



A Day in the Life of a Groom

By Lubna Dairanieh

A Horse Groom is the person who looks after the horse...simply said. But really the horse groom is more like the "unknown soldier". The rider finds his horse ready in the evening for a ride, trot or run, but there is a lengthy process to keeping the horse happy and healthy. I interviewed Farghal, a groom who works at the Ferousia club in Gezira, Zamalek. Surprisingly Farghal is not a heavy-built man! I thought he'd need to have some physical strength to manage the horse, but through the course of the interview I learned that the groom must have some sort of strength which does not necessarily have to be physical.

With his coarse voice, product of years of smoking, Farghal told me the story of his life as a groom. He's been a groom for 35 years, starting at the young age of 21. I asked Farghal why he chose to work as a groom and he answered: "coming from the country side to a big city, I felt very nostalgic. I started out by working in the cafeteria of the Ferousia club, then I worked in gardening, also at the club...but I always had my eye on working with the beast...I felt it's the closest feeling to being back home with my family in the country side. I talked to the head of the club many times, until he finally agreed that I work with horses." What is a day in the life of a groom I later asked: "my day as a groom starts as early as 6:30 in the morning. The first thing I do is check on the horses; I do that even before changing into my uniform. Not all grooms do that of course only those who really love their horses and know them well. I call my horses, look into their eyes, rub my hand around their head and body and I know what to expect from each one differently, if I don't get what I normally expect as a



Farghal...35 years of grooming has created an unbreakable bond between him and horses. He just couldn't think of anything else he would rather do.



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reaction from them, then I know that something is wrong and I immediately check their temperature and other measurements follow. If everything is ok then I change and start off by cleaning the boxes of the five horses I'm looking after, and I feed those who must be fed at the early hours of the morning. I then head to breakfast with my colleagues. After breakfast it's cleaning the beast himself! I first use a dandy brush to wipe the dust off the horse. Then to further clean and also throw in a massage to his worked-up muscles I use the rubber curry which is a flea deferrer as well! Now that I've looked after the body, I check his hooves, clean, pick and brush them. The final process for his "pedicure" is a layer of tar on the inside and one of grease on the outside."

I listened to Farghal speak with utmost enthusiasm about his job, thinking of the amount of detail it includes. Farghal told me that once he's done with cleaning the horse he cleans the riding gear and that takes him up to his lunch hours which are a stretch from 12 noon to 3 in the afternoon. During that time the groom stays in the stables lurching,

praying and napping close to his horses in case they need anything while he's on break. Interrupting him from the chronological order of his day I asked him what is so special about his job? "I just love how loyal this animal is. If you are good to him, he's good back. One of the things I love is that when my horses hear my voice without seeing me, they kick the door of their box to call me. One of my horses doesn't need to hear me to rant in demand of me, she senses my presence."

It's a powerful bond I thought, we tend to think of the one between the rider and the horse and neglect that between the groom and his horses. Farghal then continued: "afternoon time is when I work the energetic horses to cool them off and prepare them for a simple trot with their riders. I wash them afterwards and return them to their box and that takes up to six o'clock in the evening, and it's also the time when the trainers and riders flock to the club...it's the time of the action in other words. I tack the horse up with the saddle (gag or gog, depending on the need of the horse) leg bands and walk him to his training. Once that's over I take the

horse back, walk him to cool off and then I give him a goodnight's bathe and air-dry him for freshness. Once he's back in the box I massage his back, the area that was under that saddle to break off dry sweat and to loosen the muscles. And then I attend to each horse's specific need; some need to have their legs rubbed with muscle relief ointments for example. I wrap up my day by cleaning the saddles and then head home to my family at around 11:30pm."

What a long day I exclaimed! But Farghal then explained to me that he doesn't feel that the day is long. He loves his job. I asked Farghal at the end of my interview if he plans to carry on doing this job in the future and not surprisingly, he told me that he wouldn't want to ever not work with horses. He further explained that it's his field and domain, 35 years of it enabled him to know so much about horses, how to treat them, tame them and keep them happy, and a one way relationship it is not, because they give lots of love back.

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