

# Anette Mattsson

Anyone who has enjoyed *The Arabian Magazine* in recent years or purchased our calendars cannot have failed to noticed the photography of Anette Mattsson. Swedish born and bred, this remarkable young lady regularly covers many of the premier Arabian horse events across Europe and the USA.

With her love for Polish Arabians deep at the core of her love for the breed, I talk to Anette during the holiday season to find out more about this lady, who I regularly travel across the world with, and her life behind the lens.



Interview by Samantha Mattocks

Photography unless stated by Anette Mattsson [www.fotografmattsson.com](http://www.fotografmattsson.com)

The first thing you notice about Anette is her flame-red hair which, as you get to know her more, realise truly represents her passionate nature and the love she feels for the Arabian breed. The second thing you notice is her smile – Anette is a naturally warm and friendly lady and very welcoming to those new to the Arabian show scene. And the third thing you notice is her camera. Either in her hand, around her neck or hanging from her shoulder like most women have handbags, Anette's camera is never far from her. As you talk to her, she always has half an eye on the action in centre ring or watching for horses appearing in the background. A born photographer, it is little wonder that she has made this her life.

Talking about her background, Anette tells me that she grew up in a small village outside of Falun, around 250km north of Stockholm. She still lives in the area and is rightly proud of her Swedish roots. "As a child, I loved writing and painting," Anette tells me. "When, as a seven-year-old child, I was asked the mandatory question 'what do you want to be when you grow up', my answer was always the same: a writer. And it remained the same throughout my childhood."

Horses also featured heavily in Anette's list of loves as a child. "One of my closest neighbours when I grew up was Brita and Rolf Axelsson at Wilkesbacka Gärd," Anette recalls. "They bred Arabian horses and started their pure-bred breeding programme in 1967. The Axelssons are perhaps best known as the breeder of Edjora (Exelsjor x Edessa

by Pietuszok out of Ellora), the dam of US National Champion Mare Kajora. Of course, Kajora is well known in history as the dam of Gazal Al Shaqab (by Anaza El Farid by Ruminaja Ali out of Bint Deena).

"From the age of 12 years old, I spent all of my free time at the Axelssons farm and there I had the great fortune to learn all about breeding, showing and training. All stallions and the mares not in foal were ridden, and my main riding horses were the two breeding stallions Cid Ben Afas (Abu Afas x Cyneraria by Sedziwoj out of Cerozja) and Maz (Aladdin x Maricedia by Cedr out of Maritsa)."

But with Anette, her love for horses goes deeper than the horse standing in front of her. She is a pedigree expert and this knowledge, too, comes from the time she spent at Wilkesbacka Gärd. "Brita saw early on that I had a huge interest in pedigrees and the history of the Arabian horse and she became the best mentor I could have wanted," Anette explains. "I studied all the books and magazines I came across, memorising pedigrees. I learned all I could about the enchanting history of the breed. Brita herself was always a joy to listen to as she had seen most of the great horses on her travels and had lots of fun stories about them and their people to share."

When Anette was 15 years old, in the summer of 1985, she went to work for the Cavallo Arabian Stud. Wanting to learn more about the Arabian breed, she decided that the best way to do so was to spend a summer working at another farm. Cavallo was noteworthy in Anette's



life as they were home to two Polish-bred stallions Figaro (Negativ x Fortunata by Branibor out of Forta) and Dylemat (Gedymim x Doliwa by Comet and out of Delja). Anette had already developed an appreciation of the Polish breed through her research with Brita and spending so much time with Figaro and Dylemat only increased her interest and admiration for this particular bloodline. Anette's time there was also important as the summer of 1985 saw her attending her first national shows, one in Norway and one in Sweden. "That was an amazing experience and I was instantly hooked," she smiles.

Two years later, Anette finished school and she knew that her life path was to take her down one filled with Arabian horses. "Three farms offered me employment," she says. "I knew that whichever farm I chose would decide which path my life would take, so it was not an easy decision. I was very interested in show training and, at one of the three farms, I knew that I would get a great opportunity to learn as they had an American trainer and they were the most successful breeders in the show-ring in Sweden at that time.

"But my huge interest in breeding and pedigrees won and so my choice was Beit El Kheil Arabians at Erik and Åsa Melander. Erik was very well educated in Polish Arabians and had written a lot of great articles. He had an impressive library with all the Polish Stud books from 1928 as well as all the race records from Poland. I worked there for two years, spending all my free time studying pedigrees, racing records and everything else that I came across. As time went on, I was entrusted to do pedigree researches for catalogues and advertising and I also learnt a lot when it came to evaluating young horses as Åsa was a very talented judge."

In the summer of 1988, all of these horses were out in the pastures of Beit El Kheil Arabians. The stallions Parys (Tryptyk x Parma by Aswan out of Pokaznaja), Karnawal (Etap x Kasta by Wielki Szlem out of Kassala) and Exodus (Cadyk x Ex Diara by Exelsjor out of Diara Mokka) were all in show training and there was only the 11-year-old grey stallion Etnograf (Engano x Etna by Faher out of Elzunia) left in the barn. "I was offered the chance to work in the show barn and spent the summer working as the assistant trainer, which gave me a taste of the show training as well," recalls Anette. "For the Swedish National Show, they had the American handler Greg Hazlewood over to show the horses and we had a very successful show with two Swedish

National Champions, the senior stallion Parys and the junior mare Saleta (Etnograf x Saldara by Dardir out of Salamalaika). All the time that Anette was developing her skills of working with, and



Algeria (Celebes x Algonkina) is photographed with a groom and Director Andrzej Krzyształowicz.



Esklawa.



Eutrofia (Palas x Euforia) photographed at the Kurozweki Stud.



Cystyr and TA Cyfirely.

understanding the history of, the Arabian horse, her natural love of painting and writing remained. While she would draw horses in her room at night, she was also developing a natural eye at capturing the horse in her mind. Photography seemed to be the natural next step for her, although it was to be after she left Beit El Kheil Arabians before she purchased her first major camera.

"There is a strong creative streak in my family," smiles Anette. "My grandfather was an artist and so it was natural that, from a very young age, I myself was always painting and drawing.

I also had a long-term interest in photography, but did not have a good camera of my own although I took as many photographs as I could with my little camera. When I moved back home after working for two years at Beit El Kheil Arabians, I fulfilled a long-time dream when I bought myself a camera, an Olympus OM 505 with a 35-50mm lens.

"It instantly became natural for me to concentrate on photographing horses. I loved to take the camera down to Wilkesbacka and photograph the mares with foals, the youngsters when they were playing or the stallions filled with self-confidence and attitude. I photographed at farms I visited and at shows I attended and very soon, the owners wanted me to take more and more photographs and then use those images in advertising. Things progressed and in 1992, I got a freelance job at Sweden's largest equestrian magazine – imagine being able to combine writing and photographing Arabian horses professionally! It was a dream come true. In 1996, I upgraded my camera to a Nikon F90x with a 75-300mm lens and it was a joy to photograph with.

"While I had been photographing digitally in the studio for more than a year, using the Canon equipment belonging to the company I worked for, I felt that with my own horse photography business, I did not want to change until I could get a digital camera just as fast and sharp as my old camera. In March 2005, Nikon presented their new digital camera D2x and I started out the new season with my new camera and my 70-200mm VR lens and celebrated its arrival with a trip to Texas photographing Arabian horses!"

Asked about what it is about photography that Anette loves so much, she explains: "I love to capture the horse's personality, especially when they are free out in pasture. It was an amazing feeling when I got my camera and I could then turn everything that I saw into images that I could capture and look at time and time again. Whenever I see a horse that oozes charisma and attitude, I just love to grab my camera and capture that same feeling in my photographs. To get the horse's feeling through the lens and down to the final image is something that I strive for and each time, the subject is different. Sometimes it is a powerful, masculine stallion, others an older mare with her newborn foal. Each moment is magical and I feel privileged to be able to capture that moment."

Back to the late 1980s, however, and with a camera now firmly in her hand, it was time for Anette to fulfil her other remaining passion – that of the Polish Arabian. "My admiration for Polish breeding could not be any larger," explains Anette. "I remember how, as a young girl, the history of Polish breeding captured me and looking at the horses at Wilkesbacka was like having a piece of that history close to me. The Axelsson family had an old mare bred by the private Polish breeder Zygmunt Braur in 1962. Her name was Wielka Este (El Trypoli x Wielka Zorza by Wielki Szlem out of Zorza Pelkiska) and she had such strength and

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Ala (Alegro x Alita). The photograph was taken at Toskhara Arabians in the UK in 1996.



credit: Carina Soderstrom



credit: Maria Rovulal

barns and out in big pastures, the way they test their breeding stock at the racetrack and the fact that selection is made based on conformation, temperament and durability. And not the least, I like the great love for the horse and honour that you can see in the people handling them. This love and admiration for the horse goes back hundreds of years and I think it is truly amazing.

"Sometimes when I consult a breeder, they ask if I usually prefer the Polish horses. And I reply that a good horse is always a good horse no matter if it is Polish, Egyptian, Crabbet or Spanish. The Poles demonstrate this belief perfectly as they always bring in outcross stallions. Likewise, I would have no problem breeding to a non-Polish stallion in my own breeding programme if I thought that he would be a great combination with my mare. I have several favourite horses that are straight Egyptian or Russian. And I believe that if I am consulting a breeder when it comes to buying a horse or a breeding, it is always the breeder that has to make the decision. My job is to give them the right tools so that they can make a decision that is right for them."

With the subject of Anette's own horses mentioned, now is the time to discuss them. I remember very well her proudly showing a photograph of her 2009 filly Silencia at the Polish National Show, and of breeders the world over being transfixed by the beauty of this filly foal. It comes as not surprise to realise that Anette's own horses, Mattsson Arabians, are of Polish bloodlines. Over a cup of coffee, she tells me the

stamina, seldom found in any other horse. She died at 30 years of age leaving 18 offspring; 13 fillies and five colts. Wielka Este and the stallion Cid Ben Afas, bred by Zoo Rostock in East Germany, were like two war horses and you had no doubt that they could have been among the horses that walked through Dresden with the bombs falling around them at the end of World War II."

Having left Beit El Kheil Arabians, and having saved up, the first trip that Anette made by herself was to Poland in September 1989. "I was 19 years old and I finally was there, visiting the State Studs, the racetrack and watching the Polish Prestige auction. It was a dream come true and I fell irrevocably in love with the horses, the people and the country. To walk at the historical ground at Janów Podlaski and to see legendary horses such as Palas (Aswan x Panel by Nil out of Platina), Eukaliptus (Bandos x Eunice by Comet out of Epigona), Elfur (Czort x Ellora by Witraz out of Elza), Parma (Aswan x Pokaznaja by Knippel out of Provincia), Algeria (Celebes x Algonkina by Pietuszok out of Alga) and Etruria (Palas x Etna by Faher out of Elzunia), to name just a few, was truly amazing.

"What I like about the Polish breeding programme is the whole concept: the way that the Polish State Studs keep their horses in the



story. "It was very clear from an early point that my own first horse would be a mare of Polish bloodlines, but with the extremely high prices during the 1980s, this seemed like an unachievable goal.

"By 1991, I felt that the time had come and I was lucky to be able to buy one of Beit El Kheil Arabians three daughters by the Swedish National Champion Cadyk (El Paso x Cumparsita by Gwarny out of Carmen). Sapala was out of the mare Saldara (Dardir x Salamalaika

by Algier out of Salexja) and represented the great dam-family of Milordka through Saga and her daughter Sakla. It is the same family as the great E-line through Estokada, a full sister to Sakla, at Michalów. Sapala was a dream come true: a beautiful mare, she had a wonderful temperament and an amazing pedigree. I bred her the first time in 1992 to the Polish-bred German National



Fergana (Arbil x Flota), photographed at Janów Podlaski although she was owned by Michalów. She was entered in the auction.



Polish racehorses at Warsaw Racetrack.



Anette riding Salaterka.

credit: Daniel Evans

Anette concludes, telling me that her all-time favourite mare in Poland was the beautiful Wizja (El Paso x Warmia by Comet out of Wadera). "I really admired that dam-line," she says. "Kullatorp Arabian Stud in Sweden bought the great mare Warszula (Palas x Wacpanna by Bandos out of Warmia) in 2000 and she was in foal to the young stallion Angor (Alegro x Angola by Palas out of

Champion Stallion Festiwal (Palas x Fatima by Negatiw out of Fatma) and she produced the colt, Siniak.

"In 1996 I bred Sapala to the stallion Elton, a son of Polish-bred Etnograf (Engano x Etna) and out of Elizbieta (Cadyk x Ellenora by Emir Said out of Ex Diara) and this was a combination I strongly believed in. On 15 March 1997, Sapala gave birth to a bay filly that I named Salaterka. She is one of the most amazing horses I have ever met – intelligent, kind and yet also very powerful with an amazing attitude. She has four offspring to date, four fillies! I have kept her daughter Silencia born in 2009. When Salaterka was born, I knew that I would like to breed her to one of the young stallions in Poland at that time, in particular the 1995 Polish National Champion Stallion Ecaho (Pepton x Etruria by Palas out of Etna) as I felt that she would be a wonderful cross with the Ibrahim-line through Bandos-Pepton-Ecaho and I would double up on the great mare Etna (Faher x Elzunia by Witraz out of Elza). But I had to wait until 2008 before it was meant to be and in 2009 she gave birth to an extremely exotic and beautiful filly; Silencia."

Andria). Warszula had a chestnut filly in 2001 named Wiona and I was extremely lucky to get her as a yearling. I also have Wiona's yearling filly, Wiszula, by Ecaho."

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The mares Orawa and Etruria in the early morning at Janów Podlaski. Orawa is the dam of Olita (by Ecaho).

horse world grew year by year." In 2003, Anette had her second child, Erik, who went on his first photo shoot when he was just three weeks old. Two years later, in 2005 – curiously the same year that *The Arabian Magazine* was started – Anette felt that it was too much to juggle – full-time employment, two children, several horses and her own photographic career. "I took a big step and quit my job so that I could concentrate on my own business," she says. "I strongly believe that you can do anything that you want as long as you are willing to work for it. And I am, and have always been."

In between Emma's arrival in the world and Anette quitting her job, she had worked for many years as a consultant for Arabian horse breeders, as well as making websites and advertisements for breeders. "When I left my job, I kept it so that I still had some work as a freelance photographer with them as winter in Sweden is not a very profitable time for a horse photographer; however, taking photographs of children, families and pets is! And that is what I love so much about my job now, the diversity is so great. One day, I can be in California photographing horses and the next week, I am working from my desk making adverts or articles before putting up my studio equipment and take photographs of school children for their annual. It is all so varied."

Anette continues, saying that the best part about her life as a photographer is the wonderful horses that she gets to photograph as well as travelling to other countries in order to get that coveted image. "One of my first big photo shoots outside of Scandinavia was in UK in 1996 when I was brought over by

Dick and Christine Reed of Toskhara Arabians and Veronica Mann Wernsten of W-Arabians. We went to a regional show and spent several days at each farm, photographing most of the horses. I was thrilled

to photograph the Reeds charismatic Algonkwin (Bask x Alpaga by Celebes out of Algonkina) as well as their 28-year-old chestnut mare Cystyr (Cytarus x Rossadu by Dumah out of Rossadu), the dam of the stallion Cytosk (by MI Tosk by Bask out of Toi).

"My favourite horse to photograph is without doubt Ecaho. As soon as he walks out of the barn, he just blows you away with his beauty and attitude. The first time I photographed him was when he was steel grey at the Polish Nationals in 1995, standing like a statue in the ring and he was just the most beautiful stallion I had ever seen. Needless to say, he was named Polish National Champion with the highest score of the show. Ecaho is now snow white and, if possible, even more beautiful and it is always such a joy when I take photographs of him. He is a once in a lifetime horse and I feel blessed for having the opportunity to be involved with this amazing stallion."

Anette continues, saying that she went to visit Toskhara Arabians in 2005 after they had moved to Texas. "They had arranged with several photo shoots at other farms and I was thrilled to be able to capture

the 24-year-old stallion Poirot (Negatraz x Piersnica by Negatiw out of Piesn), owned by Mark Schmidt. I remembered Poirot as a grey young stallion advertised by his owners Colonial Wood during the mid-1980s. They told me that he was very hard to photograph as his beauty never managed to come through in the photographs. So, we let him loose and I got a wonderful collection of images of him and Mark was so pleased. I find it so very rewarding when the owners feel that the soul of their horse can be seen in my photos. I then feel that I have succeeded with my task.

"Earlier that week, I had a shoot scheduled at a farm I had never been to before. Christine and I went there the day before to look at the surroundings and meet with the owners. In the car, Christine told me that it would be fun for me to take photos of their old stallion because he is very famous. I asked for his pedigree and was totally blown away when she told me that it was the 29-year old Bataan (Banat x Cantata by Laur out of Canaria), bred by Countess Penelope Lewenhaupt in Sweden. He has been a great race sire, and the sire of NF Proof (ex Szalka by Eleuzis out of Sala). I grew up hearing about what a shame it had been that Bataan was sold at such a young age to USA and never

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used in Sweden and now I had the huge honour of doing, what was to be, his last big photo shoot. When I met Countess Lewenhaupt three weeks later, I brought some photographs for her to keep and it was such a wonderful feeling to see her admire the stallion she had not seen for more than 20 years."



Emira by Laheeb.

Anette keeps her horses at Wilkesbacka Gärd, where her adventure with Arabian horses began all those years ago. "I am the one breeding Arabians at the farm now," she tells me with a smile. "This was something that Brita was very happy about. She passed away in 2008 and it was memories of our shared trip to Poland for her 70th birthday in 2000 that she held dear. She always wanted to do that trip again ... So it is good that the farm is continuing its own history now, through my horses and their future generations." Anette brings the different veins of her life together for me – the horses, the photography, Poland – and her family. "I worked in my father's car shop in the 1990s until I got pregnant in 1997. I had my daughter, Emma, in October and stayed at home with her for almost two years. During this time, I had lots of photo shoots at farms during the summer and Emma sat patiently waiting for me in her baby buggy next to pastures and show-rings. "In 1999, I got a full-time work as a photographer doing studio photos and I advanced to be in charge of my region with as many as 17 photographers working on my district who I trained. During this time, I was writing more and more articles and publishing photographs in Arabian horse publications worldwide. Inevitably, my photography work in the Arabian



Anette and Samantha at Silver Maple Farm, part of the 2010 Santa Ynez Breeders' Celebration.



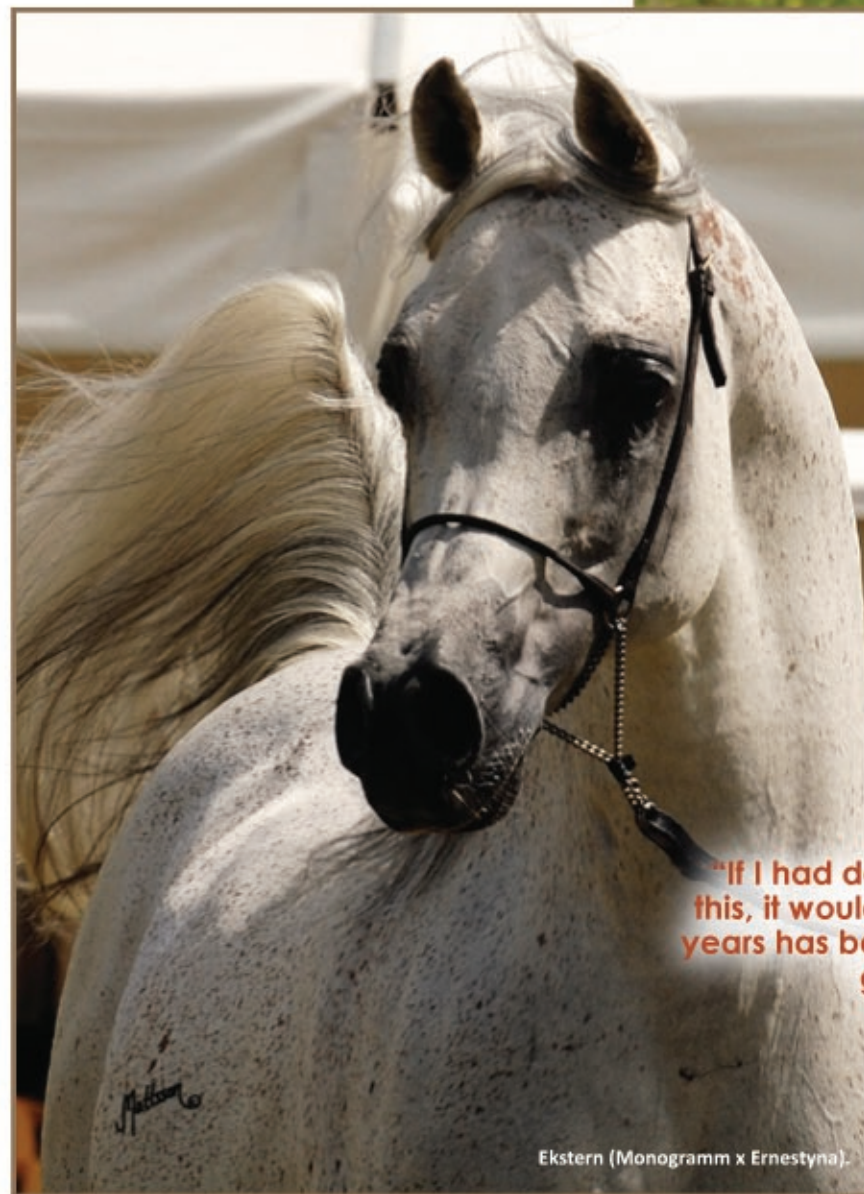
Kwestura as a yearling.



Plisa.



Calisia (Eukaliptus x Catalina by El Paso out of Czczuga).



Ekstern (Monogramm x Ernestyna).

Pausing, Anette and I look at each other. Having spent so much time in each other's company, we know that it is moments like this which reminds us of how much we truly love the Arabian breed, and of how it truly gets into your soul.

Smiling, Anette continues. "I love to photograph Monogramm (Negatraz x Monogramma by Nippel out of Monopolia) sons such as Ekstern (ex Ernestyna by Piechur out of Erwina), Ganges (ex Garonna by Fanatyk out of Gizela), Kordelas (ex Kabala by Palas out of Kometa), Fernando (ex Frejlina



Anette with Gazal Al Shaqab.

x Catalina by El Paso out of Czeczuga) was the front figure with her sheer beauty in a portrait, Zenia (Grandorr x Zenobia by Endel out of Zuela) represented the Arabian as the perfect family horse on the beach together with a family and a dog during a picnic. Then we had the endurance horse Pilgrim (CA Emir x Perlita by Kismet out of Preria) galloping with his rider in the snow and the last photograph was aimed at showing the love and connection between the human and the Arabian. Kullatorp had Premier on lease from Emma Maxwell at this time and we thought that he would be the perfect candidate with his pretty head and his beautiful colour. And he was. The photograph we picked

Ecaho at Haras de Cardenas.



Audacious P5 at Sheila Varian's in April 2010.



Martynika.

by Pepton out of Finezja) and, of course, Premier (ex Premiera by Piechur out of Premia). They have a phenomenal attitude, great movement and excellent Arabian type that they love to show off. And they are fun, tons of fun!"

One of Anette's long-term clients is Kullatorp Arabians in Sweden and having been photographing for the farm regularly since 2002, she helped with a beautiful advertising campaign called 'The Perfect Arabian'. "It was our aim to show the true versatility of the Arabian horse over four pages," Anette recalls. "Calisia (Eukaliptus

for the campaign was taken early in the morning sun outside a white church, where he was standing loose with a girl holding her arms around him and her long, blond hair shining in the sun. It was the perfect moment, captured in the perfect image."

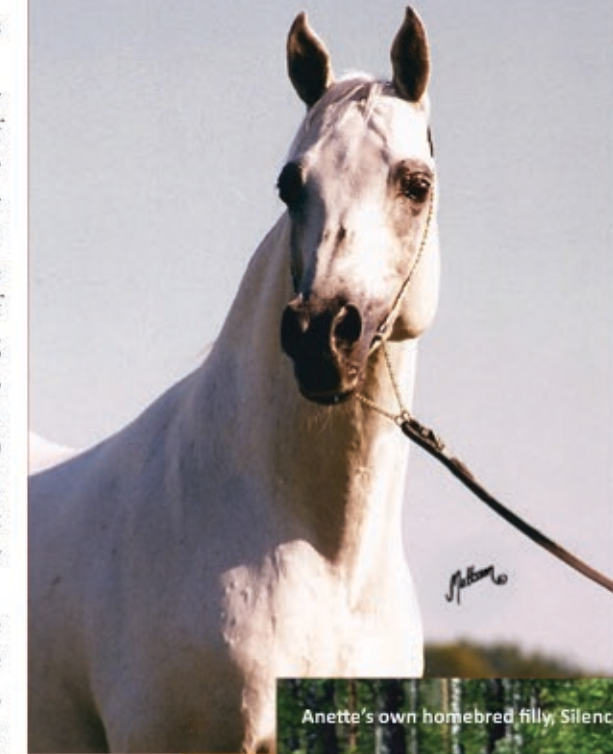
Moving into present time, Anette says that there are times when she just stops and realises that she is extremely fortunate to make a living out of her greatest passions in life "other than my two wonderful children", she adds. "The Arabian horse and my photography – it is wonderful! And it almost seems that everything has happened without me even thinking of it. When people ask me

if I regret something in life I always reply 'nothing at all', as everything you experience takes you forward in the journey that is your life and every step along the way will make you the person that you are. I have had lots of wonderful adventures in life, but also some very hard times and it is all this together that makes me the person I am today." I ask Anette if there was any point where she wondered if she could truly make a career out of photography. "I never thought that I wouldn't as I believe that you have to have faith in yourself," she says. "If I had doubt in my managing to make a career out of this, it would have been as if I doubted myself. The past 10 years has been so busy and full of work that I have just kept going. And I love every minute of it."

Indeed, as well as the photography, the horses, the consultancy and the family, Anette is very involved with the Swedish Arab Horse Society. It comes as no surprise to learn that, as well as helping organise shows and clinics, running events and helping promote the Swedish Arabians, she has been secretary of the society since 2006 and in 2008, she took on the role of editor of the society magazine.

One of the key things in Anette's life in recent years has been the Arabian Breeders' Celebration, held in Santa Ynez, California, since 2009. "The idea came about in Poland in 2008," recalls Anette. "Joaquin Bin, Scott Benjamin and I had an idea about making a farm tour in Santa Ynez following on from the Arabian Breeders' World Cup in Las Vegas. The idea is that the tour would be all about the breeders and would help to connect breeders from all over the world. The idea grew and turned into the Santa Ynez Arabian Breeders' Celebration and we have had breeders coming from all over the

Parys (Tryptyk x Parma by Aswan out of Pokaznaja).



Anette's own homebred filly, Silencia.



Pairot (Negatraz x Piersnica by Negatiw out of Plesn).



world every year to visit the farms included in the group.

"I am right now, together with Scott and your own Samantha, making all the preparations needed for the third Annual Celebration in April 2011. It has been a wonderful event to organise and it is very rewarding when people come back each year and have it on their 'must do' list for the year."

Smiling, we realise that we have come full circle. The time for looking back at the journey is, temporarily, over and it is time to look ahead. So does Anette have any unfulfilled ambitions? "I have so many future projects that I want to realise when I can find the time," she says. "I have a couple of very interesting book projects that I am working with and I hope to have them published soon. "One of my dreams has always been to visit Australia, so that must be on that list. I would love to experience the country and to photograph Arabians in those amazing and dynamic surroundings of the Australian countryside. It is always so inspiring to visit a new country and photograph horses using the light and the surroundings that are specific to that part of the world. I am also very curious about South Africa, a place I know that I will love with its great nature and wonderful possibilities to capture amazing photographs. I went to Colombia in 2009. It is a beautiful country with a lot of horses and wonderful people. I am looking forward to return to South America and to exploring the other countries there as well."

For now, the future plans are immediate: we have Scottsdale fast approaching and Anette hopes that,

once more, it will be her images used in the arabhorse.com e-blasts which announce the champions from the show. Then, it is onto Vegas and Santa Ynez. In August, after the Scandinavian shows and Poland, Anette is making her first trip to the UK International A Show in Towerlands, somewhere she has always wanted to go. On her precious home time between trips, Anette will spend time with her beloved children and horses, as well as looking at the images of Arabians that she has captured from all over the world.

"Ultimately, when I am 85 years old, I would love to have an exhibition with my photographs from what would then be a very long career as an Arabian horse photographer. I would love for this to be presented at the World Championships in Paris, as this is one of my favourite shows. And I would be drinking champagne, meeting old friends, and together we would be lost in memories of years gone by, looking at my photographs." And I know I'll be there, standing right next to her. Reminiscing on a life well spent and filled with a deep-rooted love for the Arabian horse. ❖