



MICHEL ROBERT

A LEGEND

By Khaled Assem

AT FOUR YEARS OF AGE, FRANCE'S MICHEL ROBERT TOOK HIS FIRST RIDE, NOT ON A HORSE, BUT ON A SHEEP! AND BY FIVE, HE HAD ALREADY ACQUIRED A LOVE FOR HORSES, INTRODUCED TO HIM BY HIS LATE FATHER WHO WAS A DOCTOR. LATER ON AFTER JOINING THE RIDING SCHOOL OF CHAMBÉRY, MICHEL STARTED COMPETING IN DRESSAGE AND SHOW JUMPING AT THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL. AT 18, HE LEFT "TO MAKE HIS VOYAGE AROUND THE WORLD ON HORSEBACK".

ROBERT, A SHOW JUMPING LEGEND REPUTED FOR HIS UNMATCHABLE HARMONISED PERFORMANCE WITH ANY HORSE, AS WELL AS FOR NOT TAKING ANY MEDICATION OR GIVING HIS HORSES ANY, PARTICIPATED IN HIS FIRST OLYMPICS IN 1972 IN MUNICH, AND TODAY HE DEDICATES HIS CAREER TO INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION, HORSE TRADING AND WRITING. WITH MEDALS WON AT EUROPEAN AND WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS AND OLYMPIC GAMES, ROBERT IS DESCRIBED AS A "BLUE CHIP FOR THE TEAM OF FRANCE". ROBERT'S MENTAL CAPABILITIES ARE BEST ATTRIBUTED TO MEDITATION, YOGA AND A HEALTHY DIET.



His splendid stables, located 40km from Lyon in North Dauphiné, also constitute for him an environment and working frame advantageous for the success of his personal and professional objectives.

I watched you working with your horses; what are your daily training routines?

Firstly, I try to understand the horse. I then interact with him. It's very important to be technically well positioned on the horse; it has to be fully correct. It's not easy to connect with a horse and so practice is necessary; both physically and mentally. If you know your objective that is good, but it's necessary to fulfill that objective gradually, and afterward form a common language with your horse. It's extremely important for me to understand my horses; everyday they have different ingredients and I respect that.

Observing you work on lots of basics, you practice plenty of basic work such as half-halts, backward movements with your body and inclinations slightly forward, and you change stride as well as diversify a lot; please elaborate on this technique?

I have been working on this technique for a long time and it serves me well. My problem is that during competitions I ride very fast and as a consequence the technique becomes hard for me to collect the horse before the fence. It's good to control the energy of my horse as well as devise good and small aptitudes with the horse.

You are one of a very few riders who have a consistent pace all through the course, is that correct?

I try to keep the same pace!

How long ago did you start your philosophy of no medications whatsoever for both you and your horses?

20 years ago. Horses have the same spirit as humans and it is very important to me to find out what the problem is before having to give any medication. For example, if you drink too much alcohol tonight, tomorrow morning you will have a headache



and would need an aspirin. Instead of drinking too much, or should you give in to the temptations of alcohol and drink too much, you can avoid taking that aspirin and simply drink plenty of water. Horses are the same – without the alcohol.

Does that mean you do not give any medication at all?? What if your horse goes lame before a show?

Then I rest it for two weeks. I don't jump it. Jumping it with medication is a big problem.

No supplements at all?

No no. None. Not for me or my horses. No drugs.

Did you try to take that concept a bit further by educating young riders in France?

Personally, it's important for me that people know that Michel Robert wins a class without medication. In cycling tours in France and Europe, cyclists may not have the chance to win tours without doping, but in equestrian sport, it is possible for me as a show jumper. This is a big decision to take, however others may not always see eye to eye. It's a choice. Ten years ago I had problems with all my horses; several of them were lame in one leg. I thought it was my position so I changed that along with my exercise which was when they got better.

You wrote two books: why?

Because I get many questions about my technique and so I wrote them. It was also very important to me to transmit my experiences. My heart is my light and to me it was important to give other people solutions to problems, and many have learned from them.

Do you think you would write a book with the concept "free from medication" in order to tell people about this more and more?

A new book? No. but articles and journals, why not?

Tell us about your horses?

I have a mare I've been riding



for four years. She won the 2009 GCT in Doha and this year in February she won the World Cup Grand Prix in Degole. She has a great character. I have another which I bought in 2010. He is not jumping big classes but there is progress. I bought him as I needed a horse with experience. It's hard for me to find a horse as such since I have no sponsor for the time being.

Is there any championship that you did not win but are keen to win?

Well, I think one just needs to work hard and keep going, and one day a certain championship win will come. One gold medal versus having a good life and enjoying it with my horses will not give me everlasting pleasure. 🐾

Photos courtesy of Cymon Taylor
www.cymontaylor.com
www.photostaiononline.com
Tel: +39 333 290 2515
