

Arabian Horse Society of Australia focus on Youth

During recent years the Arabian Horse Society of Australia has made a concerted effort to encourage and promote youth. In 2003 a Youth Development program commenced with a Youth Sub Committee of the Board of the AHSA being formed. Directors of the AHSA recognize that our youth are the future of our breed and every endeavour is being made to provide opportunities to assist, encourage and educate children. Owing to the versatility of the Arabian horse we are very fortunate to have some extremely competent and experienced horsemen involved in a diverse range of equestrian disciplines. It is through the generosity and willingness of these people to impart their knowledge and the support of the AHSA, that the breed has been able to make some terrific progress in our Youth Development program.

Victoria was the first state to put the wheels in motion by conducting several instruction days. The popularity of these days led to the formation of the Victorian Arabian Horse Youth Group, an authorized sub committee of the AHSA. The Victorian Youth Group has been closely modeled upon youth groups within the cattle breed societies. The ideas and structure of their youth programs has helped provide the Board of the AHSA with some definite aims and direction. Queensland has since followed suit and established their own youth group. The AHSA will continue to offer education days and work with our affiliates in the other states to gather support to form similar groups.

It has been the AHSA's aim that these youth groups would provide education, enjoyment and general horsemanship. It was always intended that each group should belong to the children and not be run for them by adults, so that responsibility and leadership skills would develop. This hasn't yet been achieved in Queensland owing to a much younger age group of children, but it has developed extremely well within Victoria. The youth groups cater for children from five to twenty five years of age. It is envisaged that the youth groups will act as stepping stones to prepare children for committees later on. The Victorian Youth Group children have their own committee, are setting up their own website, run an AGM (and run a very good meeting), help organize their weekends of instruction, are learning to fund raise and manage their own bank account. The responsibility and organization being shown by our older children is really developing and it is exciting watching it. The Chairman and Secretary volunteered to work at the Australian National Arabian Championships and did a tremendous job.

Children want activity and it must be fun, so we have tried to provide a wide variety of instruction. People are often amazed at some of the instruction we have provided - campdrafting, tentpegging, polocrosse, show jumping, barrel racing, western, stockhorse, halter, hacking, show presentation, junior judging, knots and splicing, scrap booking and making ribbon brow bands to name a few. We have been fortunate to receive instruction from some extremely competent horsemen - tentpegging with Australian team members and the Australian National Coach, western with the Victorian Quarter Horse Association Chairman and polocrosse with Victorian state team members, not to mention those within our own breed.

The camping for the children at our weekends has been a huge success and instrumental in developing friendships. They now know each other at the shows, email and go and stay with one another during holidays. The social aspect of the youth groups is really important.

The youth program within our shows has expanded considerably. Our affiliate shows offer an extensive range of youth classes, as does the Australian National Arabian Championships, the breed's premier show. In Queensland separate youth shows are conducted annually. At one of these shows many of our professional riders and trainers officiate as the stewards and marshals to encourage and provide tuition during the course of the show. This show has now reached the point of having four rings in operation. The standard of competition amongst our youth competitors has risen dramatically with many of our youth also competing in open classes and being quite capable of holding their own against professional trainers. We have enticed children to our show ring by offering youth packages with the entries, to make it more affordable and to encourage further participation. High point awards and encouragement prizes are offered as incentives.

The Victorian Youth of the Year is generously sponsored by some of our affiliates in Victoria and their shows in turn become qualifying events for the children to accumulate points, which is also beneficial to the affiliates. This competition provides financial assistance to the two winners to help enable them the opportunity to compete at the Australian Championships each year. The past winners of this competition have all been grateful for the opportunity and invaluable experience they have gained by competing at that level of competition.

Apart from the sponsorship the AHSA gives to the Quilty, support is also given to youth awards in endurance riding, a sport in which the Arabian excels. It is hardly surprising that endurance is attractive to children given that it can be a family sport and has a unique atmosphere with plenty of challenges, but also great reward. It is fabulous to see Arabian breeders such as Peter Toft and Ron Males encouraging children to the sport. Ron now competes with his grandchildren and on one particular occasion Peter organized twelve members of the Toft family to ride at an endurance ride - a good proportion of them children.

The AHSA has made available two \$1000 scholarships for youth competing in open competition on registered Purebred Arabian or Arabian Derivative horse or horses with outstanding results. The aim of these scholarships is to promote the Arabian horse and our youth and help further develop the potential of the winning combinations. The \$1000 awarded will be used to help cover expenses incurred by the winner and their horse in gaining further experience and may be used not only for competition expenses but also tuition. We are extremely pleased with the number of applicants we received in the first year.

During December the AHSA also released our Youth Exchange. The aim of the Youth Exchange is to award a ten day trip to New

Zealand to a person eighteen to twenty five years of age, in recognition of their service and contribution to the Arabian breed in Australia. The NZ Arabian Horse Breeders Society are reciprocating and offering the same opportunity. The AHSA and NZAHBS shall organize host families throughout the duration of the trip to accommodate the exchange students and avail them opportunities of attending Arabian events, offering instruction and experience as well as some recreational time.

Our Youth program is not dull. We have plenty on the agenda and plenty more to achieve. We owe a great deal to the many people who have provided support and to the children for their tremendous enthusiasm and sense of fun. It has indeed been a rewarding project.

Kate Luckock

AHSA Focus on Youth.