

# Conformation & Breed Characteristics



ARABIAN  
HORSE ASSOCIATION

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**Leg Up**  
Arabian Horse Association

## Lesson Plan

### 1. Arabians: An Ancient Breed of Horses

- A. The Arabian horse is known for its ancient bloodlines, which in many cases can be traced directly back to the desert. Unlike most breeds, Arabian horses have existed as a pure breed for thousands of years! By contrast, most breeds seen in North America today were developed in the last 50-150 years.
- B. Arabian horses have been selected for specific traits for many generations, including a distinctive appearance and certain physical attributes. Together, these breed characteristics are very consistent in Arabian horses and are frequently passed on to offspring.

### 2. Type

- A. Because they were bred very carefully, Arabians often have a great deal of “type”. Type is defined as the characteristics which make a breed recognizable and distinctive from others.
- B. Classic Arabian Type
  - i. Head—when compared to other breeds, the Arabian’s head appears small and refined. Characteristics include: large and wide-set eyes, bulging forehead, dished face, flaring nostrils, small and refined muzzle, rounded jaw wide between the branches, small and close-set ears.
  - ii. Neck—a clean, or tight, throat-latch is a long and arched neck tying high to the chest and withers.
  - iii. Shoulder—a long and sloping shoulder will be well-covered in muscle.
  - iv. Topline—the Arabian will appear relatively flat through the croup. The tail is set high and often carried high.
  - v. Barrel—ribs are well sprung
  - vi. Legs—well muscled forearm and gaskin, straight and sound bone, large and defined joints, long and sloping pasterns, round and proportionate feet.
  - vii. Size—14.1 h to 15.1 h is considered the Arabian breed standard.

### 3. Balance

Historically it was vital for the Arabian horse to endure long periods of use, and to meet this need it was carefully selected to be very balanced. Balance refers to the blending of parts to form the whole horse. It is best viewed from the profile.

- A. A balanced Arabian horse will appear strong and functional as well as attractive. This is seen in a: long neck, angled shoulder, short back, long underline, long and square hip.
- B. A good basic measure of balance is the ability to visually divide a horse's body into thirds (shoulder, barrel, and hip). Balance is determined in large part by the slope of the shoulder, which should approach 45 degrees.

### 4. Soundness

Sound feet and legs are required for any horse to function properly, and Arabians have been selected for soundness for thousands of years.

- A. Having good basic structure allows a better chance of a horse remaining durable through use. Soundness is a form-to-function relationship, meaning if it is formed right it will function right.
- B. Legs should be straight when viewed from front and back, and hocks well-set. Joints are large, strong, and well defined. Pasterns must be long and sloping, and hooves round, open-heeled, and proportionately sized.

### 5. Movement

The horse's way of going should reflect function, soundness, and comfort for the rider.

- A. Straight motion—strides should be straight and true without interference.
- B. Length of stride—legs move freely in a flowing motion from the shoulder and hip, at all gaits, to allow for an extended reach and a ground-covering stride.
- C. Smoothness—cadence and a soft footfall make a more comfortable mount.

### 6. Muscling

Arabian horses are not heavily muscled but should appear strong, healthy, and functional. The neck should be well developed, and shoulder should be well covered with muscle, as should the ribs and hip. Forearms and gaskins will evidence adequate muscling.

### 7. Coloring

Arabian horses evolved with a fine coat of varying colors.

- A. Coat colors include varying shades of bay, chestnut, grey, and black.
- B. Dark skin should be seen on all horses except under white markings. Historically, this trait helped them remain comfortable in the harsh desert climate.
- C. Arabian horses often have a fine hair coat and a lack of hair around the muzzle and eyes.



**The Arabian horse gets its Arabic name, Kohl-ani,** from its beautiful skin and eyes. The Arabian's skin is the same bluish-black color as kohl, a black substance used by women of the Arabian Peninsula as both eyeliner and a control against the sun's glare. Perhaps due to its desert evolution, the skin around the Arabian horse's eyes is naturally black, giving the impression of artificially lined eyes.

**In comparing breeds,** Arabians have a number of traits considered to be superior.

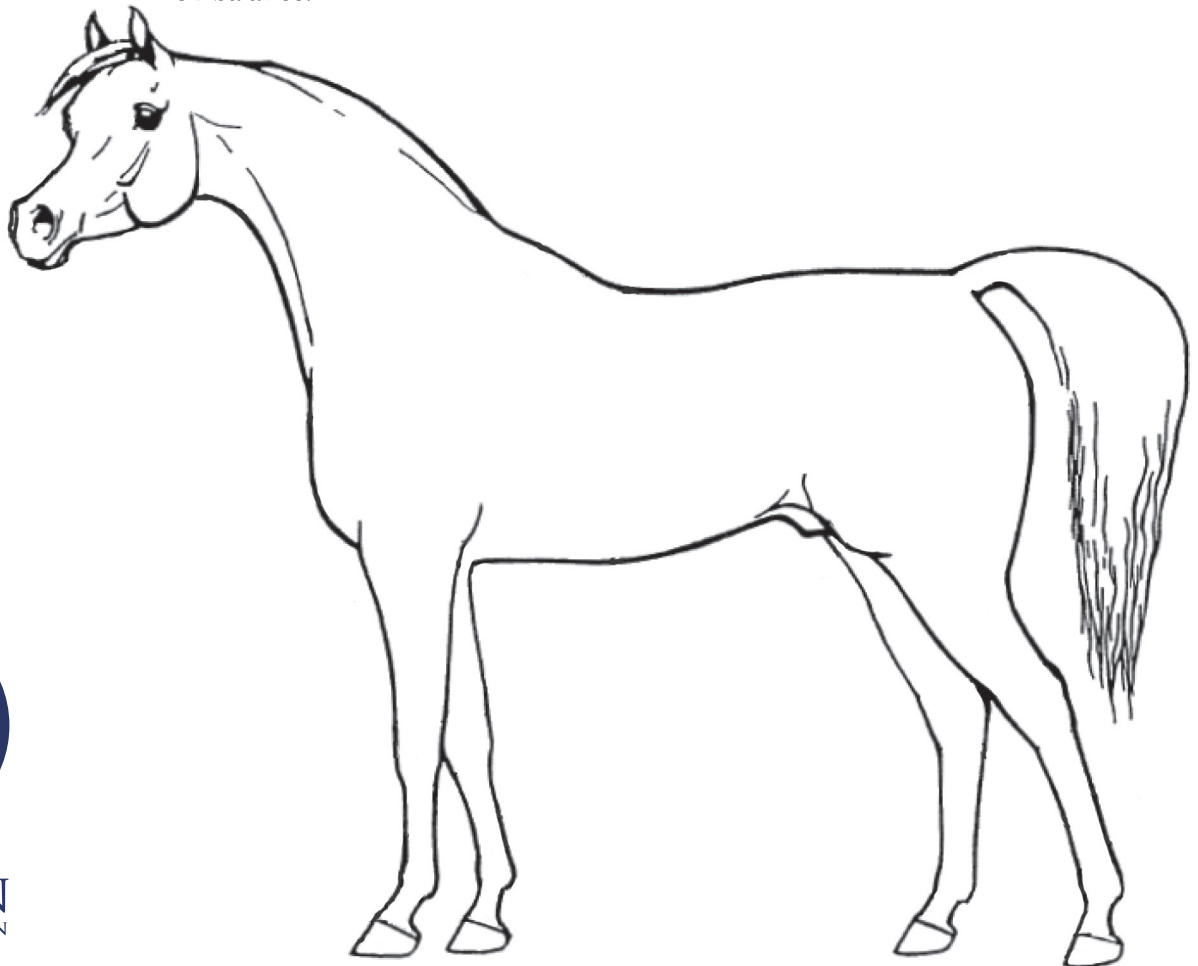
- The Arabian is reputed to consistently outlive other breeds. Although horses' ages vary widely, most breeds live to be 20-25 years old. Many Arabians, by contrast, are in their prime at 20 and many live well past 30.
- Some consider the Arabian the most intelligent of all equines. Its shield-like bulge between the eyes, called the jibbah, was traditionally thought to demark greater intelligence.
- The Arabian possesses a long memory, quick comprehension, alert curiosity, resourcefulness and sociability.
- Centuries of close contact with humans have given Arabians a friendly, loyal disposition, above all marked by a genuine and consistent desire to please their owners!



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### Learn to find a horse's balance!

- On the diagram below, a photo, model, or live horse find the following: poll, withers, point of shoulder, loin coupling. Mark each point.
- Draw or tape a line from the withers to the point of the shoulder. What angle does the shoulder make in relation to the ground?
- Now draw lines showing the:
  - Distance from the poll to the withers
  - Length from the throat-latch to the neck-shoulder junction
  - Topline from the withers to the loin coupling
  - Underline from just behind the elbow to the stifle
  - Square of the hip
- Next, find the relationship between these lines. When you compare the length of one line to another, what ratios are 1:1 and what are 1:2?
- Change the shoulder angle. How did that change the ratios?
- Answer this question: why is the shoulder called the fulcrum point of balance?



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Match the vocabulary word on the left with the correct definition on the right

Mitbah	Ideal shoulder angle
Jibbah	Quality of movement
Type	A balanced horse has a body which can be divided into this
Balance	Length from back of elbow to front of stifle
45 degrees	Shield-like bulge between eyes, common to Arabians
Prepotent	Arched shape of throat-latch and neck common to Arabians
Way of Going	Length from withers to loin
Form-to-Function	Proportional blending of parts
Thirds	Likely to pass traits to offspring
Topline	Built to last
Underline	Characteristics which make Arabians recognizable from other breeds



**Arabian Characteristics—  
circle those which describe the Arabian horse**

- Small, refined head
- Straight-profiled head
- Slightly long, wide-set ears
- High set tail
- Heavy muscling
- Balanced
- Sound feed and legs
- Light skin under coat
- Coarse hair coat
- Tail carried high
- Slanted croup
- Pure breed begun in the 1800s
- Long-lived
- Friendly personality
- Generally over 16 hands
- Bred for thousands of years
- Durable through use
- 14.1 h to 15.1 h



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Find your way through the maze to reach the AHA logo in the middle



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This grid has hiding all of the vocabulary words listed in the box below. Find them and circle each word.

HVIMUSCLINGZLUNKEKMZ  
 TJRFLRSARANYXLZNL LXG  
 JJKJUOJEQVKEQKKOB PNA  
 MCUCQNNENILPOTDIAHUT  
 FBCYCFCDPDQOZAATR UWT  
 BWIOGIDTKTNRPCRCUOKR  
 GZTNLGTGIDTUSLKN DITA  
 REDLUOHSFOEPOL SUTENC  
 STRONGRFLNGESKFAOET  
 CMVWB JZIZRGARUI OIVMI  
 JPPZHSTHNEEBLWNTLCEV  
 DJRTXEBFWGLTAEAMTTVE  
 SSENHTOOMSEYCMDRJ MOW  
 DISHEDFACEOCR AEOXXMM  
 FAEFSRNBGF TONS RFMHTU  
 TOZH YCATGT FMEAYANYTU  
 JQJFIMHORNSDUELP HFVV  
 NAXELQICOKTMNOEAQCCH  
 DTNH HNCWQMOWYQDBJEG  
 STMGGSGKLSUPRT RWFHXE

Ancient

Dished Face

Soundness

Attractive

Durable

Strong

Balance

Form to function

Tail

Characteristic

Functional

Topline

Coloring

Movement

Type

Conformation

Muscling

Way of Going

Dark Skin

Slope of Shoulder

Desert

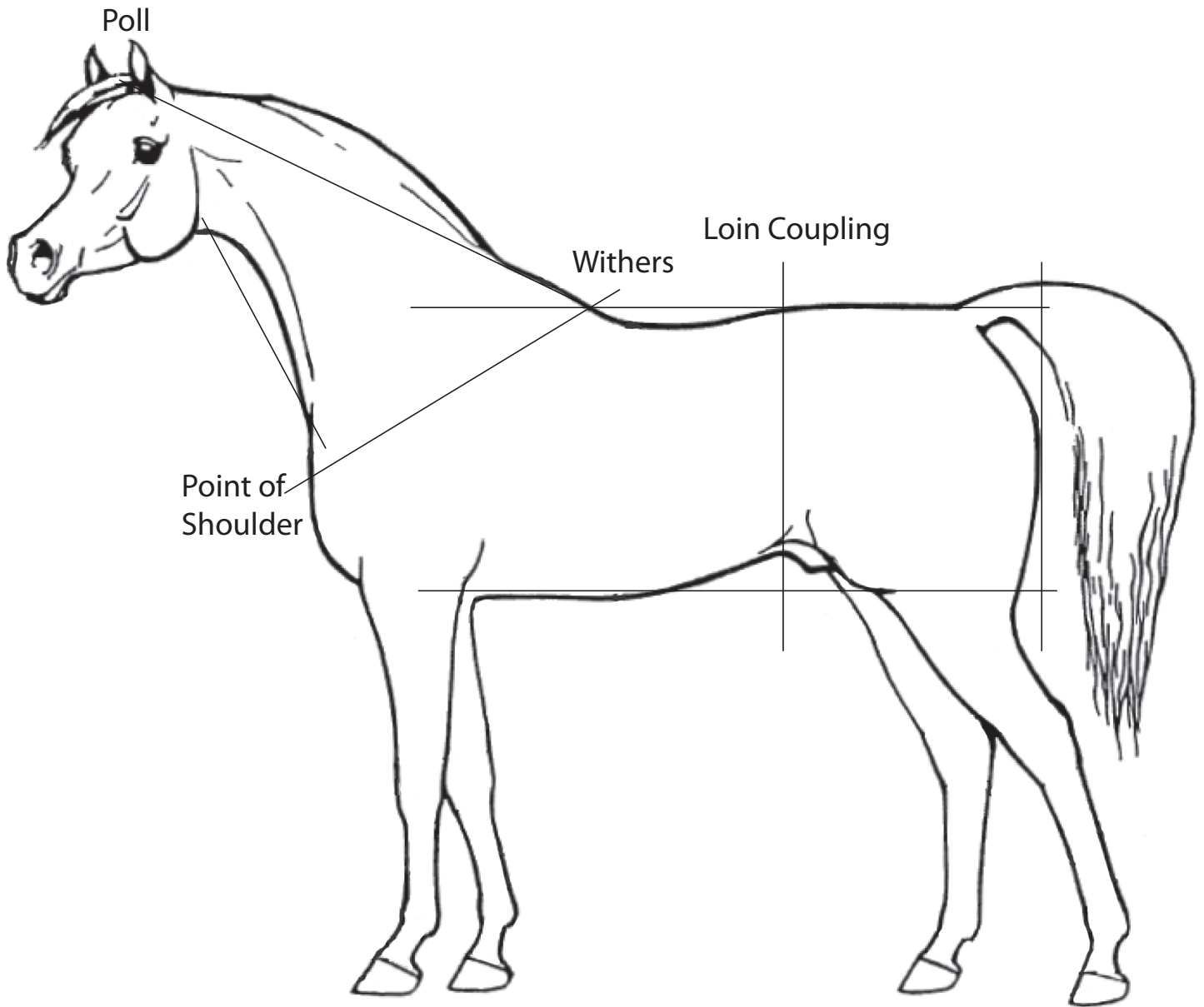
Smoothness



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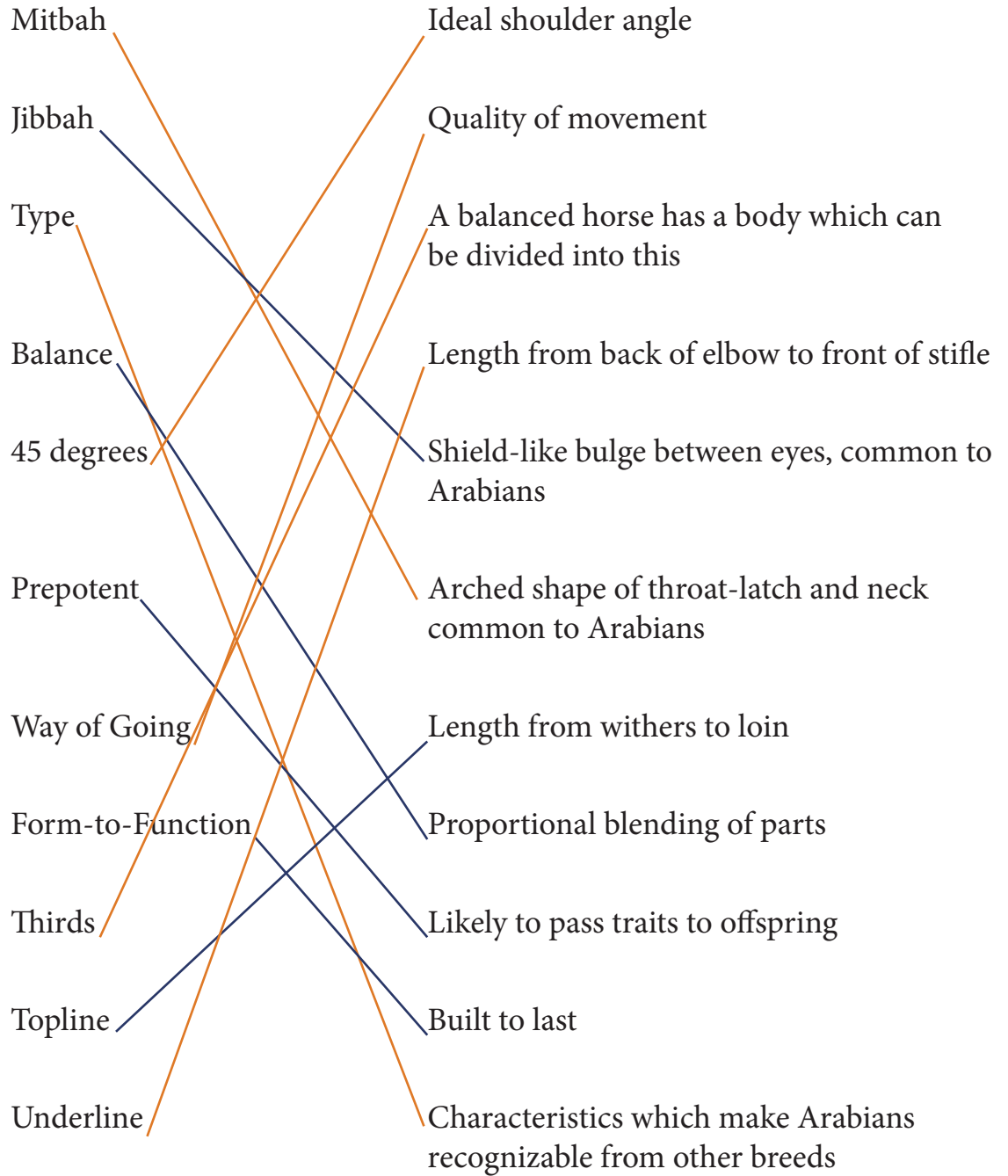


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High set tail

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Balanced

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Coarse hair coat

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 DJRTXEBFWGLTAEAMTTVE  
 SSENHTOOMSEYCMDRJ MOW  
 DISHEDFACEOCR AEOXXMM  
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