

From Foal to Racehorse – The Lifecycle of the Arabian Racehorse

By Paul Simmons

Breeding Arabians for racing is a long term project, it is very much a waiting game unlike showing where the results of your breeding plans can be seen within a year when you start to show them as yearlings. While it is true that you can race Arabians as 3 year olds, the majority of us wait until they are four or even five before we race them; as we all know Arabians are physically slow maturing horses. Five years is a very long time to wait to see if a breeding plan is successful, and I often think us breeders need nerves of steel to hold our nerve while waiting to see if the match has provided the results we had hoped for. I thought it would be interesting to look at the life cycle of one of my homebred horses, charting her life from foal to racehorse. This article looks at the life cycle of my eight year old homebred mare Samauring Zayin (aka Sammy), who has managed to live in five different counties since her birth, raced 20 times at 8 different race tracks and won twice.

The Racing Foal

Sammy was born on a beautiful spring morning in early April 2005 at about 6 a.m. at a point to point yard in Exmoor National Park (Somerset), the night before her dam Jumah refused to come into her stable and later gave birth to a lovely bay filly – Sammy. It was clear from day one that Sammy was going to be a bit of a monkey, within hours of being born she was galloping like a loon round her field and fly kicking at her poor mum; but even at that age I could see the racing fire in her and the zest for speed and power and was obviously thrilled. Her dam Jumah had won 3 races and been placed 12 times from 22 starts, and this was her second foal (her first being owned and bred by the Brunton's Clarendon Stud). Sammy's sire The Wiking was extremely successful racehorse in the USA winning over \$200,000 in USA including the Drinkers of the Wind Futurity Stakes, Bob Magness Derby Group 2, Armand Hammer Classic Group 1, Florida Arabian Cup Group 1, Godolphin Classic Group 1, Jewels of East Diamond Derby. So as you can imagine I was excited about what this breeding would bring, and so began the day dreaming of what lofty heights Sammy might reach on the racetrack.

The Travelling Foal to Weaning

Sammy was a fairly reticent foal, she wasn't very interested in people, and found handling to be an invasion of her equine rights. When she was 6 weeks old she travelled to stud with her mum Jumah who was put in foal (by AI) to a French Arabian stallion. Sammy returned to the new stud base in Surrey with more than a little attitude, the cute little bay filly with a great outlook on life returned like a bear with a sore head, frequent tantrums when being handled and her ears constantly pinned to the back of her head; she was like a little bay demon. A few weeks of gentle handling and bonding turned Sammy back to her usual ways, and she was once again a precocious bay filly with a sunny temperament. She grew into a strong athletic foal, and her coat grew into the beautiful dark bay colour it is now.

Weaning proved to be the first real glimpse of Sammy's athletic potential, by now she was a tall powerful seven month old filly and she was weaned with two other youngsters with a couple of nanny mares; while their dams were taken away. All 3 did a few laps around the field, but it was Sammy who won the babies race by several lengths with a generous length of stride; that had me eagerly anticipating her racing future.

From Yearling to Three Year Old

Sammy had a fairly carefree childhood, and I believe it is really important to allow horses to grow and mature naturally with the herd as the time will come when they will have to put the hours in on the gallops and the racetrack. Sammy was a dream to handle, she matured nicely after weaning and would follow me round the field as I mended fences. It was clear as she grew older that she would be a light framed horse as is typical of her Polish/Russian and Egyptian bloodlines. She was present when her little sister Amy was born in 2006 and was an excellent nanny which I am sure Jumah appreciated!

The Four Year old

Life got a little bit more serious for Sammy as a four year as I started to do more work with her, we started lunging and gradually moved onto biting and putting the tack on. Sammy never put a foot wrong and seemed to relish the attention she was receiving, lunging was great fun as she could whizz around the sand school and she relished chewing the rubber bit. Backing was also an easy affair, the first time I sat on her she simply turned round and nibbled my shoes as if to say "what on earth are you doing up there?" She was lightly hacked out and then turned away for the winter as she was still immature mentally and physically.

The beginning of Sammy's racing career

In March 2010 Sammy aged five years old joined my other homebred mare Sakeena Sky Zayin in training with my friend in West Sussex. She was re-backed and undertook some intensive schooling which helped with her balance and steering! Sammy loved the training routine especially as it involved hacking over Ashdown Forest, with lots of roaming cows and wild goarse bushes to swerve at. I rode Sammy out several times in her first season, and she was a superb smooth moving and comfortable ride and importantly had plenty of pace. Once your homebred is training the reality of seeing them on the race track is breathtakingly close, the once scrawny bay filly was transforming in front of my eyes into a power packed muscle machine with the will to win. I saw her do her first gallops at Lingfield and both I and her trainer were delighted with her ability, and of course the potential she was showing. Her first entry was made at Wolverhampton in June.....

Sammy's first race season 2010 (Trainer 1):

The day dawned Sammy made her debut at Wolverhampton on 12th June 2010 over 1 Mile 2 furlongs, she ran up with the pace and finished a credible 8th out of 11 and seemed to thoroughly enjoy her day out. She ran in her second race at Fakenham on 27th June over 7 furlongs, we were all quite excited as Sammy was "working" (galloping) well at home and we hoped she would show some more form and improvement. Sadly she missed the break at the start, and Fakenham is a tight track and she missed all the bends, but did well to finish 6th of 8 and promptly got an unreasonably high handicap mark of 65. Her next race was a week later and this proved to be a mistake, Sammy was far too over excited in the saddling box and then the parade ring; she then refused to start the race through sheer nervousness and excitement and badly hampered the favourite. She eventually jumped off a furlong behind the field and finished last. That's racing as they say and she seemed none the worse for her adventure but then fate intervened and one of those field accidents occurred. Sammy's rain sheet slipped off in the field, and she became utterly convinced that it had morphed into a leopard attacking her; she shot round the field in panic and cleared a four foot fence. Sadly she jarred her shoulder and the season looked over, but after vet attention and box rest she came sound and we decided to give her one more run for the season (rather than end on the bad note of her planting at the start at Hereford). So Sammy finished her season at Huntingdon over 8 furlongs, she behaved impeccably and jumped off with the field and galloped into the straight but was well beaten on her handicap debut. Sky took the

pressure off slightly by winning her race that day! It was a less than dazzling start to her race career, but the first year is always a “learning” year and as long as they enjoy themselves, stay sound and show some potential then that’s all you need to put them in training for a second season.

Sammy’s second season 2011 (Trainer 2)

Sammy went into training for her second season with trainer number 2 in Wiltshire, and the pressure was on this time; the official rule at Zayin is they have to have at least been placed within their first 8 starts. Her first start was at Taunton over 1 Mile 2 furlongs where she looked to be a running a big race before nearly falling on the home turn losing her place and she finished 6th, not too bad and not too great. She then ran out of her grade at Newbury in the breeders cup, but finished an impressive 5th over a mile. Her next two starts were a disaster, she was virtually last over a mile at Hereford and then beaten out of sight at Wolverhampton over 2 Miles. So that was 8 races, the rule is 9 strikes and you’re out; and I believed strongly that her next race at Hereford was a mistake but the trainer passionately believed this was her race. Sammy obviously sensed the pressure and ran a blinder of a race, she travelled beautifully throughout and powered down the home straight to win by a length over a mile and a half. So race 9 had finally seen Sammy win her first race and it looked as though she had a hit form, but sadly Sammy ran twice afterwards at Salisbury and Wolverhampton and failed to fire; so came back to Somerset (the new base for Zayin Stud back on Exmoor) for a six month holiday.

Sammy’s third season 2012 (Trainer 3)

Sammy saw her third season move to another new trainer (Number 3) in Warwick.

Sammy started her season with a rather disgraceful display at Taunton when she dumped her jockey on the way to start and then proceeded to jump the four foot racecourse barrier from a trot (which was quite impressive) and then galloped off into the horizon, evading capture for nearly half an hour! However, she soon redeemed her reputation with two classy staying performances at Hereford, in June over 2 Miles when 3rd to Terminators Dream and in July she followed up with 3rd to subsequent UK Champion racehorse Shamal over 1 Mile 6 furlongs. She then showed her true athletic ability and tough racing attitude when winning the second race of her career at Nottingham in August over 1 Mile 6 furlongs in bottomless ground when coming home two and a half lengths too good for Sert, under a superb ride from Steve Harrison. **Race Form Summary (3/20=2-0-2)**

❖ Highlights

1st in the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Stakes over 1 Mile 6 Furlongs (11 ran)

3rd in the Royal Cavalry of Oman Stakes over 2 Miles (7 ran)

3rd in the Oman Handicap Stakes over 1 Mile 6 Furlongs (7 ran)

Sammy’s Future 2013

Sammy won’t be racing for a third season, she has raced for 3 seasons and won twice and been placed twice and ran 20 times finishing her career sound. She has reached her limit of achievement and done enough to stay on as a broodmare at the stud, fulfilling the expectation and hope that I saw in her as a foal back in 2005. Sammy was scanned in foal to Mared Al Sahra for a 2014 foal.

2014 Update

Sammy gave birth to her first foal in May a handsome bay colt by Group 1 winner Mared Al Sahra called “Zayin Activist” or Bobby for short. Sammy is proving to be a superb broodmare and mother and seems to love this new role.