

# TRAINING, BOARDING & BUYING

***Match-making is a key to success at the Ardalan family's breeding, training, importing and sales business.***

*by Kim F. Miller*

The Ardalan family's Caspian Stables is a major source of jumpers for every level of the sport. Patriarch Arsia and daughter Tara are busy and familiar riders on the West Coast circuit and go-tos for professionals and amateurs looking for quality horses, from prospects to Grand Prix mounts. Through breeding, training and importing, the program based in San Diego County's Valley Center prides itself on having a horse for virtually any rider at any given time.



However, its real strength is expert matches between horse and rider. “It’s a true art form and something that we think is very important,” says Tara. “It’s really important that horse and rider complement each other.” Caspian’s match-making abilities explain the family program’s longevity, Tara asserts. Successful partnerships generate return customers and that’s been the core customer base for Caspian throughout its nearly 40-year existence.

It’s all about having a good eye, Tara continues. “I’ve been lucky to grow up with my dad and to be surrounded by incredible horseman all my life. It’s a gift that’s helped me become very good at getting an idea for each rider and horse’s strengths and weaknesses and making sure that they complement each other.”

Because they are active competitors themselves, the Ardalans are often familiar with the riding styles, abilities and preferences of prospective customers. If they’re not, Tara usually requests a video. “It’s never about just finding a ‘1.4M horse.’ It’s about finding a 1.4M horse that’s right for that rider in terms of size, type, temperament and the many other things that go into making a good horse rider match.”

The Ardalans then apply what they know about their customers to a large pool of available horses. They can start with homebreds produced by their three sires and trained and campaigned to various levels by Arsia and Tara. They can continue the search with the steady stream of imports in their stable. Or Tara can take clients on one of her frequent horse shopping trips to Europe.

### Holsteiner History



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Written by by Kim F. Miller  
Friday, 31 March 2017 03:21

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Arsia's story intersects with some of the West Coast's best-known performance and breeding stallions. These include South Pacific and Cheer, key sires for Joan Irvine Smith's The Oaks breeding program. He was hooked on Holsteiners in the early 1980s, while representing investor Doris Van Heeckeren. That was well before the breed's blend of athleticism, heart and smarts was prized at the top end of the sport as it is today. "He basically purchased all of Mrs. Smith's horses and helped her, along with other professionals, start their breeding program," Tara explains.

Today, Caspian's sire roster includes two Holsteiners: the BWS approved Chin Chin, by Colman out of a Sympatico mare, is currently campaigning Grand Prix with Arsia. And the homebred, Specialist, is by South Pacific, out of Al Italia.

Their third sire is the KWPN, approved Brandenburg, Regent, by Flemmingh and out of an Abgar mare.

Caspian offers limited breedings to their three stallions and typically produces at least six babies a year to bring along themselves. Tara is particularly excited about one of those this spring: a foal due out of a Mr. Blue mare, Miss Blue, by Chin Chin.



Over the years, several of their horses have gone on to the Grand Prix ranks and they've also sold one stallion to Europe. That's the approved Holsteiner Canterbury, whose Caletto 1 and Lord lines inspired his sale to a German breeder who is now standing the sire in Belgium. The Ardalans have one of his babies, Canderry, now competing in the 6-Year-Old Jumper divisions.

Wherever their horses end up, they all start life as a result of the Ardalans' emphasis on good minds. "We always breed for temperament that is suitable for amateurs, but often they are athletic enough to be suitable prospects for the big Grand Prix."

Tara enjoys taking clients to Europe, where a network of contacts cultivated by Arsia over many years makes for productive visits that often take buyers off the beaten path. “We don’t just go to one barn,” Tara explains of a typical European itinerary. “Whenever possible, we prefer to find that diamond in the rough. When you know as many breeders/farmers who may not be the big names, but they may have that quality horse with raw potential, you are able to get a better price.” For clients who want a horse with international experience, the Ardalans have contacts for that, too.

Caspian Stables is best known for the jumpers they’ve bred, produced and/or imported, but they also serve the hunter and equitation markets. “A good horse is a good horse,” Tara states. “When I come across a phenomenal hunter prospect I am happy to market that. And a lot of our jumpers are suitable to cross over into the equitation ring.”

Along with sales, breeding and imports, the Ardalans work with a boutique-size training clientele. Their students include Tara’s fiancé, Dustin Williams, who began taking lessons when they met and quickly progressed to competing in the 1.3M and 1.4M jumper divisions. “I’m very proud of him!”



Martin Kistler rode in Europe as a junior, then returned to the sport with the Ardalans four years ago and has now joined the Grand Prix ranks. Another client is attending school in Florida, but keeps her horses at Caspian Stables and returns to compete them when her schedule allows. The Kelly family of Los Angeles also keeps their horses with the Ardalans and meets them at shows. Because of their full competition calendar, Caspian is the best fit for clients who want to compete on the same A circuit as their coaches.

### **A Family Endeavor**

Arsia began riding in his native Iran at the age of 13. Into young adulthood, he went as far as he

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could in the sport there, receiving valuable knowledge from coach and mentor Colonel Shaki and other top horseman in the country. He then immigrated to the United States in 1974 to pursue higher levels of the sport available.

He and his wife Dee settled in Ohio, where Arsia earned a bachelors of science degree in equestrian studies from Lake Erie College. He gained another valuable coach and mentor in the legendary Hungarian trainer, Laddie Andahazy. Lake Erie's team coach. Arsia continued into an equestrian career there, then moved to California in 1985, with Tara, then 9, and her younger sister Tasha.

Tara inherited her father's passion and talent for horses and started with a superstar junior career. She represented Zone 10 in North American Young Rider Championships, the U.S. Olympic Festival and the Prix des States Championships. Riding Witch Broome Wizard, she earned a whopping total of seven gold and two silver medals.

She worked with her father at The Oaks breeding program and they were later teammates in the Asian Games, for Iran, in both 1998 and 2002.

Dee Ardalan doesn't ride but she is a key to Caspian's success as a behind-the-scenes star. Tasha is not a rider either, but "she's our biggest cheerleader" and also keeps the family dogs well fed with the results of her own business enterprise: Foxy Treats organic dog food.

It's a family affair at Caspian Stables. Thanks to Arsia and Tara's gifts as horsemen, that family has grown significantly over the years to become an extended clan that includes top horses and riders succeeding and enjoying each other all over the world.

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*For more information on Caspian Stables, visit [www.caspianstables.com](http://www.caspianstables.com).*