

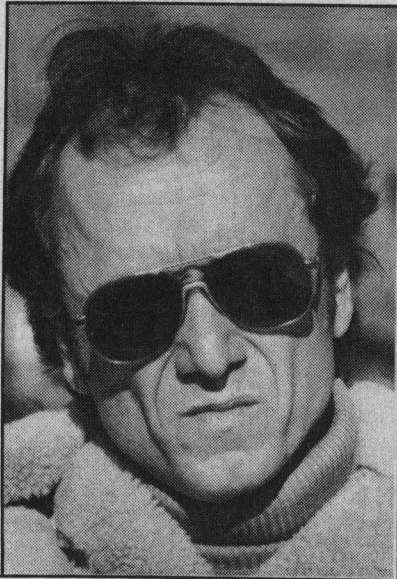
2 of 3

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
SANTA CRUZ

✓ CF Animal Welfare RP 12/1/90

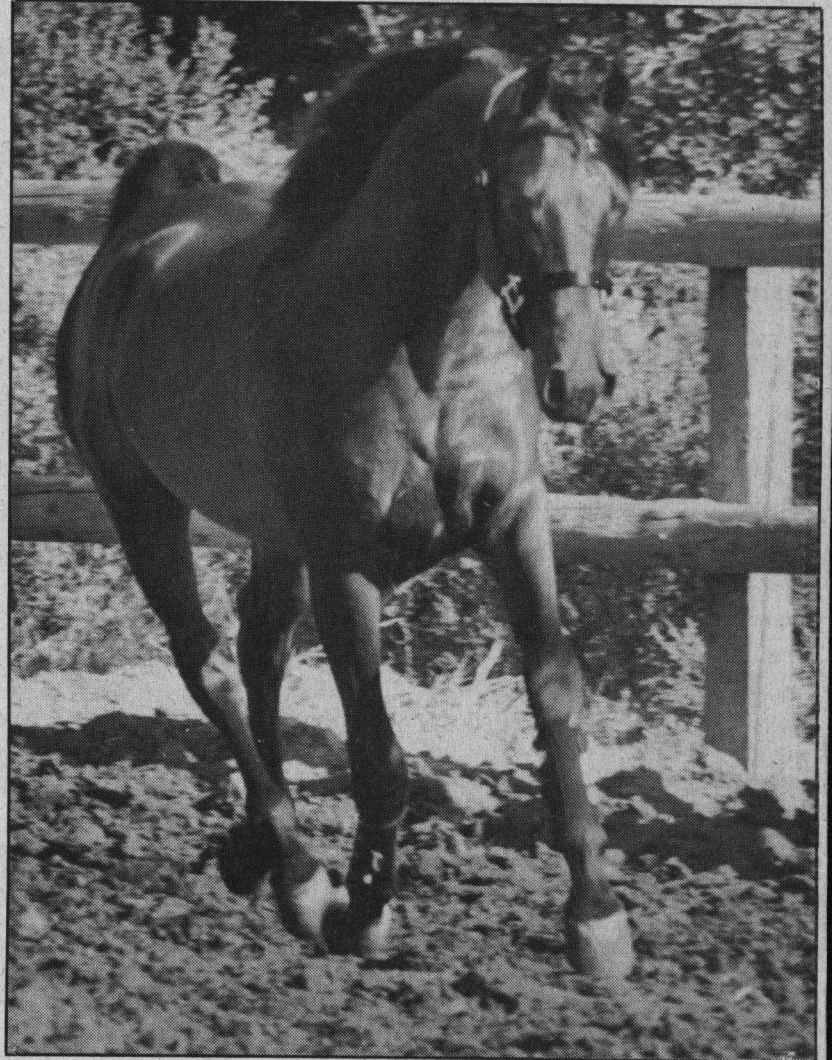
# Horse owners deny mistreatment

By BOB SMITH  
STAFF WRITER



Bob Smith

**Mustafa Sabankaya is at odds with the SPCA over treatment of his horses. At right is one of the horses returned by the SPCA.**



The owners of 44 Arabian horses seized a month ago held a press conference yesterday morning at their Bonny Doon horse-breeding ranch, defending themselves and lashing out at the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office and the Santa Cruz SPCA.

Mustafa, Nezh and Semih Sabankaya, naturalized Americans born in Turkey, are scheduled to be arraigned Tuesday at 8:30 a.m. in Santa Cruz Municipal Court on animal cruelty and neglect charges stemming from accusations that they allowed the horses, most of them yearlings, to become malnourished.

"We never felt that he was doing bad things to the horses and abusing them physically," said Jon Hopkins, chief deputy district attorney. "Our contention is that the feeding plan was abusive - the plan resulted in malnourished horses."

Attorney Gordon Salisbury said the Sabankayas, who breed about 200 Arabians, including several world-class animals, got 20 of the seized animals back from the SPCA two days ago after paying \$5,000 to the SPCA.

SPCA spokeswoman Judy Cassada said yesterday afternoon that the ones still in SPCA custody at its Seventh Avenue headquarters in Live Oak are in much worse shape than the ones released.

"They are clearly malnourished and have scruffy coats," Cassada said.

Not so, said Salisbury. Saying he had inspected all 44 with two veterinarians two days ago, Salisbury told reporters, "Certainly most of them were in as good shape as those released. If there was any difference that was really noticeable between those released and those kept, it was that many of them (those kept) had cuts that were received as part of the roundup of these horses."

Hopkins countered later that the injuries occurred because one of Sabankaya brothers drove a jeep through the pasture, spooking the horses there.

That, Hopkins said, contributed to a decision to impound all of the horses in the pasture.

"There were a small number of horses there that appeared to be healthy but we believed that all needed to be examined," Hopkins said. "If we were going to proceed on a criminal case, we needed to seize all the evidence that bore on the case."

The horses that sparked the initial complaints of mistreatment and malnutrition when they were seen by passers-by, Salisbury said, were some Arabians who were underfed and mistreated at an Arizona ranch. They were brought to the Sabankayas by their owner, who wanted to try to restore their health.

"Of the skinny horses still being held by the SPCA," Salisbury said, "the bulk of those horses fall into the category of the Arizona ones."

The search warrant obtained by the SPCA charged that the Sabankayas were deliberately underfeeding the herd in an attempt to create a survival-of-the-fittest atmosphere in the pasture where the seized animals were kept.

Salisbury denied that charge.

"I can assure you that is not the case," he said. "What people saw in that pasture was nothing more

or less than horses existing in a herd situation in a natural pasture.

"But with the exception of the Arizona horses, the greatest trauma any of those horses have suffered was when the SPCA decided to rescue them, sedate them, throw them into trailers and then take them to small paddocks where they have stood, virtually exercised, for more than a month."

SPCA's Cassada said the horses still at the shelter "are not in a position to be exercised.

"They are so weak, it would be foolish to stress them. They are not used to human handling," she said.

The \$5,000 fee paid by Sabankaya to get the 20 horses released by the SPCA averages out to about \$250 a month per horse.

Several horse owners present at the press conference said the charges were far in excess of the

normal costs of caring for a horse.

One said a survey recently completed placed the cost of owning a horse at about \$100 a month.

Cassada said the SPCA costs were inflated because of the animals' poor condition.

"There were so many things to be evaluated - fecal tests, blood tests, worming, overtime," she said.

The SPCA is not seeking foster homes for the 24 horses it still has at the shelter, nor are the horses available for adoption.

Hopkins added that some were sick with a contagious disease known as "the stranglers."

"The experts said they could not be fostered out," Hopkins said. "Once they were brought to an appropriate weight, they would fare better on a ranch with a proper feeding schedule than cooped up in the pens at the SPCA."