

The Gassir Branch of the Jamil El Kebir Tail Male Line: Preserving Variety and Masculine Desert Type

by Karin Floyd and Kate Rhodes

Within Straight Egyptian breeding exist four tail male lines: Saklawi I, Jamil El Kebir, Zobeyni [evidence now shows that the Mesaoud branch of this sire line actually traces to Ghadir, senior stallion of Abbas Pasha — there is still a line tracing to Zobeyni through Mahruss] and El Deree. The abundant successes of the Nazeer “type” have made Saklawi I a popular and well-represented tail male line in North America, followed by Jamil El Kebir, then Zobeyni having 50+ of this male line and, consequently, relegating the El Deree tail male line to near extinction. It is astonishing to realize how some tail male lines have come to be so scarce given their distinctive influence. In such wonderings, it becomes apparent that care must be used in preservation of different branches within each of the tail male lines to ensure variability of genetic diversity for generations to come. This article focuses on Jamil El Kebir via Gassir which, until 2015, was becoming an extinct branch. It is still at risk, but the numbers are increasing due to the efforts of dedicated breeders, preservationists, and those who have purchased male offspring for performance purposes. Testimony and pictures of past horses, current stallions, young progeny and geldings will help paint a picture of this family today.

One can quickly ascertain that the Gassir branch would not fare well in today’s halter show ring nor that of the past. Comments from Judith Forbis, who emphatically focused on show type and refinement in her own program, even upheld this notion: “Gassir (Kheir x Badia) is an extremely handsome stallion, but is quite different in type (more masculine and powerfully built) than most of this family tends to be” (Judith Forbis: *Authentic Arabian Bloodstock*, 92). This comment is dated in a 1967 article, but her comments in a 1960 article were a bit harsher: “...Gassir, a white Dahman Shahwan out of Badia by Kheir, who despite his good looks hadn’t proved much of a sire” (24). One has to wonder, on which criteria were her comments based? “Hadn’t proved much of a sire”? Various breeders concur that this comment was highly subjective and, interestingly, this branch is quite popular in Egypt today. Perhaps those in Egypt saw value in this masculine type that Judith Forbis did not. The Gassir sire line brings a balanced “frame”: notable size, powerful shoulders, short coupling, proportioned and powerful hind ends, and ample bone density, which a study of pictures will show. But perhaps, indisputable evidence of success also lies in Egyptian race records.

As one can expect, Philippe Paraskevas has some opinions on the Jamil El Khebir tail male line as a whole (which he labels in his book *The Egyptian Alternative: In Search of the Identity of the Egyptian Arabian Bloodlines: Volume II “The Motor of the Breed”*) as well as Gassir himself. Regarding the Jamil El Kebir tail male line in general, which he nicknames the “Rabdan” line because they are available to us today solely through Rabdan El Azrak, he states:

Typical Rabdan males always tend to be colorful characters and powerful looking animals; they often boast wide chests and can be strikingly broad across the back and hind-quarters, deep of girth and sometimes massive overall. Most are overwhelmingly masculine in appearance as well as behavior; many embody the type and the spirit of Kohailan-hood. Some observers of the scene will say that their warrior-horse-like strength comes at the cost of their main perceived weakness: occasional lack of refinement (Paraskevas, 320).

Is calling this a weakness accurate? Surely not, considering this sire line’s record at the racetrack, over fences, in dressage and overall prowess.



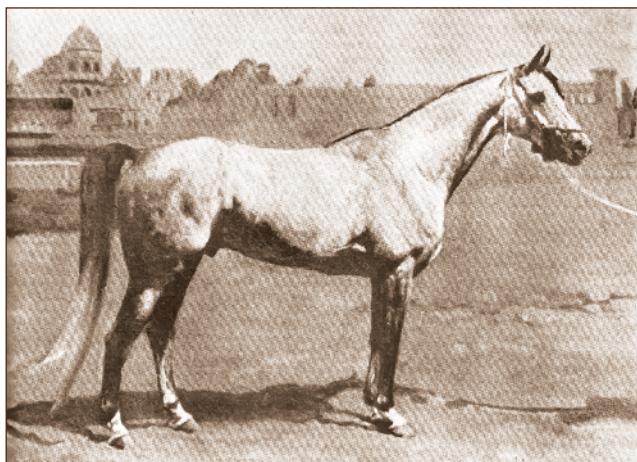
Treff-Haven Sabeel, 2002 grey stallion by Treff-Haven Emir x Bint Lebleba.

Rabdan El Azrak sired Samhan, while not impressive in his photograph (the only photograph of him available, and unfortunately as a weathered older stallion), he sired Ibn Samhan in 1919, who sired Kheir in 1924 and then *Zarife and Balance in 1928.



Samhan (APK), 1905 chestnut stallion by Ibn Rabdan (RAS) x Om Dalal (APK).

The legendary Balance (Ibn Samhan x Farida) holds one of the most prolific racing records in Egypt of his time having run seventeen races between 1932 – 1934, winning 14, placing second in two, and third in one. Judith Forbis refers to him on page 377 in *The Classic Arabian Horse* as being “Egypt’s most outstanding racehorse of all time.”



Balance (RAS), 1928 grey stallion by Ibn Samhan (RAS) x Farida (MNL).

However, not to be overshadowed, Kheir (Ibn Samhan x Badaouia) sired many impressive race winners as well, including *Fadell (x Bint Radia), who started racing as a four year old, and competed until he was six years old. Out of 41 races, he won seven, placed second in six, third in nine, and fourth in two (Forbis, 386). Another of Kheir’s sons, Mandour (x Hind) competed in the 1945 racing season running only three races, but winning two, and placing second in one (Forbis 394).

Even a daughter of the Samhan branch of Jamil El Kebir raced on the track, Gohara (Balance x Jehan), who won one race and placed third in another in 1969 (Forbis, 387). In an email exchange, Joe Ferriss noted, “It is rare for them to race a mare unless she has special promise and [Gohara’s] pedigree would dictate so.” The influence of this blood is also noteworthy in Zaafarana (Balance x Samira) as the dam of the prolific race winners Amrulla and



Photo: Judith Forbis collection.
Zaafarana (RAS), 1946 grey mare by Balance (RAS) x Samira (RAS).

*Talal.

Another noteworthy influence comes from the Bint Riyala branch of the Rodania tail female line, and her characteristic Koheilan influence. Philippe Paraskevas states:

Besides siring Gassir, Kheir’s other noted legacy is in his decisive influence on the Bint Riyala branch of Rodania, through Malaka. When you compare over time the increasingly diverging development of the Riyala and Rissala branches of Rodania, and the differences among them, it must be that Kheir was a critical factor in confirming the



Kheir (RAS), 1924 grey stallion by Ibn Samhan (RAS) x Badaouia (RAS).

trend towards square power that became more prevalent in the Riyalas (Paraskevas, Vol 2, 332).

Current progeny of the Gassir sire line reflect a successful blend with the Riyala family. This was incidental as their pedigrees were originally chosen with a low Nazeer, New Egyptian goal in mind. These offspring have powerful outcross potential on top of their obvious “working horse” qualities. Amurrah DHA (Treff-Haven



Amurrah DHA, 2020 chestnut mare by Treff-Haven Latif x Bint Rudaynah)

Latif x Bint Rudaynah) embodies the classic Koheilan type, illustrating the Rodania line via the Bint Riyala branch of Malaka.

Her dam, Bint Rudaynah, is a rather plain but perfectly straight legged mare who was generously gifted to Desert Heritage Arabians by Sandy Cleland. This blend has given Amurrah DHA the substance, intelligence, and powerful movement that one should expect. She is the tallest of the Treff-Haven Latif get so far and is probably the most intelligent. Amurrah learned to undo panel chains by 8 months old, leading to a routinely escaped mare and foal pair until she was caught in the act. There is also a water spigot routinely tampered with that has allowed for some grassy patches to grow that would otherwise not exist naturally in a desert.

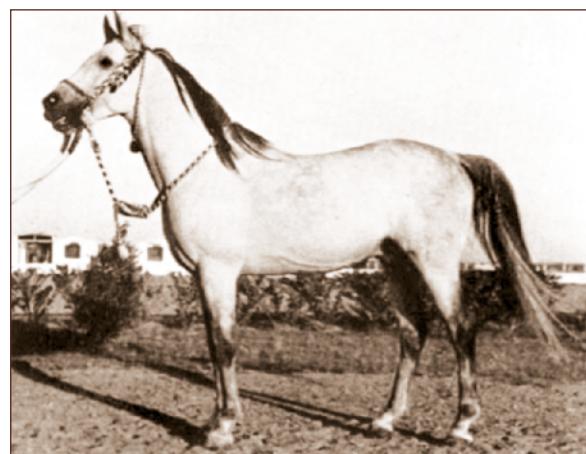
Another study of the Kheir influence through the Koheilan Rodans is Van Alma Dahlia (Treff-Haven Sabeel x Sorta Sultry). She is a near perfect mare in many ways, with three circles, notably correct legs standing on rock hard, balanced black feet, a powerful hind end, and a “ride or die” attitude. Another remarkable quality is her unique and exquisite beauty, featuring wide-set, big, bright eyes on a tapered face with a jibbah to die for. This mare embodies a modern day glimpse of why these horses were both honored and sought after for centuries.

Her inner fire, balance and beauty exemplify what one might imagine a desert war mare might have been. Dahlia has truly taken the best of both worlds as she boasts the Gassir frame with some of the style drawn from her dam’s approximate 30% *Sultann (Sameh x Lubna) influence. Dahlia is also one of the last of the female branch to Rodania through the EAO import, *Yathreb, adding a further element of branch variety.

These observations come as no surprise to people familiar with the Gassir influence. But what should one consider with regard to its utility in a breeding program? This is where breeding these horses becomes an art form between pedigree, phenotype, and in some cases, a leap of faith.

Philippe Paraskevas encourages breeders to consider this line cautiously. However, some breeders more focused on athletic working horses rather than refined picturesque horses can count on this line to correct structural and strength inadequacies that may be present in their available mares:

All Gassirs have inherited his distinctive type, which is very hard to alter when passed on successfully to his get. Generally speaking, delicacy of features and overall refinement are not defining traits that you can count on from Gassirs... However obvious his qualities, Gassir was not a favorite of Western visitors to El Zahraa. Besides remarking in *Hanan* on Gassir’s heaviness, Dr. Nagel was at his most categorical when he wrote: ‘Of all the stallions of El Zahraa, Gassir was one with the least type’. These remarks are surprising since it appears that Gassir was a stallion of a most pronounced type (Paraskevas, 333).



Above: Gassir (RAS), 1941 grey stallion by Kheir (RAS) x Badia (RAS).
Below: Van Alma Dahlia, 2016 bay mare by Treff-Haven Sabeel x Sorta Sultry)



We're left to question why this branch is so popular in Egypt versus North America despite Dr. Nagel's commentary? One has to wonder...

When breeding this branch, there is no doubt height, bone, and movement will be produced, as well as balance in the sacred three circles which includes a strong shoulder, short coupling, and a fabulous, powerful hip. This consideration is reaffirmed below:

Gassirs are often the heaviest and most powerful of all Rabdans, if not always the tallest... Gassir certainly qualified as an outcross in his day and he embodied Kohailanhood, as do to this day all of Gassir's male descendants that I know of, regardless of birth strain, even those that are rather tall and stretchy. Length of lines does little to bring Gassirs closer to Saklawihood. Gassir's appeal as an outcross lies not online in his sire line or in his peripheral Dahman blood from Bint El Bahrain, but also partially in his own sire's unique strain of desert-bred tail female line, giving this stallion special standing among all historical outcrosses (Paraskevas, 332).

Circling backwards to Kheir, Philippe Paraskevas claims, "As powerful outcrosses go, few horses were as strikingly 'different' from the mainstream as Kheir was in his time. Also, few genuine outcrosses ever had as much potential for meaningful impact, and alas, few went as unrecognized and as underused" (Paraskevas, 331). Unrecognized' and 'underused'... such a waste considering the strong and corrective influence of this sire line. But what does this mean in terms of pedigree when studying and looking at a potential mare? Paraskevas further advises:

Strongly Rabdan influenced males provide great outcross material for some of the over-refined mares bred many times over to the Saklawi I line. However, the most likely to benefit from the qualities that the Rabdans (Paraskevas, 320) bring to the table are the Sid Abouhom/Akhtal-influenced mares for the Rabdans crucially provide much needed substance, balance and build to some of the narrower-chested and sometimes angular mares, those most steeped in racing tradition (Paraskevas, 321) ...



Treff-Haven Aazar, 2000 chestnut stallion by Treff-Haven Emir x GH Aatifa.

Those that have owned and bred this line can collectively agree that "Gassirs are here to build frames and not for any other reason... Gassirs are routinely deep of girth; they sport wide and powerful chests, and their tail carriage is evocative of nothing but raised flags" (Paraskevas, 334).

This sire line has left quite a stamp within the Non-Nazeer and Low Nazeer groups, with which they've mostly been bred and are currently available. Many of such crosses have come from foals of mares descended from Sahlih (*Ibn Hafiza x *Sanaaa) bred by the late Helma Cairns, including Tahara Risaana (Al Saaheb x Tahara el Risaana), Dahlilah (Sahlih x Desert Ecstasy) and Bint Matala (Al Saaheb x NC Matala). With such a high percentage of *Ibn Hafiza blood, these mares provide quite an outcross for the heavily Gassir bred non-Nazeer stallions of the Treff-Haven breeding program. Resultant crosses are athletic individuals that inherit the Gassir frame while being complemented by the substance and movement for which *Ibn Hafiza and his offspring were well known.

True to form, Baroud DHA sports the Gassir sire line, with resultant frame, and interestingly, traces in tail female to the aforementioned racing mare Gohara. After being started under saddle in 2021 and trained for collection this breeding season, Baroud DHA will be competing in endurance races by the end of 2022. His future is quite exciting considering his pedigree, phenotype, and big, driven movement over the desert terrain of Tucson without hardly breaking a sweat.



Baroud DHA, 2016 grey stallion by Treff-Haven Sabeel x Bint Matala.

Pictured opposite are some other Gassir-influenced x *Ibn Hafiza-influenced individuals.

Given all the above, why not try to capitalize on this branch? Perhaps a dose of Gassir might bring much needed size, structure and powerful movement that brings people to purchase riding horses. All hope is not lost to the beauty pageant type breeding that Straight Egyptians have seemingly been relegated to.

Per current research, there are eight confirmed, intact males of the Gassir branch in North America and some geldings noted here



Left to right: *Van Alma Risaana* (next page), *Treff-Haven Lexie*, 2010 bay mare by *Nagsous* x *Leilaah*, and *Val Alma Lazarus*, 2021 *Lexie* colt by *Treff-Haven Sabeel*.



Above: *Hassaniah DHA*, 2020 grey mare by *Treff-Haven Latif* x *Dahlilah*.

Below: *Dahlilah*, 2000 bay mare by *Sahliah* x *Desert Ecstasy* with 2022 filly by *Treff-Haven Latif*.



for reference. These horses can help us understand this very important family. For ease and clarity, males are listed below. There are females of this group worth noting for reference, however they will not pass on the sire line. Also, some geldings have been added as current representatives of the line even though they can not add to the future of the family.

Treff-Haven Labeeb, 2001 gs

- His only son is deceased

Treff-Haven Sabeel, 2002 gs

- *Van Alma Ramses* (x *Tahara Risaana*), 2015 gg

- *Baroud DHA* (x *Bint Matala*), 2015 gs

- *Van Alma Mosaad* (x *Fia Amal*), 2020 bs

- *Van Alma Hadad* (x *Van Alma Sophia*), 2021 bs

- *Van Alma Lazarus* (x *Treff-Haven Lexie*), 2021 bs

Treff-Haven Lamir, 2004 gg

Treff-Haven Latif, 2006 gs

- *Ibn Latif DHA* (x *Bint Matala*), 2020 gg

- Unnamed Colt (x *Bint Matala*) 2022 gs

Besides *Gassir*, the only other Kheir male line was **Fadell*, which is now extinct within Al Khamsa breeding. So, the above listed males are the only source for this branch in North America. These numbers are strikingly low and only a handful of breeders are continuing this tale male line in their breeding programs. The pedigrees of the available *Gassir* sires dwell mostly in the Low Nazeer, New Egyptian group (less than 15% with no Babson imports) through the careful and thoughtful foresight of *Treff-Haven Arabians*, founded by Homer and Tina Penniman, who strived to preserve this precious group as a future source of outcross breeding. Homer is survived by Tina, and she unfailingly provides thoughtful consideration and perspective as to how this line produces respective of the dam lines. Her insight is priceless.

Pictured below is **GAF Hosam*, 1972 bay stallion by *Sabeel* (EAO) x *Mouna* (EAO), in Egypt with Kristin Ellington (Johanson) up. Under Kristin, he was successful in jumping and dressage in both Egypt and the USA. To note, Kristin is the daughter of the late Barbara Johanson, who was responsible for importing **GAF*



Hosam and, incidentally, keeping this branch alive. Interestingly, the "Hosam" family is well-known for being jumpers and the most entertaining story is that of *GAF Hosam, who jumped out of the arena during a liberty class at the Egyptian Event. In a panic, everyone ran after him fearing a stallion was loose, yet they found him standing at his stall. If one ever visited Treff-Haven Arabians, they would have noted an extra high electric wire in front of Treff-Haven Labeeb's pasture because he launched himself out on a whim. Also pictured is *GAF Hosam's great granddaughter, Van Alma Risaana (Treff-Haven Sabeel x Tahara Risaana) with Ken Keele up. This was her first outing as a three year old and she jumped everything that was put in front of her. This sport seems to be a family affair.



Van Alma Risaana, 2018 bay mare (Treff-Haven Sabeel x Tahara Risaana), jumping, Ken Keele up.

In a comparative conversation amongst breeders, owners and enthusiasts, it seems Treff-Haven Latif and Treff-Haven Sabeel both produce unmistakable foals of the Gassir influence. They are often born large and leggy with a pronounced shoulder and deep hip. They grow to be gigantic weanlings/yearlings and thunder around any open spaces with power, grace and an undeniable awareness of themselves and others. Treff-Haven Labeeb, being the smallest of the intact brothers at 15h, had smaller offspring but with the same qualities noted. They are most curious and, often, display a good sense of humor with broad expressions and the "look of eagles", indicating confidence, desire and focus. They are gentle, receptive, smart and crave human interaction, praise and affection. There is nobility inherited in these lines. Frankly, to those who currently own and have owned them, these horses are precious and remarkable.

There are also some geldings to note. Even though they cannot produce offspring, they are excellent representatives of their lineage and can help demonstrate Gassir qualities in their own right. Van

Alma Ramses, full brother to Van Alma Risaana, was bought in-utero as a future competitive driving horse. His owner, Melanie Smith, reported "he's the smartest horse I have ever trained". Ibn Latiff DHA was purchased as a dressage prospect and Treff-Haven Lamir is a successful dressage and family horse. Lamir's owner, Sarah Willis, noted on Facebook: "Best horse ever. A little too smart for his own good but I love him." Not only does this line produce good, breedable offspring, but they produce a riding horse. Quite possibly this was part of the reason for dwindling numbers of this sire line in North America; riders acquiring the lines for use and many breeders focusing on other lines for refinement?

In closing, this is an important branch of the Jamil El Kebir sire line, not only in Straight Egyptian breeding, but also has the potential to bring height, size and bone to horses who could benefit from



Above: Van Alma Ramses, 2015 grey gelding (Treff-Haven Sabeel x Tahara Risaana).

Below: Van Alma Mosaad, 2020 bay stallion (Treff-Haven Sabeel x Fia Amal).





Treff-Haven Lamir, 2004 grey gelding (Treff-Haven Emir x Bint Lebleba).

these qualities. These are horsemen's horses that bring the physical qualities that riders and trainers appreciate and add a bit of genetic diversity, which is much needed in the Straight Egyptian gene pool and serves as a potential outcross in combined source breeding. All is not lost despite the inbreeding that has defined Straight Egyptian breeding for the past few decades... there is still a light at the end of the tunnel as long as we continue to recognize and walk this path.



Ibn Latiff DHA, 2018 grey gelding (Treff-Haven Latif x Bint Matala).

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