

The Sport and The Bigger Picture

By Her Royal Highness Princess

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I think that the sport in the whole world, to a large extent, does ‘preach to the converted’. It’s just that in the established European nations their basis of interest is much larger. You go to shows and feel there are huge crowds, but actually its still elite and secular. If you speak to marketing companies, you will learn that they are all studying ways to popularize the sport and you can’t help but notice they must feel there is a serious problem. We, as the Arab world, are actually a dimension that they need, and need badly. However some of their ideas are also useful and can be tailored to suit us to promote the sport regionally. Basic things like education, reports in daily newspapers and the press that are not specialized to riders goes without saying. Simply to familiarize the sport with those who have nothing to do with it, so that they appreciate it as an art form, and understand its’ basic concepts is required urgently.

Yet, I also think that it is important that some of the qualities of the sport can and should be shared with Arab society.

Take an idea like the fences. At European Shows they invest a lot of money into having course builders design fences that display parts of their culture and traditions. They are artistic and pretty. Horses react to them in unpredictable ways. This



“Do you think it was the colors?” “Is it that he can’t jump such a solid fence?” “My horse is so careful, this course is perfect for me!” It invites public participation because they can see problems. Commentary on TV gets exciting because its not a riding school lesson anymore, and its saleable to satellite channels because its promoting your national treasures. Sponsors in the hotel industry are so much easier to talk to when you can suggest you have a marketable return! Sounds so simple, of course trust me to complicate it (!).

What I suggest is that Arab countries shouldn’t pay huge sums of money by hiring foreign course builder. But instead tap into the youth of each nation through their school system and run some kind of art or cultural competitions that allow them to design sets of fences depicting what they feel is special hidden treasure of their culture. The idea needs a lot of refinement but I am throwing it in the air not to be taken to the letter but to find a better variation along the same lines. The other thing is that we in the sport are viewed as elite, and the sport is viewed as an expensive waste of time. If you ask me all that is quite true! That criticism will not change, but there are ways of toning it down and using it to channel funds to needy causes, in a way that helps popularize the sport as well. Jump for charity! If shows could work a percentage based return for a cause then they would make a lot more friends. Again the idea needs refinement, but it will get the urgently needed press for the sport, and far more importantly for those of you like me who have this horrible guilt attack more often than not, it would help us all sleep better at night knowing it is for a good cause.

