

Rebuilt from Ashes, Once, Twice

How War, Politics, and Postwar Authority Reshaped the Breeding Philosophy for the Polish Arabian

The history of the Polish Arabian is not the history of uninterrupted refinement. It is the history of a breed repeatedly brought to brilliance, repeatedly broken by war and upheaval, and repeatedly rebuilt by people determined that something rare and irreplaceable should not vanish. To understand the breeding philosophy that emerged in Poland after the Second World War, one has to begin earlier, before the communist period, before the war itself, and even before the first great collapse of the twentieth century. The postwar philosophy did not arise in a vacuum. It grew out of memory, catastrophe, necessity, and the altered conditions under which rebuilding had to take place.

Long before World War II, Poland had already developed a distinctive Arabian tradition, rooted in old imports, great estates, and a breeding culture that thought in terms of sire lines, mare families, type, soundness, utility, and long-term breeding value rather than temporary fashion. The First World War and the upheavals that followed destroyed much of that earlier world, including major eastern breeding centers, but Poland rebuilt in the interwar years. Janów Podlaski was reactivated in 1919, private breeding revived, and by the late 1930s Poland had again brought its Arabian horse to a level of international distinction. That fact matters enormously, because it proves that the Polish breeders already knew how to restore quality after catastrophe. They had done it once before.

That interwar restoration was not merely technical. It was philosophical. The men rebuilding Polish breeding after the First World War were still close to the older horse culture that had produced the prewar Arabian. They inherited a way of seeing in which the horse was judged as a whole creature: beauty, constitution, riding quality, endurance, frame, usefulness, and breeding potency were all understood together. The older heritage Polish Arabian was not a frail or decorative fantasy. At its best, it was dry, elegant, strongly made, athletic, and complete. It had refinement, but also substance. It had beauty, but not at the expense of honesty, balance, or function. That point is crucial, because later history has sometimes blurred it.

Then came the second devastation, and this time the blow was deeper. During World War II, horses were evacuated, seized, marched west, taken east, killed, dispersed, or absorbed into foreign systems. The war did not merely interrupt a breeding plan. It tore apart the physical and human continuity on which breeding depends. Herds were scattered, records were disrupted, and the old world of estates and stud traditions was

broken apart by invasion, occupation, and violent political change.

When peace came in 1945, the miracle was not that Poland resumed breeding exactly as before. The miracle was that enough remained to begin again at all. Important stock was recovered, among it mares, suckling foals, and the stallions Amurath Sahib, Wielki Szlem, and Witra■. Their return meant that Poland did not have to rebuild from mares alone. It still possessed living carriers of the old blood and, with them, at least some living continuity with what had existed before the war.

But here the story changes in a way that must be described carefully. The rebuilding after 1945 was not the same kind of rebuilding that had taken place after World War I. After the Second World War, Poland found itself inside the Soviet sphere, under a system of nationalization, central control, and political suspicion toward anything associated with the old landed order. The Arabian horse, because of its historical associations and because of the larger social reordering underway, no longer stood in the same relation to the state that it had before the war. Breeding could continue, but it continued under a different authority and with a different set of pressures.

This is why the postwar Polish Arabian may fairly be described as having been rebuilt under command. That phrase does not mean that no real horsemen remained, nor that the resulting horses lacked greatness. Quite the contrary: the breed survived and, in time, flourished again. But the center of authority had shifted. The old breeder working within an inherited and locally governed horse culture no longer stood in the same relation to decision-making. Now there were ministries, inspectorates, federations, state studs, and political assumptions about what kinds of horses ought to be valued and why. The rebuilding was heroic, but it was not wholly free.

It is here, however, that an important distinction must be made. One must not confuse the official postwar preference for horses that could be justified as useful, substantial, and workmanlike with the older heritage Polish ideal itself. Those two things are not identical. The old Polish Arabian had substance, yes, but its substantiality came from an integrated breeder's philosophy, one in which strength, dryness, elegance, athleticism, and practical use belonged together. The early communist state may have favored horses that could be defended as useful, but usefulness under ideological pressure is not the same thing as continuity with the old Polish eye for a horse.

That difference matters because the postwar story did not move in one simple direction. In the early years after the war, Arabian breeding had to survive within a practical and ideological environment that preferred horses capable of fitting a utilitarian national ethos. Yet later, as political conditions shifted, agriculture mechanized, and export markets opened, another kind of pressure emerged. Foreign demand increasingly rewarded beauty, style, and show appeal. In some branches, that later climate

encouraged a more refined, more stylized, sometimes more ethereal expression than the older heritage Polish horse had embodied. It involved several different pressures, often pulling in different directions.

That is one reason the story can so easily be misunderstood. If one looks only at the immediate postwar years, one may think the main tension lay between a classically refined Arabian and a stronger, more utilitarian one. But if one looks at the longer arc, another truth becomes visible: the older heritage Polish horse was already a horse of strength and completeness, beauty and completeness. The real loss came because the integrated balance of the old type was gradually weakened. In some later branches, refinement ceased to be part of a complete horse and became something closer to stylization. That is a very different matter.

The institutional structure of the postwar period helps explain why this happened. The first state studs were organized under official supervision, and Arabian breeding was divided, redistributed, and managed in ways shaped not only by horse knowledge but by bureaucracy and policy. Dr. Edward Skorkowski played an important role in organizing the postwar stud system, and later all Polish Arabian breeding was placed fully under state control. The men at the studs still mattered, but they were no longer acting in a world where breeder judgment alone was sovereign. The surviving horses, however valuable, were now subject to a national framework that could preserve, redirect, or overrule.

Andrzej Krzyształowicz is crucial here, because the historical record suggests that he was not trying to destroy continuity with the older Janów philosophy. On the contrary, he is described as continuing the breeding philosophy of Stanisław Pohoski, the great prewar Janów breeder. Yet even a man as gifted and historically conscious as Krzyształowicz was working inside a changed system. The old continuity had been broken, Janów itself had been damaged, and the returning horses first had to be housed elsewhere. The stud could be guided by memory, but it could not be restored to its earlier freedom.

Roman Pankiewicz's recollections make this loss of breeder autonomy especially vivid. Speaking of the 1950s, he said that selection was done by inspectors employed by the official breeding authorities and that the stud people themselves often had little to say. That is not a small detail. It is a window into the emotional and practical reality of breeding under central authority. Decisions were being made over the heads of men who lived closest to the horses. This helps explain why the postwar story cannot be told simply as a matter of one breeder's taste or one stud's preference. The structure within which choices were made had changed.

If Krzyształowicz represented one pole of postwar rebuilding, Ignacy Jaworowski at Michałów represented another important force. Michałów, founded in 1953 from Klemensów horses, became one of the great state studs of the modern era. Its own history reflects the realities of the period: changes in stud populations, official expectations, later export opportunities, and the ways in which certain kinds of horses happened to fit those changing climates more easily than others. None of this means Michałów or Janów can be reduced to ideology. It means only that neither stud existed outside the political and economic realities of the age.

That passage into the export era matters. Once foreign markets began rewarding Arabians for beauty, presentation, and commercial desirability, another layer of pressure was added. The breed was no longer being shaped only by official domestic thinking, but by what international buyers wanted to reward. It is here that one can see more clearly how the heritage Polish type might be endangered from the opposite direction. The old horse had been an integrated horse, at once refined and substantial, beautiful and useful. But market-driven selection can reward exaggeration just as surely as ideology can reward simplification. Either way, the old balance can be disturbed.

This is why it would be too easy, and too unfair, to accuse the postwar breeders simply of abandoning heritage. They were not working in a stable, sovereign, privately directed horse culture. They were rebuilding in a damaged country under political supervision, with shattered continuity, reduced options, and official structures capable of overriding local judgment. In such a world, preservation is rarely pure. It becomes compromise, improvisation, persistence, and the art of carrying as much as possible through conditions one did not choose.

That is also why it would be a mistake to imagine that the old type disappeared in a single dramatic act. The shift was gradual, cumulative, and uneven. Some branches retained more of the old inheritance than others. Some breeders saw more clearly than others what was being lost. Some horses still carried the older architecture of the breed in body, mind, and use. But the larger truth remained: the postwar Polish Arabian was being shaped by horsemen operating within a commanded landscape, then later within an international market, and not solely within the older world of inherited Polish breeding judgment.

Seen from that perspective, the modern Polish Arabian becomes even more remarkable, but also more complex. It is not merely a beautiful horse produced by careful selection. It is the descendant of repeated salvage. It carries within it the memory of a prewar ideal, the scar of repeated devastation, and the imprint of rebuilding under altered authority. Its elegance, at its best, is not decorative. It is historical.

Yet history also requires honesty. Survival is not always the same as preservation. A breed may endure on paper, in registry, and even in broad family identity, while gradually departing from some of the physical and genetic harmonies that once gave it a distinct historical character. In the case of the Polish Arabian, the postwar decades preserved much that was precious, but they did not preserve everything equally. Some branches retained more of the old inheritance than others. Some later breeding decisions, however understandable in their own context, moved away from the older architecture of the heritage Polish horse - that dry, balanced, classically integrated animal shaped by generations of Polish judgment before modern fashion and external influences began to exert greater force. Breeding stock from other countries and other types were used to produce horses that which more closely resembled what the well-heeled markets overseas demanded – and were willing to pay enormous prices for these horses.

To say this is not to disparage in any way, all modern Pure Polish Arabians, nor to deny the beauty or value many of them possess. It is simply to recognize that pedigree continuity and phenotypic continuity are not always identical. A horse may descend entirely from Polish lines and yet no longer express, in full, the same old-world coherence of type, structure, and breeding design that once made the Polish Arabian so singular. That distinction matters, especially now.

Perhaps that is the deepest truth of all. The postwar breeders did not inherit a peaceful tradition to maintain. They inherited fragments. They rebuilt with talent, conviction, compromise, and constraint. They preserved more than might have been expected, but not always in the same form, and not always under the same freedoms, as the horsemen who had come before them. The Polish Arabian was saved, but it was also reshaped.

That is why the story still matters so urgently today. It is not only about what was saved, but about what still remains to be recognized, protected, and carried forward. If the original heritage type - the old-world Polish Arabian in its deepest and most historically integrated sense - is to endure, it will not be enough merely to celebrate the name. One must also understand the form, the philosophy, and the breeding logic that once stood behind it. Preservation, in the fullest sense, means more than continuity of a label. It means continuity of an essence.

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