

Al Zahraa International Event

By: May El-Khishen

Through out the course of history, the Egyptian Arabian horse has always been an icon of beauty and utter elegance, in order to prolong their greatness the Arabian horse breeders' association was created more than 13 years ago. The association's members were primarily a group of stable farms cooperating together to reach their initiative objective, which was to fund the preservation and protection of the Egyptian Arabian horse.

The association's activities have evolved to organising an annual festival/competition at Muhatat Al Zahraa, homeland to all these glorious events. Muhatat Al Zahraa is looked upon as the origin of all Egyptian Arabian horses in the whole world. Adding to that is that all horses and stud farms in the country must be registered there, it also being the official registrar of the W.A.H.O. (World Arabian Horse Organisation)

Last October (17th to the 20th) Muhatat Al Zahraa has hosted its 10th Egyptian National competition and its 6th International competition for Arabian horses. HORSE Times had the privilege to interview Ms. Naila Hayek, an international judge from Switzerland and Mr. Ahmed Abdel Razik, Secretary of the Arabian Horse Breeding Association, through which we try to deliver to our readers two of the most influential perspectives of the event, the judge's and the breeder's point of view.

On interviewing Mr. Abdel Razik, this is how he started talking about this competition and of course Egyptian Arabian horses: "Primarily, I would like to give you a brief insight on what differentiates an Arabian horse from an Egyptian Arabian horse. The Egyptian Arabian horses are the ones registered in Egypt, and their ancestors can be traced hundreds of years back, back to the very early horses, which were registered through the very first Egyptian breeding program, initiated by Mohamed Ali Tawfik pasha the first, prince Kamal Hussien and Ali pasha Sherif.



Mr. Ahmed Abdel Razik and his son Adel

Moreover, I can proudly say that the Egyptian Arabian horse is the purest of all Arabians, as the Egyptian registration authorities were among the first to actually start implementing the process of registering the horse and its origins. An example of two of this industry's unbeatable horses were "Shahin Nawasha," bred by Omar Sakr and "Mubarak Ikhnaton," bred by Mostafa Omar of the Ikhnaton stables.

HORSE Times then asked Mr. Abdel Razik to tell us how can a regular person who just enjoys watching horses become a successful breeder?

"If you do not see a beautiful horse, you wouldn't know what a beautiful horse really is." The first step is to teach one self how to have an analytical view, be able to distinguish each horse's unique characteristics, whether by watching horses at competitions or in different stable farms. According to what will catch your eye, you will be able to decide upon the characteristics you seek most to find in your horses, followed by that is the actual process of selecting the mare and sire's origins, then you can finally start your program. Breeding programs are evaluated every seven years, as by then the breeder will have two consecutive generations of the horses s/he have bred.

Asking Mr. Abdel Razik about the beauty competitions held, he started off by saying that the aim of these competitions is simply to motivate all stables to continuously work on breeding better horses, using the "competition" concept as a tool to enhance and develop their horses' physical appearance thus improving their breed. It is also thought of as a great opportunity for all stables to evaluate their production, by seeing how the outcome of their work has turned out to be, depending on their achievements in the competitions.

The interview ended by touching upon the positive and the negative points of this last competition from Mr. Abdel Razik's point of view. During the last 5 to 7 years, competitions in Egypt have developed immensely, creating a healthy competitive environment among all stud farms, which has helped establish each stud farm's own distinctive method of breeding and improving the quality of the participating horses. "I have to admit that this last competition has improved relatively but there were still some drawbacks that need to be worked on, like advertising and publicity, and the organisation in general as, for example, the sequence of participants was not in order and lastly the number tags and presenters' uniforms needed slight redesigning. However, the increase in the number of participants was very impressive."

Mrs. Naila Hayek honored us with her presence in the event and she was also one of the international judges appointed to judge the competition. Mrs. Hayek is also the regional manager of the well-known valuable LONGINES brand name. Our interview with Mrs. Hayek went as follows:

H.T: When where you first introduced to the Arabian horse world?

I have to say that I have been introduced to this Arabian horse society 20 years ago. I bought my first Arabian horse from Al-Zahraa here in 1977, so I have been breeding Egyptian Arabian horses for over 20 years now. My first experience was here in this office, Dr. Marsafie's office. He was the first to tell me all about the old horses, I did not see them because they were dead. He told me about all the old lines "don't touch this one because it is difficult to breed and here you have some problems with the legs". So I learned a lot of these things from Dr. Marsafy and I really appreciate him and I think he is one of the really good old breeders.

H.T: Since you are a horse breeder, it's known that Egypt and the Arab world used to be the sole providers of Arabian horses. However, now there are competitors and they are doing much better. What do you have to say concerning this issue?

I don't think its right to say "they do better"; you know Egypt was and still is a source of pure Arab blood for the Egyptian Arab Horse, and I think we really have to preserve it. I think this kind of breed is in danger since the 70s, all or most of the really good horses were sold for a lot of money to stables and now good horses are sold to the United Arab Emirates, to Qatar, and to Saudi Arabia. I think we have to keep some of the good horses here in Egypt so as to keep the source of the breed. So I think it's really dangerous; selling horses is good to promote the breed, but you have to keep some old lines, because if you lose it, it's going to be over.

H.T: A lot of breeders are against cross breeding between Arabian horses and other breeds, what is your opinion concerning this issue?

I am not against it, but I think it's only a 'gain' for the other breeds. So the Arab horse was always used to cross breed with other breeds and I think they have to do it because they need the hardness, the heart, and the courage of the Arabian horse. But we should really try to preserve this blood, its very important.

H.T: When we first say Longines of course everybody thinks of elegance, eminence and luxurious images, what comes to your mind when we say an Arabian horse?

For me it's the same. It's luxury, its beauty; it's a really special expression.

H.T: In your opinion, what is it that makes them so special or unique?

The Arabian horse is really special because of its personality. If you ever own an Arab horse, and you own other horses, you will see the difference.

Arabian horses are so clever, they always try to be your friend, try to create a bond or a relationship with you, and always try to do what is good for you; this is a really important thing about the Arab horse.



Mrs. Naila Hayek