

ZAMAN: PART TWO

A LOOK BACK AT MY LIFE WITH HORSES

By Omar Mamdouh Ismail

I am also grateful to Dr. Mohamed Abd El Motalib, the head master of my school, who always allowed me to leave school a little early to go riding. The fighting spirit was reflected in our horses, as they were properly schooled and helped to maintain a very good psychological state and a well-balanced nutritional programme to help keep them healthy during training. This included additional nutritional elements such as boiled linseed, oats and vegetable leaves, and even leavings from my mother's kitchen, like apple and orange skins and egg shells, offered fresh everyday to help as a supplement, very simple but highly effective.

From a very early age I was getting left-over trouser horses that were hard to ride for most riders. However, from the start I realised the problem is not the horses; it is the lack of horsemanship and horsemastership, and the situation is the same today as most riders are in a hurry to jump and neglect dressage for jumping. Simply, horses are not born jumpers by nature and they hate it in many cases. I received horses with average conformation, full of bad habits and the worst of these was refusing to jump or pass over a pole on the ground. This required patience, determination, and a lot of time to restart schooling from the beginning.

Among the training programmes my coach used was to take the horses to the desert to build more muscles in the national Club Al Ahli and Abbas Akkad area. The sand hills in the area helped develop muscle power. My coach was not a rider, but, amazingly, he taught me how to make myself and my horse do what we do instinctively. This required plenty of proper schooling, repetition till we reached a stage where everything is done smoothly, like flying changes and pirouettes; fear of big fences

AT AN EARLY STAGE IN MY RIDING CAREER MY MOTHER AND FATHER ACCOMPANIED ME TO EVERY SHOW AND AT THE END OF EVERY COMPETITION WE DISCUSSED HOW I PERFORMED AND HOW THE HORSE BEHAVED. FOR THE DAILY TRAINING MY DAD WAS THERE, NEVER LEFT ME, AND AMAZINGLY GUIDED ME THROUGH THE TECHNICAL DETAILS AND TAILORED FITNESS PROGRAMMES FOR BOTH THE HORSE AND MYSELF. WHEN MY DAD WAS NOT WITH ME I USED MY SHADOW ON THE GROUND OR AT TIMES HAD MY WONDERFUL FRIEND HISHAM ABD EL NABI WHO NEVER HESITATED TO RECORD VIDEOS AND OTHER TIMES MY DEAR FRIEND HUSSEIN KHAIRY STOOD WITH ME.

was not in my dictionary. In addition we did plenty of cavaletti, but I could not jump very often, as the officers in charge kept fences away, and I used to have no light in the evening after school so had to ride in dusk time or in the dark.

In the late seventies and up to the early nineties there wasn't any balanced horse food or supplements. Vets were so unskilled in equine science; an unlucky horse in need of a vet is 90% a dead horse just due to colic. A lame horse or injured would come out of the veterinary hospital a dangerous beast that bites and kicks just from the failure of the vet to have done a professional and proper job.

Farriers were not so different from vets, very unskilled. Every month horses suffered from shoeing, either fitting a small shoe on a big hoof and making the hoof smaller to fit, or nails are placed in the sensitive area making the horse lame for a few days until it was corrected. I had to stand next to the farrier and tell them where to put the nails which was hard and time-consuming. The grooms were also similar to vets and farriers or even worse, a very few had a good conscious so keeping a horse sound and healthy for many years required dedication. I had to intervene in every detail of the well-being of my mount, including educating the groom to do everything for the horse gently, firmly, and properly. This meant being at the stable almost all the time, sometimes before sunrise or late at night doing the job of the groom, vet, and black smith. Besides all of my responsibilities I had to school and educate the horse to jump international classes.

This sport appears to be an individual sport but in reality it is a team sport; behind the scenes the team consists of the horse, rider, trainer, groom, vet, and black smith.

The failure of one makes it hard or hopeless to improve. By the mid-eighties horse shows became very hard; fences bigger and wider, our Equestrian Federation that was inclined to listen to the riders' needs helped make a great team in 1987, and most importantly lifted the equine influenza travel ban on Egyptian horses so they were able to travel abroad. The atmosphere of competitions was so positive then; I was competing with great riders like Khaled Mohamed Aly with Ayub, Khaled Assem and King Tut, Husam Ragab, Mohamed El Sherbini, and our team was awarded the gold medal in the 1987 Mediterranean Games. We reached a point in 1988 when we were about to go to the Olympics in Seoul, but unfortunately we did not because good results were hard to achieve with the horses we had at the time.

Finally, when I look back at how we achieved great results in a short time and how we maintained a high level for a long time, we had a great share in improving this sport in Egypt and brought it up to international level, made it more popular locally, and helped sincerely all who wanted to learn and improve.

Today, unlike forty years ago, you will find hundreds of riders very well equipped, with fantastic horses, professional trainers available and fantastic riding centres. In addition, there are a lot of horse sales both local and imported. Many horse equipment shops selling everything a rider and horse needs including food supplements, and a world known magazine Horse Times. It makes me so proud and pleased to see the younger generations ride and compete abroad. If it weren't for the support and help of my mother and father, we would have never have seen this new generation jump so well. 🐾