyle stayed on impressively to take third and Barnhill Warrior showed remarkable improvement to take fourth.

The Bronze final was equally tense, with Brigitta, who had only been seen out twice this season, holding off the late challenge of veteran Kayeed. The 16-year-old had improved with every run this season, despite his age, and was only beaten by a length at the line. Lady Marisha ran a game race in third and Dakota Willow was another showed considerable improvement to take fourth.

The day began in fine form with a desperately close finish to the opening Weatherbys Bank Handicap Stakes; Whisper, ridden by David Turner, came with his customary late surge to beat the game Raihan by half a length. It was a fitting end to the season for the Bill Smith trained L'Escalou (pictured left in the winners' enclosure); this former champion Anglo Arab's retirement was announced after a hard fought defeat of current Champion Curupanna, in the Shaw & Fox Anglo Arab & Part Bred Championship. Son Of Sophie made it 5 out of 6 in The E-quester.com Open Race Championship and Aberfeldy made it a double for Bill Smith, with a convincing win of

The Championships

Champion trainer was the incredible Gill Duffield once again, who ensured main patron HH Sheikh Hamdan was crowned Champion owner. Their leading performers were the amazing No Risk Al Maury, who was crowned Champion Arabian, Inshaad, who landed the UK Breeders Cup in impressive style, and Aljaareh, to name but a few.

Simon Walker took the Jockeys' Championship for the second year in succession with 26 wins.

Anna Wallace took the Lady Rider's award with 4 wins, and owner, trainer, jockey Mark Cooper was confirmed the leading Novice Rider, with 3 wins.

Leading Owner: **Sheikh Hamdan Al Maktoum**

Leading Trainer: **Mrs Gill Duffield**

Leading Jockey: **Mr Simon Walker**

Leading Lady Rider: **Miss Anna Wallace**

Leading Novice Rider: **Mr Mark Cooper**

Leading Pure Bred Arabian: **No Risk Al Maury**

Leading Anglo Arabian: **Curupanna**

Leading Thoroughbred: **Son Of Sophie**

Achievement Award: **Mrs Genny Haynes**

AHS Small Owner Award: **Kate Mason**

AHS Small Trainer Award: **Helen Bona**

Sugar Dandy Award for Consistent Performance: **Benny The Dip**

ARO Riding Performance Of The Year: **Mr David Turner for his ride on Whisper at Huntingdon.**



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Photographs courtesy of Gilly Wheeler, Mr Brian Wallace and Mr Stuart Shefras.