

## Whitehaven Plantation

Snuggled in the middle of South Carolina, this century-old plantation is home to some of the world's rarest horses.

### By Summer Best

It was the mid 1980s, and David and Martha Lucas decided it was time. Time to resurrect the 100-year-old family farm up in Bishopville, South Carolina. Time to get the place ship-shape and spiffed up so the growing Lucas family of five could enjoy the countryside on weekends and holidays.

"We have always lived and worked in Charleston, and as we refurbished the farm in Bishopville, we weren't quite sure what to put there," Martha explains. "We thought we wanted horses, and we knew we could have a lot of something average, or a few of something very special." WH Bodacious, AKA "Bo," was named performance Pyramid Champion at the 2004 Egyptian Event shown by trainer Trisa Dingle.

The Lucas family chose something special: Purebred straight Egyptian Arabians. A breed of animal that comprises less than 3 percent of all Arabian horses in the world.

### Hobby Becomes Business

Twenty years later, David and Martha's little farm renovation project has turned into a major equine center in central South Carolina. Whitehaven Plantation (named after David's ancestral roots in Whitehaven, Cumberland, in the United Kingdom) boasts two barns, more than 200 acres of land, a covered arena, jump course and breeding facilities. At any time, the farm averages 50 horses on the property, 22 of them being straight Egyptian Arabians owned by Whitehaven. Two Whitehaven Egyptian Arabian stallions stand at stud, and several customer-owned horses also live at the farm for training. Others are boarded for clients.

### Reaching Out

"When we got started in this industry, many people helped us," Martha says. "We knew very little about the industry or the Egyptian Arabian, but wonderful people mentored us, and everyone was so helpful. Now, we try to help others. We believe it's our role to help educate people and learn something. It doesn't matter if they are at our farm to purchase a horse or to just take a look around – we want others to become involved in something we enjoy so much."

Seven times a year, Whitehaven hosts open horse shows at the farm. "At our open shows, we welcome all people, all breeds, all disciplines," Martha explains. "You can come to the show, tie your horse to the trailer, show at the show and just have fun. We're very involved with the

Darlington County 4-H Club, whose members compete and volunteer at the shows, as well as help out at the farm.”

Whitehaven also hosts the annual Carolina Challenge, a 30/50/100-mile endurance ride, which is put on by their neighbor and longtime friend, J.D. Fountain. The event is one of the largest endurance ride in the Southeast and is held Thanksgiving weekend, rain or shine.

#### Whitehaven Horses

Whitehaven Egyptian Arabians excel at nearly everything, from halter to western pleasure, flat racing to sport horse events. They win dressage tests, show hack classes and at endurance rides. They succeed locally, regionally, nationally and internationally (see sidebar: Big Wins.)

But they all begin their riding careers with a taste of dressage. Whitehaven Plantation's Egyptian Arabian

“Dressage is fundamental for them,” Martha says. “It’s real riding. It’s giving the horses the basics for any career they end up in. It’s critically important in our program, and we are so concerned about the horse going on to become a useful animal that we try to place them in homes we believe are the best for them. Dressage work provides the basis for that.”

#### As Pretty Does

Whitehaven Plantation is critically interested in the usefulness of its horses. Egyptian Arabians are famous for their beauty and grace, but Martha Lucas isn’t content until her horses have a job that they love and can excel at.

“We aren’t considered big breeders, necessarily, but we try to breed for variety and usefulness,” she says. “Pretty is as pretty does, you know! Arabians are really known for their stamina. It is important for us to know that there is an end use for every horse – beyond a halter class. I do honestly believe that every horse needs to find a job so that it can live up to its potential. They all need to do something. A happy horse doing its job is much better than a bored horse getting into trouble!”

Although several Egyptian Arabians are for sale at Whitehaven Plantation, the farm is careful about where their horses are placed.

“We don’t want our horses going somewhere that is a bad match,” says barn manager and trainer Trisha Dingle. “There have been times when we have let a horse go out on trial, just because we want to make sure it is the best match for the buyer and for the horse.”

## Defining Egyptian Arabians

An Egyptian Arabian, to be officially recognized as such, is registered with the Arabian Horse Registry of America and must be able to trace every line of its pedigree to horses born in the Arabia Desert, in addition to a few more meticulous bloodline requirements\*. The association managing breeding records is The Pyramid Society, which currently oversees between 500 and 600 individuals members/breeders.

Because of the stringent monitoring of pedigrees and papers, the Egyptian Arabian breed maintains exclusivity like no other equine organization.

“It’s a tight group,” Trisha says. “People are beginning to realize that these horses are incredibly rare, and there is a big emphasis on preserving the bloodlines. At the same time, even though people who breed Egyptian Arabians can be very wealthy, they are the friendliest of any people.”

The Pyramid Society’s Egyptian Event, held annually in June at the Kentucky Horse Park, is the pinnacle experience for Egyptian Arabians. More than just a horse show, the six-day affair provides seminars, entertainment, updates on breeding, artists speaking about the Arabian throughout history, vendors, more experts, dinners, dancing and more.

## All Myth?

People say Arabian horses are nuts.

Whiteheaven hosts seven open horse shows each year. They also continue outreach to 4-H horse clubs and other equine organizations.

People are wrong. “They are the loveliest, the sweetest and smartest, and the kindest of all horses!” Martha says. “They are quick to learn, and they never forget anything. They are so versatile, and they are great with kids. They are the very best companions.”

Martha will admit, however, that the Arabian’s intelligence sometimes creates an interesting learning environment.

“You don’t really tell a straight Egyptian Arabian what to do,” she laughs. “They are too smart for that. You don’t want to ‘mess’ with them. Actor William Devane has said that he cannot use a full-blooded Arabian in polo matches because the Arabian tends to anticipate the play!”

On the other hand, Arabians in general, and Egyptian Arabians particularly, seem to adapt more of a connection with their owners than other breeds, thanks again to that intelligence factor.

“There is a mare in our barn that just loves her little girl,” Martha says of the mare’s young owner. “The mare is fine with other people, but when

she's around her little owner, you can see for sure how much she adores her."

Myth No. 2, according to Martha, is that people generally assume Egyptian Arabians are highly expensive. She disagrees with the assumption.

"Many years ago, yes, these horses were just unbelievably priced," she says. "In the 1980s, Egyptian Arabians were selling for hundreds of thousands in utero."

However, a tax reform act in the mid-80s, along with other factors, adversely affected the entire equine industry. Now, Egyptian Arabians are well within the price range of the average horseman or woman. It's difficult to put a comprehensive dollar amount on the Egyptian Arabian's current worth. Because of amendments in several tax laws, fewer people purchase Egyptian Arabians as investments. Today, more people own them because they love a good horse. Whitehaven Plantation Team

#### Life at Whitehaven

David Lucas planned for his family to enjoy Whitehaven as a bit of a refuge, and he succeeded at that.

"He wanted a place for everyone to congregate," Martha says. "It's definitely the family gathering place. Our daughter got married here, and we have class reunions and social events and all sorts of fun things all the time. It's easy to handle hundreds of people at the farm!"

David and Martha's children all worked with the Whitehaven Arabians while growing up. Today, oldest daughter Carey is married to Eric Nikonchuk and is a new mom to baby Lily Lane. Son Jonathan is a law student, and Lydia is a college junior at the College of Charleston. The Lucas family spends less time together at the farm than before, but Martha and David still work in weekly visits to Whitehaven.

"The children are involved, just not as much, because they have their own lives," Martha says. "One day, I'm sure they will carry on with the farm."

#### David & Martha Lucas

##### At Glance

As president of The Pyramid Society, and as a board member for 12 years now, Martha Lucas is always engaged in something.

If she's not flying around the country, visiting with affiliates, she is putting together articles to promote the breed, or meeting with her board of directors. During The Egyptian Event, Martha is especially busy overseeing the entire affair.

“The Pyramid Society is primarily a breeder’s association,” she explains. “We’re growing, not by leaps and bounds, but growing steadily.”

Martha is also a past board member of the Arabian Horse Registry.

Her husband, David Lucas, a college football star at the University of South Carolina, seems to have excelled at nearly every personal and professional endeavor since, and is just as busy as his gregarious wife. He has developed several successful waterfront properties, shown Egyptian Arabians, played in his own popular bluegrass band and cut records, ridden English, performed in Civil War re-enactments, written and sold a successful screenplay, Virginia’s Run, to Hollywood, and he has spoken in nearly all 50 states about a landmark court case he won that ultimately influenced the 2000 Presidential election. And oh, now he plays a mean game of golf in his spare time.

“David is a real character,” Martha says fondly of her husband. “When he does something, it just has to be authentic. If it’s a Civil War thing he’s doing, then he’s got the McClelland saddle, the canteen, the powder horn and all the real weaponry. If it’s western, then he’s got the pocket watch, the scarf and the vest and the real hat and the tall boots. No fake stuff with David.”

No fake stuff at Whitehaven Plantation, either. To learn more, see photos of the farm and horses, or to contact the farm, visit [www.whitehaven.net](http://www.whitehaven.net).

#### Whitehaven Plantation Equine Nutrition

Like all successful farms, Whitehaven Plantation takes extraordinary care of its horses. Here’s a glance at the routine and feeding:

- 1) Seminole Perfect 10, a 10-percent fat, 10-percent protein sweet feed  
“ I love the high fat,” says barn manager and trainer Trisha Dingle. “It’s just wonderful. We were adding a lot of fat supplements to our feed, but we’re not adding anything now that we’re feeding Perfect 10.”
- 2) Bermuda/Coastal hay, mixed with timothy/alfalfa hay.  
“ We purchase our Bermuda/Coastal here locally, and we have the timothy/alfalfa brought in,” Trisha says. “That way, if we ever have a shortage from either source, we won’t have to switch the horses over completely to another entirely new product.”
- 3) A few show horses receive added vitamin E in their feed, and some older horses receive Corta-Flx for added joint therapy. One mare receives Moody Mare, by Feedmark\*. A few boarded horses receive hoof supplements when needed.
- 4) Most horses receive about eight to 12 hours of turnout each day in large, grassy paddocks.

Whitehaven Plantation purchases equine feed products from Cassatt's Country Store in Bishopville, South Carolina.