



THE ROYAL EQUESTRIAN & CAMEL FESTIVAL OF OMAN

WHAT A FESTIVAL

By **Nada H. Abdelmoniem**

“OMAN HAS BEEN ABLE TO REALISE MUCH OF WHAT WE HAD ASPIRED TOWARDS. EVERYTHING THAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, HAS BEEN DONE WITHIN A PRECISE BALANCE BETWEEN PRESERVING THE BEST ELEMENTS OF OUR HERITAGE, IN WHICH WE TAKE PRIDE, AND THE DEMANDS OF THE PRESENT DAY WHICH REQUIRE US TO ADAPT TO THE SPIRIT OF THE MODERN AGE – WHILE AT THE SAME TIME CORRESPONDING TO ITS CIVILISATION, MODERN SCIENCES, AND TECHNOLOGY, AND BENEFITING FROM THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE VARIOUS SPHERES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE.”

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN QABOOS BIN SAID



The Sultanate of Oman, located on the Arabian Peninsula, is a heartfelt sensation of a country. It is a uniquely striking orb of peace, bliss and love, harbouring undiscovered preserved as well as embraced culture. In all directions of the capital Muscat, beauty is evident through the city's natural landscape, the splendour and hospitality of its people, in addition to the affluent yet humble pride of their traditions that they would never imagine their world without. All over the city, Omani men are seen wearing their attractive official attire, the Dishdasha and colourful Imamma – and on official functions, they tie around their waists matching Imamma pashminas with a vibrant khanjar (dagger) tucked in. The khanjar, a very eye catching object, is a piece of art that captures the soul

of Oman; it is a symbol of manhood, courage and tradition. The curve of the Omani khanjar distinguishes it from daggers elsewhere, and its sheath has a right angle bend with complex work that is among the finest in the Arab region. It varies in size, style, price, and design according to Oman's different regions.

Just at the start of the New Year 2011, on January 1st, under the auspices of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and coinciding with the 40th National day of the Sultanate, the Royal Court Affairs of Oman organised and hosted the Royal Equestrian & Camel Festival that demonstrated 28 national and international horse and camel shows to entertain HM the Sultan and a total of 10,000 spectators for the duration of two and a half hours.



Horses came into Oman when an Omani delegation from the Azd tribe visited Prophet Solomon in Asham, Levant. The Prophet presented them with an exceptional horse to help them in their journey and named him 'Zad ar Rakib'. Ever since, Omanis have maintained his breeding line which led to a great increase in the number of horses in the Sultanate – which reached 90,000 during the rule of the Yariba. In more recent times, numbers dwindled to an all time low until the accession of HM the Sultan, whose great interest in horses and their breeding marked the revival of the golden age of Omani horsemanship. Government equine institutions, including the Royal Stables, were established and individuals were encouraged to have their own

private stud farms. HM the Sultan equally encouraged camel breeding and sports. Currently, there are 2,320 pure Arabian horses and 117,299 camels registered under the Royal Court Affairs of Oman.

The festival is held every five years as a prominent display for HM the Sultan's passion for Omani heritage. Lt. Gen. Sultan bin Mohamed Alnomani, General Secretary of the Royal Court Affairs states, "This event is an attraction for lovers of elegance, beauty, art, chivalry and self-importance which are all embraced here, now, and all in one. The Festival is an exciting picture drawn by the Bedouins along with civilians, cavaliers, women and children."





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▲ Daring female riders gallop in tandem

And adds the Vice Chairman of the Organising Committee and Commander of the Royal Cavalry Brigadier Abdulrazak Al-Shahwarzi, "The endeavour accomplished by the hard working team of men and women from the Royal Court Affairs to make this festival stand at such grandeur, as you may have seen, just to meet the approval of HM the Sultan's passion for horses and camels, is what makes us all strive to achieve what is truly of essence for Omani culture."

The Director General of the Royal Cavalry Mr. Faisal bin Mahboob explained, "We have been planning this event for three years; to technically produce the event, the Royal Court Affairs employed the professional services of German Performance Sales International (PSI) owned by businessmen Ullrich

Kasselmann and Paul Schockemohle through which their team of experts managed and supervised the grounds, sound, lighting and colossal LED screens." Flawless is the word to describe such professional and

technical production. However on an even higher level of excellence, to honourably gauge the efforts of the Organising Committee which they modestly refuse to comment on - locally, the Royal Court Affairs

▼ Jean-Francois Pignon



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brought in citizens, women and children from the Royal Cavalry, Royal Camels, Royal Household Troops, Royal Guard of Oman, Mounted Unit of Oman, Royal Oman Police, Military Bands, Folklore Band of the Royal Court Affairs, Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra and the 1st Royal Band for Music & Folklore – all mounting a total of 1,372 horses and 736 camels. To start the event in preparation for the arrival of HM the Sultan, all mounted creatures stood in absolute patience on a 232 meter long by 127 meter wide show ground for 30 whole minutes. With no movement what-so-ever, except the animals shifting legs to balance their weight, no top organisation and discipline could possibly match in such harmonised unity. Indeed, a royal and impressive performance.

The foreign teams participating in the festival were brought in from Jordan, India, Russia, Switzerland, France, Germany, Norway, Spain, Great Britain, South Africa, Argentina, Egypt, and the USA. They all performed to the live engaging tunes of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra led by Brigadier Rames bin Jamaan Al-Oweira.



▲ India's horse & bull performances

All citizens entered the grounds at Midan Al-Fateh in Al-Watayah with invites sent out from the Royal Court – whilst officials, organisers and performers, most likely, never left the grounds due to rehearsals being implemented two weeks in the stadium preceding the festival.

A day after the festival, a gala dinner was prepared for all guests and performers where the Chairman of the Organising Committee His Excellency Nassr bin Humood Al-Kindi took the chance to greet and speak with everyone. Tunes from bag pipe performers entertained all guests, while the heads of all

performing teams received gifts for their efforts in performances.

To have witnessed such an event was to have seen true excellence in beautiful organisation of equestrian and camel skills employed by Arabs – nights and days of hard work ending to an unconditional and unquestionable aim; the happiness of HM the Sultan whom all Omanis respect and love. And to have visited Oman was to have seen a great country with a promise for more, and a place where their women define elegance and their men define the archetype of man. 🇦🇴

▼ The Royal Household Cavalry Musical Ride of Britain

