

Arno Neesen...

A Dutch Trainer in Cairo

By: Zena Sallam



Arno Neesen and Eng. Khaled Assem.

Twelve eager riders arrive at Sakkara Country Club to await the arrival of European trainer Arno Neesen. It is the start of a long awaited three-day clinic tailored to benefit your average show jumper in progress. Ranging from the experienced competitor wanting to polish the edges, to the young new-comers wanting to better their game.

Myself, being somewhat of a new-comer, jumped at the opportunity. Not only would I improve the communication lines between my horse and myself, but I would also get to ride with someone already familiar with my riding, as I was fortunate enough to be one of the young riders traveling to Arno's homeland of Holland to participate in a two week program. Almost like a prolonged clinic of concentrated work, we did everything from the feeding and cleaning, to doing the actual riding. As Arno's voice echoed through the palms, I started to remember the usual routine. Five-ten minutes of forward trot and then seven-ten minutes of collected canter, how could I forget? As all the memories snuck back into my head, I realized the principle onto which Arno's teachings were based. If he had taught me one thing, it is that when it truly comes down to it, it's between horse and rider. How one communicated with one's horse could mean the difference between eight faults and none. Riding is not a

three-way conversation between the horse, coach and rider, in which the coach communicates to the rider, who then relays that back to the horse. Riding is a sport that is ten percent physical and ninety percent mental.

Arno has taught me to think of my actions and reflexes in order to correct and better myself. Whether it is with the nod of his head or the order to do it again, Arno encouraged me to think of my options and act on them immediately. His stress on the dependence of the horse on the rider, and visa versa makes it easier to make a mistake and move on unfazed. After all, when riding a course in a show one has no one to talk to but his horse.

The short three days that made up the clinic seemed to fly by with every jump. As soon as it had started, it ended on the highest of notes. Each of us had adapted our minds to becoming fast-acting, yet sensible at the same time. Arno taught us to communicate with our horses. Not just in the sense of giving an order, but to also listen to them. I learned to appreciate, my horse's, as well as my own, developing sense in the sport. Not only did the riders of my class and myself clear the last, determining course. But we all finished feeling almost relieved with the fact that it is possible to succeed without effort. Practice makes perfect, and let me tell you perfect does not happen at the first try ■



Zeina Sallam during the training in Sakkara Country Club.



Arno Neesen watching his students during the training.