

The Hearst Hunters © Kat D. Walden



Austine Hearst on Polaris Pico leading the Golden's Bridge Hounds. This photo appeared in several publications and was taken no later than 1983. Photographer not identified.

With the death of ASHAI Charter member Austine Hearst (Mrs. W.R. Hearst Jr.) in the summer of 1992, an era in Arabian sport horse history came to a close. She had been a staunch supporter of the ASHAI from the beginning of the association, always ready with frequent encouraging phone calls to President Pamela Turner or unexpected checks to bolster the foundations of the young organization. She kept her cancer a secret from nearly everyone until the end, believing that talking about it gave it power, so her death was an unexpected shock.

Austine and her husband, William Randolph Hearst Jr., were the owners of a stud of purebred Arabian horses founded by William Randolph Hearst Sr. in the 1930's. The senior Mr. Hearst sought out the best athletic stock he could buy in American, and also sent an expedition to buy and import a number of horses for the stud directly from the Middle East.

Horses bred at the Hearst San Simeon Stables at Pico Creek, California, have won consistently in a wide variety of performance disciplines. Austine Hearst, however, was the driving force behind a dozen-years' succession of Arabian sport horses, specifically hunters and jumpers.

The first of these was **Amazon of Pico**, a 1971, 15.3 hh grey mare out of a winning working cow horse, Zamiga by *Zamal—he was one of the original Hearst imports--and sired by Amara Baha. Amazon's talents lay over fences. Trained and ridden by Nicki McGinnis, who

guided all the Hearst hunters through their show careers, Amazon was Champion Jumper seven times in class "A" shows. She capped her career with a U.S. National Top Ten Jumper title in 1979 before retiring to raise foals. Her son **Blitzen of Pico** (by Pico Haat Shaat), a horse with endurance and jumping credentials, currently stands in Texas at Di Hopkins-Ryan's White Horse Acres, a sport horse facility near Ravenna, Texas.

Suzi Morris of Arieana Arabians in Southern California, who utilizes Hearst lines in her breeding program, said, "To this day, people here in the Southland still remember this big, bold, jumping grey mare sailing over those fences, for she was absolutely breath-taking in her color, form, and style."

The second of the Hearst hunters was **Polaris Pico** (a.k.a. Polaris of Pico). He was a 1975, 15.1 hh bay gelding by Bay Maruf out of Polar Pico by Rahmoun, and he was perhaps the epitome of Mrs. Hearst's goals during her tenure as a breeder. His wins included Region II Champion Hunter, first in Hunter over Fences at Scottsdale in 1981 and 1981 Canadian National Reserve Champion Hunter over Fences, which comprised one impressive season at All-Arabian shows. It was after he retired from the show ring that Polaris truly found his calling, however. Mrs. Hearst, who for many years was a Joint Master of the Golden's Bridge Hounds in New York state (the Hearsts' second home), took Polaris East to be her personal field hunter.

Although other members of the hunt club were initially skeptical about Polaris, the only Arabian in the Hunt, he proved to be an ideal Master's mount. He never bucked, even on the briskest mornings, and always displayed calm good sense in every situation, including having dozens of foxhounds swirling around and under his feet without kicking or shying. Polaris was also a strong, careful jumper who kept Mrs. Hearst safe, and he was fast enough to stay in the thick of the action. She was very proud of the fact that he was the fourth generation of his family that she had ridden.

Back in California, **Hosanna Pico**, a 1981, 15.2+hh bay mare (Haat Shaat x Bons Anna by Asil Altair), took over for San Simeon Stables in the show ring. At Scottsdale in 1985, she was first in Open Jumpers and second in Working Hunter. The next year she was the Region I Champion Hunter over Fences. She finished her show career with multiple U.S. and Canadian National Top Tens in Hunter over Fences and or Hunter Pleasure (back when H.P. horses were often actual hunters who also jumped instead of horses who merely showed in pleasure classes on the flat). She earned her IAHA (now AHA) Legion of Honor. Having proven herself a capable athlete, Hosanna also earned herself a place in the San Simeon broodmare band and is still producing for them [in 1992 when this was originally written].

The 1979, 15.3 hh chestnut mare **Juno Pico** was next to carry on the winning tradition. She earned many regional honors in Regular Working Hunter and Hunter over Fences through 1988. Since then, she too has joined the broodmare band and has produced **Glitters Pico** by Royal Gold, who won in Working Hunter and Training Level dressage, also placing Top Five in Region I Hunter Pleasure in 1991. Glitters schooled cross country courses, although the author has not been able to confirm that she ever competed in eventing. To date, Glitters Pico has not produced any offspring. And so ends the era of the Hearst Hunters.

The Hearst sons, who inherited the horses after their father died just a couple of years following Austine, continued to breed in a limited way for some years. Neither of them—apparently—was interested in the hunter tradition, although there is a published photo of one of the sons as a teenager jumping Pico Lina. Some of the younger mares are shown to be still alive in 2006 and still in the Hearst ownership, but they are not producing.

I believe that several of the Hearst horses also won at open, all-breed shows, but I have not been able to obtain details of those wins. And although the Hearst hunters' accomplishments seem impressive in Arabian circles, the only horse that all-breed publications have found noteworthy is Polaris, because hunter-jumper classes at All-Arabian shows are considered to be low-quality by the rest of the sport horse world.

The point, once again, is that no matter how much a purebred or partbred Arabian horse achieves in All-Arabian shows, other horsemen will never be impressed unless those achievements are matched in open, all-breed competition. We have to show them that Arabians are as competent today as any other horse or pony breed if we want Arabians to be taken seriously as working horses.



Pico Lena AHR #15729, 1959 mare (*Zamal x Mounigha by *Mounwer). She produced 10 foals. Rider is one of Austine and W.R. Hearst Jr.'s sons, possibly Austin.

Amazon of Pico AHR #69940, 1971 mare (Amara Baha x Zamiga by *Zamal). She produced nine foals, including Blitzen of Pico. Rider is well-known hunter-jumper trainer Nicki McGinnis.



Polaris Pico+ AHR #117462, 1975 gelding (Baymaruf x Polar Pico by Rahmoun). Rahmoun was out of Mounigha. Rider is Nicki McGinnis.

[Author's note: Updated slightly from the version that appeared originally as an ASHA History feature in the ASHA Winter 1992 newsletter and photos added.]