

HORSE TIMES



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THE LEADING EQUESTRIAN MAGAZINE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



MAISA ALSAIDI

EQUINE LAW BEYOND THE HANDSHAKE

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VIEW POINT FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear HT readers,

In this online edition, we stay close and in tune with the ever-evolving world of equestrian sport - a sport of intense complexities, growing in different forms and directions.

Which brings us to our first highlight: Equine Law. Maisa Alsaidi offers an expert analysis of the high-value stakes involved, from the augmented prices of horses today to the various transactions between breeders, owners, riders, prize money, and more, shifting from what started decades ago with a handshake to a highly sophisticated global market where sentimentality can no longer mask vulnerability.

HT has always kept a deep interest in the technical aspects of the sport, and so, Louise Fagersson gives us insight into the philosophy of development behind Fager bits. The breed has changed, and the equipment has to suit, evolve, and readjust. Design, curves, size, and metal have effectively given the horse a more amplified voice.

At CSIO5* Rome Piazza di Siena, Piergiorgio Bucc riding Pallieter vd. N. Ranch handled the intense pressure to steal hearts as well as the Rolex Grand Prix show, before further winning the same one in La Baule on Hantano.

The FEI is at a crossroads with the candidacy of three distinguished figures: Mark Samuel, Sabrina Ibanez, and Jack Huang. From HRH Princess Haya and her vision, to Mr. Ingmar De Vos and the

new challenges, to what the winds of change might bring, hopefully, stability, vision, and, most urgently, out-of-the-box remedies.

Marcus "the Magnificent" Ehning delivered an AI-like performance with a human heart, demonstrating timeless precision and outstanding horsemanship, even after being chased by a terrier on the course.

Cruising to the French Riviera, the incredible Abdel Saïd is seen dominating some of the richest and most competitive shows in the world; simply put, pure magic.

Paul McAuley, a true Irish horseman, is guiding the operations and leadership on the ground of AIUI-la with an innate wealth of knowledge and understanding of the sport.

Richard Vogel & United Touch: this partnership is breathtaking. Together, they redefine speed and accuracy in modern showjumping, winning two Rolex Majors in a couple of months: one at the Dutch Masters and another in Aachen.

My dear friend and previous coach Jean-Yves Camenen, who impacts the sport through its soul and spirit, remains an ever-evolving curator in the showjumping sport.

Elio Travagliati at Al Shira'aa in Abu Dhabi set the pace for one of the most thrilling speed derbies in the Middle East.

Back to horse care, we explore the biometrics of the hoof and its impact on performance with Thomas Fenzl, alongside Sami Ghazwan's philosophy on the soul of a champion.

The "ever-successful" Doha Tour showcases world-class facilities, with the Egyptian team being a yearly participant and sharing foot-on-podium space.

As always, issue 73 is packed with voices that shape the sport today.

Read on and enjoy,

Khaled Assem

MAISA ALSAIDI

EQUINE LAW BEYOND THE HANDSHAKE



TODAY, WE ARE EXCITED TO MEET AND INTERVIEW A PROMINENT LEGAL PROFESSIONAL WITH A UNIQUE NICHE PRACTICE SO IMPORTANT TO OUR EQUINE INDUSTRY. PLEASE MEET MAISA ALSAIDI, FOUNDER AND MANAGING PARTNER OF EQUEST LAW LEGAL CONSULTANTS IN ABU DHABI GLOBAL MARKET, THE FIRST FIRM IN THE MIDDLE EAST SPECIALIZING IN LEGAL SERVICES FOR EQUESTRIANS, PROFESSIONALS, FEDERATIONS, AND BUSINESSES IN THE EQUINE INDUSTRY. SHE HAS REPRESENTED MULTIPLE INDIVIDUALS, FIRMS, AND FEDERATIONS IN THIS SPECIALIZED FIELD, WHETHER IN DISPUTE RESOLUTION OR IN EQUINE BUSINESS, COMMITTEE FORMATION, AND CORPORATE STRUCTURING, INCLUDING HELPING THE EQUINE INDUSTRY FORMALISE THEIR RELATIONSHIPS FROM SIMPLE HANDSHAKES TO DOCUMENTED AGREEMENTS AND TRANSACTIONS.

WITH OVER 15 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE, MAISA HAS BROKEN NEW GROUND AS A PIONEER IN SPORTS, MEDIA, ENTERTAINMENT, AND EQUINE LAW ACROSS THE UAE AND THE MIDDLE EAST.



Welcome, Maisa. As a lawyer and horsewoman myself, I am fascinated by your career focus on sport, and equine sport in particular. How did you come to specialise in this area? What inspired you?

I came to specialise in Equine Law after I saw a rising demand from the equine industry for more formalised relationships in terms of dealings, whether at an athlete level, management level, or even in business, horse sales, and horse management. The need always arises when disputes in a certain industry rise to a level where you need an expert legal advisor in this field, either to try to resolve the matter between the parties involved or to handle it through litigation, either in court or arbitration.

Having horses myself and having my son, Fares Azouni, compete at a top showjumping level, in addition to attending shows in both the Middle East and Europe, inspired me to start my specialty in Equine Law.

In the Equine Industry, in addition to being an experienced lawyer, you need to understand the horses, the industry, and the parties involved to be able to provide comprehensive legal advice.

Have you always had an interest in horses?

Yes, horses are family to me. I started to have my own horses after my son got involved in the sport. To have horses in your life is a blessing, and to treat them well is another blessing.

Where did you start your career arc?

I started my career in the United Arab Emirates, where I worked in multiple international firms and media houses as a legal consultant until I established my own firm seven years ago.

What types of services do your firms provide to equestrian clients?

We specialise in Sports Law, mainly Equestrian. We also specialise in media, corporate, real estate,



and wealth planning.

What are the most common disputes or legal matters your firm handles on a day-to-day basis?

We handle agreement drafting and negotiations, whether related to sports, media, corporate, or real estate. We also handle dispute settlement and litigation at all levels.

What's the most important piece of advice that you would give to someone considering buying a horse?

For buying a horse, there is always a process that all equestrians in practice follow, starting from a

horse trial, to conducting the pre-purchase exam by a certified vet, and continuing to invoice and payment. We advise always having a sale and purchase agreement in place, as it will add the most necessary terms in relation to the purpose of purchase, warranties, handover, taxes (on cross-border transactions), shipping, delivery, and the specific date when the buyer and seller each assume liability. We understand that the market practice for buying a horse is going through invoice and payment without agreements, but we can see the rising number of disputes in relation to matters that were not disclosed by the seller and the level expected from the horse. If you do a sale and purchase agreement, you have to mention the purpose for which the horse is purchased. If the horse is supposed to be at Grand Prix level, then this should

be mentioned in the agreement. If after the sale the horse is at a much lower level because of reasons that were not disclosed by the seller, then this could be a reason for a dispute between the buyer and seller.

What are the most critical legal risks when conducting remote or online horse sales in the Gulf region?

The number of online remote sales is growing in the region, especially when there are reasons affecting the buyer's travel plans, such as pandemics or regional political conflicts affecting travel. These circumstances and others sometimes prevent the buyer from traveling, and so they rely on remote purchase. Unfortunately, these buyers rely completely on videos and pre-purchase exams conducted by a vet. Most of these buyers are first-time buyers, and they are victims of fraud. After the horse is transported to the buyer, the horse does not perform at the same level seen in the video. Additionally, sometimes another horse is shipped to the buyer - not even the horse that was in the video. We see these cases a lot in purchases of ponies. Other cases involve the height difference between the horse and pony. We also have cases related to online auctions and embryo sales.

We know that you are very dedicated to youth sport development. Please tell us about your youth sport development initiative.

I truly like to focus on youth in equestrian sport, as they are the next generation and the reason for this sport to continue in all disciplines.

Having experience in horse management, athlete management and attending shows all around the world made me understand the current issues faced by our youth equestrians today.

We appreciate the role that the FEI is doing to support the youth. On the other hand, there is a lot to be done to support the next generation of equestrians.

We are a group of private individuals who are passionate about the sport and at the same time would like to address the current issues faced by youth in equestrian sports from the ages of 16 to 21, trying



Ride. Explore. Discover.

to find the basis to support them educationally and financially. At a certain level, we are trying to support in various ways after certain assessments are made of certain athletes who demonstrate horse love and understand horse welfare; both are key components to the selection of youth who will represent our initiative. There will be education and financial support to certain athletes to be able to spread our initiative.

What are your wishes for the future?

Every athlete has a dream; every team has a dream, and every nation has a dream. In the steps toward achieving our goals and dreams, we should hear our horse, feel the horse, and work with the horse not against him. Your horse is giving all his heart and energy to make you achieve your goals. We have always to remember throughout our journey that horse welfare is always a priority. 🐾

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PIERGIORGIO BUCCI WINS HIS SECOND ROLEX GRAND PRIX OF THE SEASON AT LA BAULE

A Rolex Series Event

A PACKED CROWD AT THE STADE FRANÇOIS ANDRÉ WITNESSED ITALY'S PIERGIORGIO BUCCI MAKE HISTORY AT THE JUMPING INTERNATIONAL DE LA BAULE BY WINNING THE PRESTIGIOUS ROLEX GRAND PRIX VILLE DE LA BAULE. RIDING HANTANO, BUCCI BECAME THE FIRST RIDER TO CLAIM TWO ROLEX SERIES GRAND PRIX VICTORIES IN THE 2026 SEASON, FOLLOWING HIS RECENT TRIUMPH IN ROME.



Grégory Bodo's demanding 1.60m first-round course proved a severe technical test for the 45 competitors, with only seven horse-and-rider combinations managing to jump clear and advance to the jump-off.

Switzerland's Martin Fuchs was the first to crack the code riding Conner Jei, followed by home favourite Julien Epailard, then Pieter Devos, Gilles Thomas, Bertram Allen, Cian O'Connor, and finally Bucci.

In an exciting jump-off, Fuchs set a very fast, faultless benchmark of 41.03 seconds. Epailard eclipsed this time by over two seconds but suffered a costly rail, whilst subsequent challengers failed to unseat the Swiss leader.

As the final rider to enter the arena, Bucci

utilised his late draw to perfection. Combining extraordinary speed, precision, and efficiency, the Italian delivered a magnificent clear round in 40.61 seconds to snatch victory, leaving Fuchs in second and Epailard in third.

Reflecting on his triumph, Bucci praised the incredible atmosphere and credited his late starting position, which allowed him to study Fuchs' round and execute a tighter turn that suited Hantano perfectly. Although disappointed to narrowly miss out, runner-up Fuchs lauded Bucci's superior performance, whilst Epailard remained delighted with his horse's brilliance ahead of future challenges. 🏆

Photos by Rolex Series

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THREE-WAY RACE BEGINS FOR FEI PRESIDENCY

THE PROCESS TO ELECT THE NEXT FÉDÉRATION EQUESTRE INTERNATIONALE (FEI) PRESIDENT HAS OFFICIALLY BEGUN, WITH THREE DISTINGUISHED FIGURES FROM THE INTERNATIONAL EQUESTRIAN COMMUNITY CONFIRMED AS CANDIDATES FOR THE ORGANISATION'S HIGHEST ELECTED OFFICE.



Sabrina Ibáñez

In line with FEI policy for all elected positions, the candidates are listed in alphabetical order by National Federation: Mark Samuel (CAN), Sabrina Ibáñez (ESA) and Jack Huang (TPE).

Representing Canada, Mark Samuel is FEI Honorary Vice President, having served on the FEI Board for 12 years, as Chair of Regional Group IV (North America) and FEI Vice President from 2017 to 2024. Sabrina Ibáñez, of El Salvador, joined the FEI in 1991 and served as FEI Director of Governance and Executive Affairs from 2011 until her appointment as FEI Secretary General in December 2014. Chinese Taipei's Jack Huang has served as Chair of FEI Regional Group VIII (Asia and Oceania) since 2016 and has been FEI Vice President since 2019.

CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION:

The deadline for submitting candidacies for the FEI Elections and Appointments 2026, including the position of FEI President, closed on 1 June 2026 at 23:59 CEST.

In line with the FEI's commitment to transparency and good governance, and as per the Rules for Election of the FEI President 2026, all presidential applications underwent an independent background check by the Independent Election Committee. The FEI Nominations Committee reviewed and vetted the candidacies during its meeting on 11 and 12 June.

With the official announcement of the candidates, the presidential campaign now begins in accordance with the Rules for Election of the FEI President 2026. The successful candidate will be elected by the FEI General Assembly on 5 December 2026 in Jiangyin, China.

In addition to the presidential candidates, the Nominations Committee examined all applications submitted for the various positions that form part of the FEI Elections and Appointments 2026 process.



Mark Samuel



Jack Huang

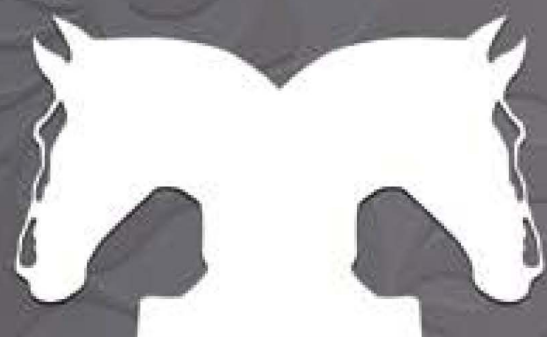
Three positions – Nominations Committee Member (Regional Group IV), Medical Committee Member, and Eventing Athlete Representative – have been reopened, with candidacies accepted until 15 July 2026.

FEI President Ingmar De Vos welcomed the announcement, highlighting both the calibre of the candidates and the strength of the organisation's future leadership.

"I am delighted that three such highly respected and experienced individuals have decided to stand for the FEI Presidency," Ingmar De Vos said "Mark Samuel, Sabrina Ibáñez and Jack Huang have each made an outstanding contribution to the FEI over many years, and I know they share a deep commitment to the values and future of our sport."

"Serving as FEI President has been the greatest honour of my professional life, and I am very proud to see these three candidates, which have already served the FEI in important positions, putting themselves forward to lead the organisation into its next chapter. Their willingness to serve is a testament to the strength of our community and the confidence they have in its future. I am convinced that, whoever the National Federations elect at the General Assembly in December, the FEI will be in very good hands." 🏆

Photos by FEI/Germain Arias-Schreiber/Lizz Gregg/Richard Juilliart



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The horse day after day



A BIT OF COMMON SENSE

LOUISE FAGERSEN ON GIVING THE HORSE A VOICE

IT STARTED WITH A COMMON FRUSTRATION: A SENSITIVE HORSE AND A MARKET FULL OF CLUNKY, OUTDATED BITS. BY LOOKING AT HOW TACK ACTUALLY BEHAVES UNDER SADDLE, LOUISE FAGERSEN HAS REDEFINED EQUESTRIAN COMFORT. FROM SPACE-AGE TITANIUM TO GAME-CHANGING CURVED CHEEKPIECES, HORSE TIMES TALKS WITH THE FOUNDER OF FAGER BITS TO DISCOVER HOW ONE BRAND IS PUTTING THE HORSE'S VOICE BACK INTO THE CONNECTION.





Louise, every single Fager bit has a human name, like Maria, Sally, or Gustav. How do you choose the names, and have you ever named a bit after a horse or person who was a complete nightmare to deal with?

The names usually don't have a very specific background. We mostly throw around different names until something just feels right.

Lately, we've started trying to separate some collections with female or male names depending on the material, just to make it a bit easier, but unfortunately that's not something I thought about from the beginning.

Sally is actually named after my dog. I had a feeling that bit was going to be a success, and it really was.

Maria is named after my younger sister, and just like her, that bit turned out very unique and very popular.

What was the original inspiration behind founding Fager?

I struggled to find a suitable bit for my own horse. During a check-up, I realised that many bits changed angle significantly once the horse was ridden with contact, compared to how they sat in the stable without pressure. This meant the pressure points under saddle were often completely different from how they appeared at rest. That discovery became the starting point for Fager.

While bit concepts like the Pelham or snaffle are centuries old, how have modern materials and weight changed their effectiveness?

We always look for answers in the horse's reaction. As horses have become finer, more sensitive, and more reactive through modern breeding, we need to adapt our equipment to what they comfortably accept first, as that is the foundation for training and true teamwork.

Every horse responds differently, but in general, we see that many prefer bits that take up less space in the mouth, are lighter, and feature a more forgiving angle that creates room for the tongue. Our Soft Joint designs have also been highly successful because they provide the flexibility of a broken bit

without the concentrated pressure points of traditional joints.

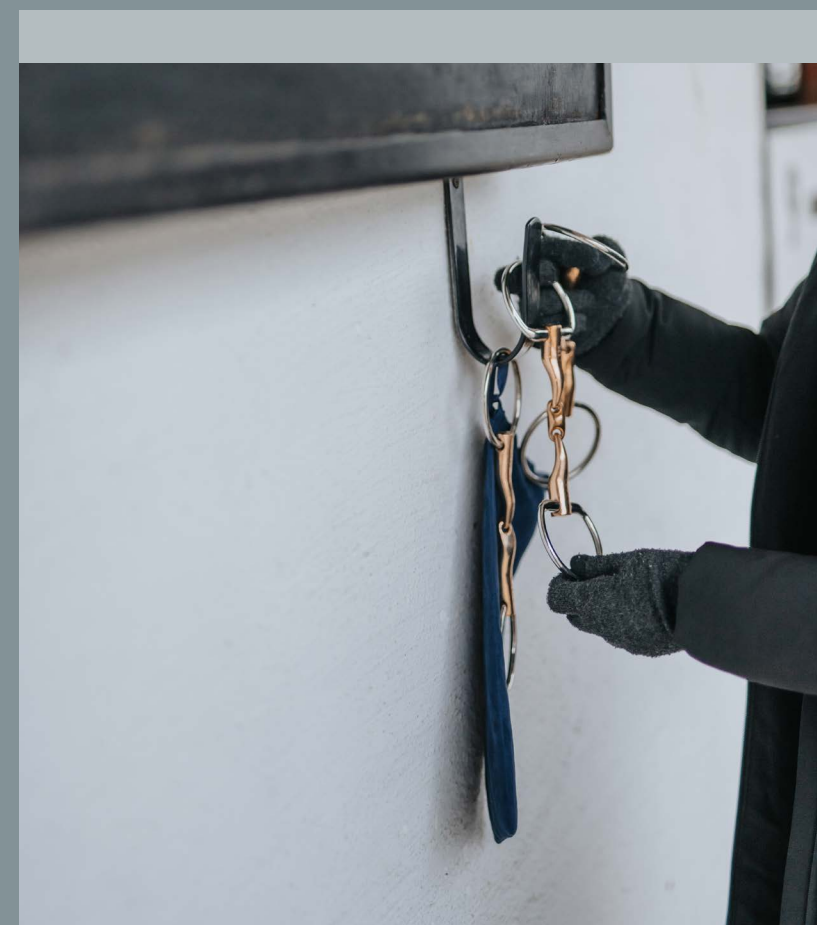
So yes, during bit fittings, we often notice a very clear difference in how horses respond to variations in material, weight, and design.

Many riders struggle with straight cheekpieces hitting the noseband and rubbing the sides of the horse's face; Fager designed them with a curve. Is that why you curved them, or is there another explanation?

I assume you mean our Baby Fulmer, which we developed to give the horse clearer guidance and stability. This is one of the models I've spent the most time developing to get the angles exactly right. The upper and lower parts of the cheekpiece are shaped differently, so it's vital to fit the bit correctly to ensure the cheeks stay away from the skin.

Without the curve, the cheekpieces would cause sores on a lot of horses. The angle is crafted in two steps—both forward and outward—to keep the bit stable without it pressing into the face.

Because the ring is loose and sits slightly away from the Baby Fulmer itself, it rotates differently compared to a fixed cheek. The design is also forgiving enough to sit correctly even if someone hap-





pens to ride with a bit that is slightly too long, or takes a stronger rein contact.

What materials or combinations of materials do you use in your bits, either alongside or instead of stainless steel?

Stainless steel is a reliable material, but many horses dislike the metallic taste and how cold it gets in winter. Sweet iron alters the taste into something many horses prefer, which often encourages a softer contact.

Titanium is one of my personal favourites; it neutralises the metallic taste, weighs less, and adapts more quickly to the horse's mouth temperature, so it never feels uncomfortably cold. Copper or Sweet Gold can encourage horses that tend to drop the contact to seek the bit more. By combining different materials, you can achieve vastly different reactions.

We also use TPU in various hardnesses for horses that struggle to accept metal, or bits in general. Leather offers incredible acceptance too, which is why we provide leather bits. However, because leather can be easily damaged if a horse chews on it, we developed leather covers that can be attached to a normal bit instead. It's an excellent way to test how the horse reacts to leather without risking ruining a brand-new bit on the first ride.

We've seen trends like "blue bits" and leather-covered mouthpieces come and go. What is your take on these fashions?

I wouldn't really call them trends, as both blue bits and leather-covered mouthpieces have existed for a very long time, particularly in the Western world. I think people simply forget about them until they get a sensitive horse and start looking for alternative solutions that the horse might find more comfortable.

What are the specific benefits of combining different metals within a single bit design?

For example, if you combine the benefits of titanium and copper, you get a bit that feels light and is easy for the horse to accept, while a copper roller in the centre gives the horse something to play with without making the mouthpiece feel too fixed.



If, on the other hand, you have a horse that easily drops the contact but can also feel a bit stiff in the connection, I would choose sweet iron combined with a copper roller. That combination usually creates more acceptance and support, while the roller keeps the horse softer and more relaxed in the contact.

You can then take it a step further depending on the horse and rider. If the rider has unsteady hands, or the horse tends to overreact to rein aids, I would add a forward lock to stabilise the bit and prevent it from becoming too mobile. For sensitive horses with very active tongues, an upward lock can help create a calmer, more stable feeling in the mouth.

In what scenario would you recommend an asymmetrical bit, such as one with a smooth side and a twisted side?

At the moment, I honestly struggle to find a good



reason to recommend an asymmetrical bit like that, unless the horse has a specific mouth injury or pathology. In those cases, I would personally prefer to go bitless. It's not something we offer or sell at Fager.

How do you balance traditional biting principles with the need for modern, anatomical innovation?

Honestly? Mostly common sense. I'm a little allergic to the word "anatomical" because it's used for almost everything today, whereas horses are built very differently and accept very different things. But at the same time, I use the word myself because it's easy for people to understand.

For me, it's more important that riders understand what the bit actually does and why they are using it. If you can explain that simply, you've come a long way. As a company selling bits, I believe



we have a responsibility to educate riders, just as riders have a responsibility to learn what actually suits their own horse. People are always welcome to contact us; we love talking about bits.

Could you shed some light on the specific innovations Fager is currently developing for the future?

There are a lot of exciting things happening right now, even though I can't go into too much detail just yet - and it's not only bits we're developing.

On the bit side, we are currently testing a completely new cheekpiece design that addresses several issues I've been trying to improve for a long time. It's designed especially for sensitive horses that rub easily, but it also creates a nicer parallel angle from the corner of the mouth to the rein, giving clear guidance without feeling too stiff. I have very high hopes for this one, but it's still in the testing stage.

We're also continuing to expand our TPU series; our ultimate goal is to create the world's largest range of TPU and rubber bits. A completely new line called ComfyCurve will also launch in the near future, and our Basic Line is about to expand with several new mouthpieces currently undergoing testing.

There's really no end to the ideas, and our goal is always to create something better than what is currently on the market. To accommodate all of these future innovations, we are even planning to extend our warehouse. I truly think what's coming next will make a lot of horses and riders happier.

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So yes, there's a lot happening on the bit side alone, and many of the upcoming releases are solutions that people truly haven't seen before. I really think they will make a lot of horses and riders happier.

When designing for sensitive horses, do you find the weight of the bit or the texture of the material to be more influential?

Today, almost every rider who reaches out to us says their horse is sensitive, and honestly, I understand why. If a horse accepts everything, there's usually no reason to look into changing bits!

But it's much more complex than simply labelling a horse "sensitive." We need to understand how the horse reacts, what equipment they are currently using, and which part of the contact they struggle with. Some horses actually prefer more weight or thickness in certain areas while needing less pressure in others. Our Sweet Gold series is often a brilliant option for them.

Texture also matters immensely. In general, I prefer smoother surfaces for sensitive horses. It should never feel rough, but it shouldn't feel too dry either, as that can increase the risk of friction and sores inside the mouth.

How do you ensure that a more complex bit design remains "stable" and "quiet" in the horse's mouth?

It's not always about making the bit completely still, but stability is vital. Correct fitting is truly the key to everything, much like I mentioned earlier with the Baby Fulmer. A bit that is too large or too small is usually what causes problems and rubbing.

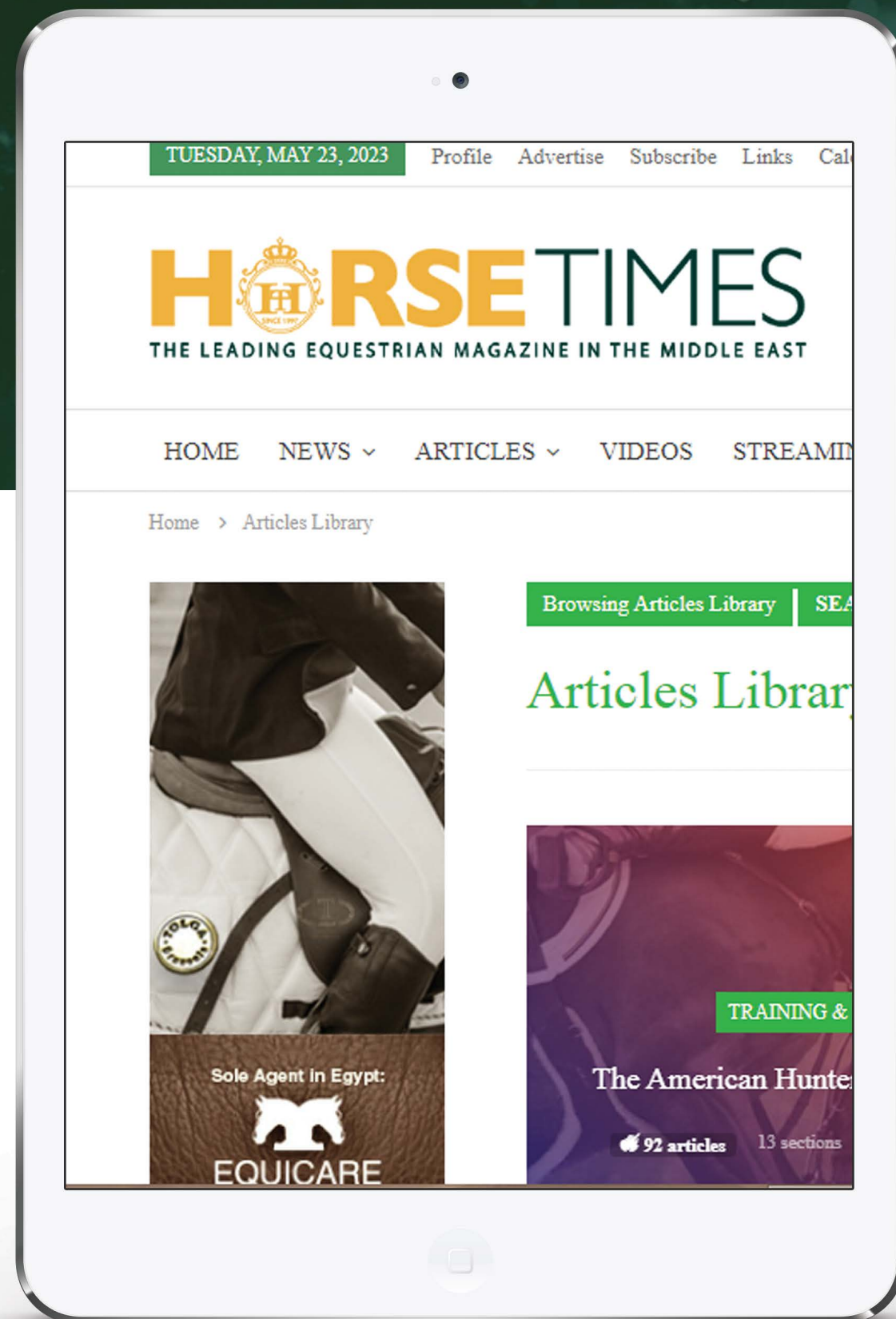
So, my biggest piece of advice is to learn how different bits actually function and ensure the fit is correct. If people are unsure, we always try to help as much as we can remotely, but having a qualified bit fitter see the horse in person is always even better.

Which bit in your current range are you most proud of?

The development of the Soft Joints was a massive step in the right direction—the Maria, for example, is still a fantastic bit. But right now, I'm probably most proud of the new designs currently in testing. We are working on a new double-lock system with a very smooth finish, and I'm actually sitting here with the 3D print in my hand right now. It's going to be incredible. 🐾



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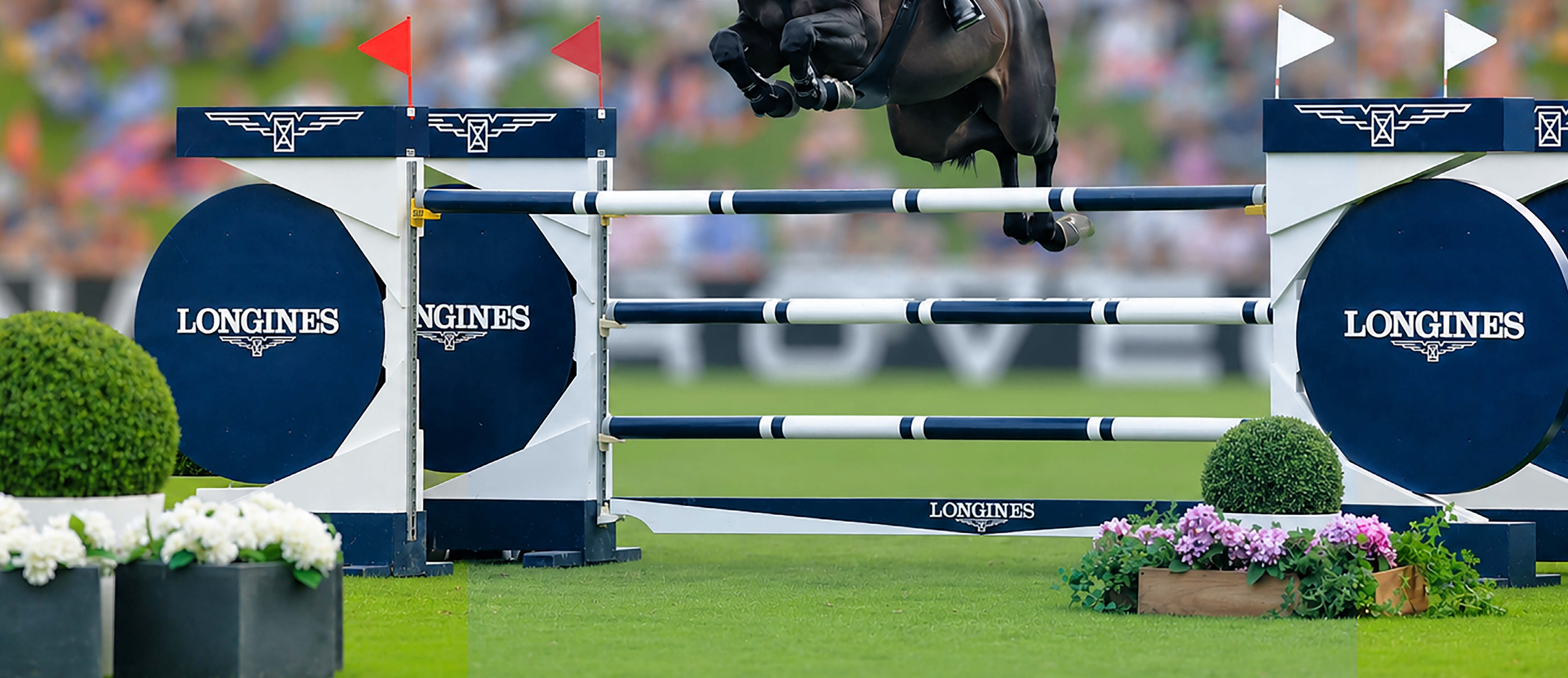
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HORSETIMES
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MARCUS EHNING
WINS THE LONGINES GRAND PRIX
OF SWITZERLAND
AT CSIO5 ST. GALLEN



GERMANY'S MARCUS EHNING HAS WON THE LONGINES GRAND PRIX OF SWITZERLAND, THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE LONGINES CSIO ST. GALLEN. JUDGED ON PENALTIES AND TIME WITH A WINNING ROUND OVER FENCES UP TO 160CM IN HEIGHT, THE COMPETITION, WHICH FEATURED 500,000 EUROS IN PRIZE MONEY, COUNTED TOWARD THE LONGINES WORLD RANKINGS AND SERVED AS A QUALIFIER FOR THE 2026 WORLD EQUESTRIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS IN AACHEN.

Germany's Marcus Ehning has won the Longines Grand Prix of Switzerland, the highlight of the Longines CSIO St. Gallen. Judged on penalties and time with a winning round over fences up to 160cm in height, the competition, which featured 500,000 Euros in prize money, counted toward the Longines World Rankings and served as a qualifier for the 2026 World Equestrian Championships in Aachen.

Riding Coolio 42, Ehning delivered double clear rounds, finishing the winning round in 46.08 seconds. 🏆

Photos via St. Gallen





MORE THAN JUST LINES ON PAPER IN THE ARENA WITH GRÉGORY BODO

FROM THE RIDING CLUBS OF EASTERN FRANCE TO THE WORLD STAGE OF THE PARIS OLYMPICS, THIS EXCLUSIVE HORSE TIMES INTERVIEW EXPLORES THE REMARKABLE CAREER OF GRÉGORY BODO. WE TRACE HIS JOURNEY FROM A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD RIDER IN FORBACH TO A WORLD-LEADING COURSE DESIGNER, DISCUSSING THE DELICATE BALANCE BETWEEN TECHNICAL PRECISION AND EQUINE WELFARE.

DESPITE HIS GLOBAL RECOGNITION, BODO REMAINS REFRESHINGLY GROUNDED, BRINGING A SENSE OF HUMOUR AND HUMILITY TO HIS CRAFT. HE SHARES HIS INSIGHTS ON THE “MUSICAL” FLOW OF A WORLD-CLASS TRACK, THE IMMENSE PRESSURE OF GLOBAL CHAMPIONSHIPS, AND WHY THE HISTORIC BOND BETWEEN HORSE AND HUMAN REMAINS THE HEARTBEAT OF THE SPORT.

ROOTS & EARLY PASSIONS:

How did growing up in Eastern France shape your passion for showjumping and course design?

I had the opportunity to live in Forbach for more than 20 years across a large equestrian centre named 'Mont Dragon' in Moselle (North East of France). I was a showjumping rider, and everyday I had the opportunity to grow and develop in the presence of horses. My family allowed me to fully commit to this sport, and it became a true passion. From the age of 15, I was interested in the building of showjumping courses due to the high number of competitions organised at my riding club. Lorraine (North East of France) was very active in terms of showjumping competitions, with a good level of shows and many excellent riders and horses. I was lucky to meet competent and influential people who gave me the opportunity to continue my passion for course designing and to complete the various trainings and tests. In a relatively short time of eight years, I was able to reach the highest national level as a course designer.

When did you first realise that designing courses could become your life's work rather than just something you did for local competitions?

I think it was around the age of 18 when I was appointed regional course designer. My mentors trusted me and gave me the opportunity to build my first national-level competition at 140cm (named B1 back then) at the 'Etrier Verdunois' in Verdun - France, with a good couple of horses and riders. In the Grand Prix, I had eight clear-rounds and qualified for the jump-off. From that moment I must say that this role truly became a vocation to me - a passion above all and something I was completely committed to. I even stopped riding in order to dedicate myself fully to course designing.

You started riding at the age of seven, but what are your earliest memories of being around horses?

I have always been attracted to horses because I saw them everyday. My grandfather owned race-horses. I remember from the very beginning that I had a very good feeling with horses and an almost instinctive relationship.



I was never afraid, and quickly became competitive, telling myself that one day I would be a great rider...even though I was better as a course designer (laugh).

THE JOURNEY FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL:

Making that leap from regional shows to the world stage is a massive undertaking. What was the specific turning point that transformed you into an internationally recognised designer?

I think it was when I was about 25 years old and had many national competitions to manage. The key people in the sport began to realise that I had particular abilities for building courses. It was at that precise moment that I personally approached the Aachen School of Course Design in Aachen, Germany. This school was run by the well known course designer Arno Gego. He is the one (together with his close colleagues) who encouraged me and pushed me to pursue a career in this field. Of course, I must also say that my national federation contributed to developing my skills towards the international level.

You've mentioned the importance of that education, but I also recall you working with figures like Bill Juliac and Jean Paul Quque. Were there specific mentors in the nineties who truly

ly set you on this trajectory?

Of course, I need to thank many people at the regional and national levels who helped me reach a high level of expertise and gave me the opportunity to take part in a lot of competitions. I will never be able to thank enough the late Mr. Jean Collin, former course designer and President of the Lorraine Equestrian Area. I must also mention my mentor Michel Juliac, as well as many other people at higher levels who helped me to achieve the top international level. I have been fortunate and blessed to meet the right people at the right time.

As you began meeting those «right people» at major international venues, what were the biggest challenges you faced leaving the local circuit behind?

I wouldn't say they were challenges so much as



a sense of apprehension, because you are going into the unknown. You don't know the riders or the horses yet, since you have not previously worked with such a high-level group of competitors. The most important point is to remain yourself, continuing to do what people know you for and speak positively about.

How has your perspective on that role evolved from those first international steps to where you stand today?

It has evolved in the sense that you have gained more self-confidence. You know how to address both the technicalities and the subtleties of the course for horses and riders. Today, I have become a teacher; I am transferring my knowledge in addition to being a team leader and, of course, a kind of artist who creates—week after week—courses that provide a positive image of our sport.

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF COURSE DESIGN:

How would you define your style of course design? You are deeply committed to preserving horse welfare, making their safety your top priority. Can you please elaborate on why?

I have always appreciated courses that favour forward movement and fluidity. I love layouts with what I would call a “musical” flow - the drawing and design of the lines are incredibly important to me. My goal is to create difficulty for the riders to try to figure out rather than for the horses, which is perhaps the most delicate balance to achieve. My courses are respectful of the athletes; they are subtle and sometimes challenging, but always fair.

What inspires you when creating a course - the start lists, visual beauty, difficulty or innovation?

Wherever I go, one thing remains truly fundamental: horses must jump well and with confidence, from the opening classes of the show right through to the Grand Prix.

In the background, the field of competitors and the calibre of horses present are also critical factors, particularly regarding the questions you will ask of them in the ring. Ultimately, the type of competi-



tion, the time of year, the venue, and the available equipment all shape the philosophy you follow when designing the course.

Beyond that philosophy, can you walk us through the actual creative process when designing for a world-class event?

I focus primarily on the treble, double combinations, and the placement of the jumps. Sometimes we have to think about using natural obstacles, such as the water jump or liverpools. Drawing the course on paper gives me the necessary indications to then determine the profile of the jumps, the distances, and the types of jumps, while ensuring a good balance of changes of rein throughout the course.

It sounds like a delicate balancing act. How do you weigh the expectations of the riders against those of the organisers and the spectators?

This is a question about feeling and based on one's experience. You learn to make different elements

work together: creating sport with real competition, providing excitement for the spectators, promoting equine well-being, and ensuring that horses can progress as well.

PARIS OLYMPICS & MAJOR PRESTIGE EVENTS:

How did it feel to be appointed as course designer for the Paris Olympics?

I felt a immense pride and a honour, what could be more wonderful than taking part in the most prestigious sporting event in the world? With Los Angeles 2028, it will be my third Olympic Games, and I am only 47...

What makes designing for the Olympics different from any other event?

Olympic courses are designed with very high standards. This event is prepared for by everyone, and on the day of competition, both horses and riders

will be at the peak of their performance. For this reason, the courses must be very subtle and not too demanding during the qualifiers because a few combinations are less experienced. You plan the courses for the Olympics for several months, while other events are organised as they go.

Which prestigious events have left the strongest mark on you, and why?

Two events left a strong impression on me at the very beginning of my career (at the highest level). The first was in Calgary, Canada, where I had the chance to design courses for several years; it's a magical and legendary place with a very special atmosphere. The second was in Lyon, France, through its wonderful leg of the FEI Jumping World Cup Final, and just for the record, it was my first five-star event in 2017.

What is the pressure like behind the scenes at this level?

The pressure is always there - you can't deny it - because otherwise it would mean you don't have a

passion for your job. Naturally, you want the competition to run smoothly, with high-quality sport. The stakes are significant such as money, animal welfare, and show itself. Also, the responsibilities on your shoulders continue to grow year after year.

PERSONAL DIMENSION & REFLECTIONS:

Looking back to the early days in Alsace Lorraine, what does it mean for you to have reached this level?

A vocation, a source of pride, and most certainly, it was already meant to be that way.

Do you ever think about how far you’ve come since those first local competitions in Forbach-Saint Avoird or Sarreguemines?

Yes, I think about these past events from time to time because I’m quite nostalgic; sometimes I visit the sites of these competitions, even though they no longer exist today.

How has your relationship with the sport - and with the people you met along the way, evolved over the years?

As I mentioned earlier, I was fortunate to meet important people who helped me grow in this job. I still have a good relationship with them, and I am very proud of that.

What keeps you motivated after decades in the field?

It’s simply the passion. The desire to do things well, to contribute to improving our sport, and to be a key player in the success of show jumping.

FUTURE OF THE SPORT AND ADVICE:

How do you envision the future of showjumping course design?

I have been following its evolution for decades, and in fact I have noticed major changes, both in terms of equipment and technology, as well as in the per-

formance levels of the horse-rider combinations. We cannot go beyond the physiological limits of the horses; therefore, certain technical and regulatory details will still need to evolve, but without compromising animal welfare.

What arguments would you defend against the ones who want a complete end of equestrian sports at the Olympics?

Why remove a sport that so profoundly embodies the harmony between animal and human? Horses have always been an integral part of our existence; together, we have traveled through centuries of history. I find it inconceivable that one of mankind’s greatest partnerships might disappear from the sporting record.

What advice would you give to young designers who want to follow in your footsteps?

You must always believe in what you do and never give up. I believe that the passion and love for horses must come first, and that money should not be the main motivation. Hard work will pay off at some point. Another important aspect of our role is the ability to question yourself and never think that you are the best, because one day the sport will remind you of your place.

Are there innovations or trends you believe will redefine the sport in the next decade?

For the moment, the only innovations that can be expected will concern the equipment used to build the courses, rules, competition surfaces/footing, and perhaps judging techniques.

You have never been in Saudi Arabia, which event you would have loved to taking part and why?

No, I do not know that part of the world. I only took part in the competition in Doha in 2013, but as an assistant. Unfortunately, I do not have experience the Kingdom, although I know of the Riyadh competitions by reputation.



YOUR HUMAN SIDE:

What moment in your career has moved you emotionally the most?

When I became a Level 3 Course Designer in 2012, and without a doubt when I was appointed a Level 4 Course Designer and Technical Delegate in 2019.

What do you wish more people understood about the work of a course designer?

I think it is very complicated for the public to understand our job. In fact, most people are not aware that this role even exists or what our responsibilities entail. Fortunately, in recent years equestrian sports have become much more visible in the media; because of this, course designers have had more opportunities to explain their work and the challenges involved. It is important to understand that our job is neither an exact science, nor is it

based on mathematical programming. It is based entirely on human qualities.

If you could speak to your 20yearold self, what would you tell him?

You are the most handsome and you are the best! (Laugh)

How do you stay grounded despite the prestige and global recognition?

Never forget where you come from, and never try to be someone else, even despite the success. My family upbringing gave me the foundations to become a modest person.

Eventually, let me share this quote with you: “Talent is almost nothing; experience is everything, and it is gained through humility and hard work.” ~ Patrick Suskind (German writer)



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ABDEL SAÏD WINS €500,000 LGCT GRAND PRIX OF CANNES

An LGCT Event

ABDEL SAÏD GOT HIMSELF ANOTHER SPECTACULAR VICTORY IN THE €500,000 LONGINES GLOBAL CHAMPIONS TOUR GRAND PRIX OF CANNES, STEERING WATHNAN ZASOU VOM CLAASHOF THROUGH A BREATHLESS, FAST, DOUBLE-CLEAR JUMP-OFF IN 39.44 SECONDS. SET AGAINST THE GLAMOUR OF A SOLD-OUT RIVIERA CROWD, THE BELGIAN RIDER OUTPACED RUNNER-UP MICHAEL PENDER ON HHS CYPRUS AND THIRD-PLACED JANNE FRIEDERIKE MEYER-ZIMMERMANN ON CELLAGON CASCAIS.

Uliano Vezzani's demanding 1.60m course caught out many pre-competition favourites, leaving just four riders to battle it out against the clock. Pender set an early target of 41.35 seconds, which Meyer-Zimmermann couldn't quite catch, before Saïd took daring inside turns to shave nearly two seconds off the leading time. Last to go, Andreas Schou risked it all for a win but picked up four faults at the fifth fence, handing Saïd the coveted title. 🏆

Photo by LGCT



PAUL MCAULEY

THE IRISH HORSEMAN AT THE HELM



MAJOR INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOWS LOOK EFFORTLESS TO THE UNTRAINED EYE. THE FOOTING IS PERFECT, THE STABLING IS IMMACULATE, THE LOGISTICS ARE SEAMLESS, AND THE HORSES ARE THRIVING. BUT THAT EFFORTLESS PERFECTION DOESN'T HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT, IT'S PLANNED BY THE PEOPLE AT THE HELM. ENTER PAUL MCAULEY.

WITH A CAREER SPANNING OVER FOUR DECADES ACROSS IRELAND AND THE MIDDLE EAST, MCAULEY IS THE ULTIMATE OPERATIONAL ARCHITECT. HE'S THE QUIET FORCE BEHIND WORLD-CLASS EQUESTRIAN FACILITIES AND COMPETITIONS, DRIVEN BY A SIMPLE, UNCOMPROMISING PHILOSOPHY: HORSE WELFARE ALWAYS COMES FIRST. CURRENTLY IN A NEW ROLE CONTRIBUTING TO THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL EQUESTRIAN SPORT AS A CONSULTANT FOR THE AMBITIOUS ROYAL COMMISSION FOR ALULA IN SAUDI ARABIA, MCAULEY SPOKE WITH HORSE TIMES TO DISCUSS THE EVOLUTION OF THE SPORT, THE LOGISTICS OF ENDURANCE RACING, AND WHY TRUE SUCCESS IS ALWAYS BUILT BEHIND THE SCENES.

Paul, coffee or tea, and how strong are we talking?

I enjoy a medium-strength Americano, nothing too strong, just a good, balanced coffee.

If you didn't have any responsibilities, how would you spend your days?

I would spend my days with my wife, Áine, at our home and farm in Ireland, enjoying the countryside, the wildlife, and the slower pace of life that comes with it. I would love to have the freedom to take the occasional road trip around Europe, discover new places, revisit old favourites, and perhaps play a few rounds of golf along the way. Of course, horses would still be part of my life. Whether that was breeding and raising a few young horses or simply having them around the farm, I don't think you ever truly leave the horse





world behind. It has been such a big part of my life that I can't imagine not being involved with it in some way.

Onto horse talk now; you have spent more than three decades working across Ireland and the Middle East. How has the international horse industry evolved during your career, and what changes have impressed you the most?

In my opinion, the biggest changes have been in breeding, transportation, and the overall professionalism of the industry. When I started, many

of the technologies and systems we now take for granted simply did not exist. Breeding has become far more accessible through the use of artificial insemination, allowing bloodlines to be shared across continents with relative ease. Likewise, transporting horses internationally has become much more efficient, with top competition horses regularly flying around the world to compete. Whether they are racehorses, endurance horses, polo ponies, or showjumpers, international travel is now a normal part of professional careers in the equine space. I have also been impressed by the rise in professional standards across the industry.

Facilities, event organisation, veterinary care, and horse welfare have all improved enormously. The sport has become far more professional at every level, and that is something I am very pleased to have witnessed during my career.

Your experience spans multiple disciplines, from showjumping, dressage, and eventing to endurance. What are the biggest operational differences when directing events in these very different equestrian worlds?

While each discipline has its own unique requirements, the fundamentals of running a success-

ful event remain remarkably similar. Whether it is showjumping, dressage, eventing, or endurance, the priority is always horse welfare, competitor experience, safety, and delivering a professionally organised event. The biggest operational differences are usually logistical. Showjumping and dressage are largely arena-based disciplines, where footing, course preparation, scheduling, and spectator experience are key considerations. Eventing introduces the added complexity of cross-country courses, requiring extensive planning, course maintenance, safety measures, and a much larger operational footprint. Endurance is different again. It is less about what happens in a competition arena and more about managing horses over long distances and often challenging terrain. Veterinary services, horse welfare protocols, route management, logistics, and coordination across many kilometres become the primary focus. In endurance, the event can cover vast areas and involve hundreds of people working behind the scenes to ensure everything runs smoothly.

Behind every successful horse show is a strong organisational structure. What do you believe are the key ingredients for delivering a world-class equestrian event?

A world-class equestrian event is never the result of one person. It is the result of a strong team, clear leadership, attention to detail, and a shared commitment to delivering the best possible experience for everyone involved. First and foremost, you need people who understand horses. Every decision, whether it relates to scheduling, footing, stabling, logistics, or facilities, should be made with horse welfare at the centre. If you get that right, everything else becomes much easier. Communication is equally important. An Event Director must be able to bring together governing federations, officials, riders, owners, grooms, sponsors, staff, and spectators, all of whom have different expectations and priorities. The ability to build trust and maintain strong relationships across all those groups is one of the most important aspects of the job. Attention to detail is another key ingredient. Competitors may only notice a handful of things when they



arrive, but they will certainly notice if something has been overlooked. The same applies to spectators. A successful event should not only cater to those competing, but also create an enjoyable experience for the public. Spectators bring atmosphere, energy, and support to the sport, and ensuring they leave with a positive impression is an important part of any event's success. The best events are often the ones where everything appears effortless, because hundreds of people have worked behind

the scenes to ensure every detail has been considered. One piece of advice I have always given my teams is simple: if someone comes through our gates smiling, they should leave smiling. Whether I was running a riding school, an equestrian centre, or an international competition, that philosophy never changed. If riders, owners, sponsors, staff, and spectators all feel welcome, valued, and eager to return, then you know you have delivered something special.

You have extensive expertise in breeding and raising top-class stock destined for racing. What qualities do you look for when identifying future elite horses at an early stage?

The first thing I look for is natural athleticism. A young horse should have a good frame, correct conformation, particularly in the forelegs and feet, and move freely, efficiently, and with balance. Just as importantly, I look for temperament. A horse can have all the physical attributes in the world, but without the right attitude it is unlikely to fulfil its potential. I like to see a horse that is sensible, willing, trainable, and comfortable with the job it will eventually be asked to do. Elite horses often possess something that is difficult to define but easy to recognise when you see it, a natural presence, intelligence, and an ability to adapt and learn. Of course, identifying potential is only the beginning. Good management, veterinary care, and farrier support all play a crucial role in a horse's development. In many cases, the foundations laid during those early years can make the difference between a good horse and an exceptional one.

Stable design is another important part of your work. How do you combine horse welfare, functionality, and modern technology when planning and overseeing equestrian facilities?

When planning an equestrian facility, regardless of its size, the starting point is always the client's brief, the intended purpose of the facility, and the welfare of the horse. There is no single design that suits every operation. A breeding farm, a racing yard, a showjumping facility, and a stallion barn will all have different requirements, and the design must reflect that. For example, stallions are generally best housed in quieter areas where they are less likely to become stressed or distracted by the day-to-day activity of the yard. By contrast, a

busy competition yard may require a layout that prioritises efficient movement of horses, staff, and equipment while maintaining a calm and safe environment. Regardless of the discipline, good stable design starts with understanding the horse's physical and psychological needs, then creating a facility that works efficiently for horses, staff, owners, riders, and visitors alike. In terms of design, I generally favour the American barn-style layout, with wide passageways and generously sized stables. Features such as Dutch doors and rear windows help improve airflow and create a more comfortable environment. Horses are naturally social animals, so wherever possible I believe stable partitions should allow them to see and interact with one another while maintaining appropriate safety standards. Ventilation is one of the most important aspects of any equestrian facility. Having spent many years working in the Middle East, I have seen first-hand how critical cooling and airflow systems are in hot climates. In cooler regions, such as Ireland, good air circulation remains equally important, although care must be taken to avoid direct draughts. Technology has become an excellent support tool, but it should never replace good horsemanship. Today it assists with administration, record keeping, horse health monitoring, communication, and overall facility management. Surveillance systems have also become invaluable, helping improve security and providing important information when incidents occur. Used correctly, technology complements good management and ultimately contributes to better horse welfare.

Having worked extensively in the Middle East, how have you seen the region's equestrian industry develop over the years, particularly in terms of professionalism and ambition?

When I first arrived in the Middle East in 2005, there was already a deep passion for horses and

a busy calendar of equestrian events. However, the industry was still developing in terms of structure, governance, and professionalism. Over the following years, there was a conscious effort across the region to raise standards and create stronger pathways for riders, horses, and officials. Initiatives such as the Group VII World Cup Qualifiers, national competition leagues, and the introduction of training shows played an important role in that development. In particular, training shows provided invaluable opportunities for novice riders, young horses, and aspiring professionals to gain experience and progress through the sport. What has impressed me most is the ambition and willingness to invest in long-term development. Today, the region is home to some of the finest equestrian facilities and events in the world. Standards of organisation, horse welfare, and competition infrastructure continue to improve, and the proof of that success can be seen in the number of international riders who now choose to spend their winter seasons competing here. The Middle East is no longer simply participating in the international equestrian community; in many respects, it is helping to shape its future.

Much of your reputation has been built behind the scenes rather than in the spotlight. What motivates you to continue working tirelessly in roles that are often unseen by the public? Could the Albert Einstein quote be your motto, “Try not to be a man of success, but rather try to become a man of values?”

I've always been a results-driven person rather than someone focused on recognition, and over the years I've realised that my greatest motivation comes from working within a team and helping others achieve success together. Many years ago, I realised that my greatest strengths were not necessarily in the saddle, but on the ground around horses. Whether it was managing stud farms, operating equestrian centres, directing competitions,



designing facilities, or supporting my daughters through endurance riding, I found real satisfaction in helping others succeed and watching ideas develop into successful projects. Some of the most rewarding moments in my career have not been the headlines or the trophies, but seeing riders progress, facilities thrive, events grow, and people develop confidence in their abilities. Knowing that I may have played a small role in helping that happen has always been enough motivation for me.

After retirement, you chose to return to the industry as an equestrian consultant for the Royal Commission for AlUla in Saudi Arabia. What inspired you to take on this new challenge?

To be honest, I never really retired from horses. I have always remained involved in the industry through consultancy work on private equestrian facilities. Horses have been such a significant part of my life that stepping away completely was never really an option. When I was approached by the Royal Commission for AlUla, what attracted me most was the opportunity to help build something from the ground up. It was an ambitious vision with a long-term commitment to equestrian sport, horse welfare, tourism, and community development. Those are the types of projects I have always enjoyed being involved in. Since joining the Equestrian Development Team, I have had the privilege of helping guide a number of important initiatives, from international events to the development of new facilities. Seeing those projects move from concept to reality has been incredibly rewarding.

AlUla is becoming an increasingly important destination for sport, culture, and heritage. What opportunities do you see for equestrian development in the region in the coming years?

The opportunities for equestrian development in AlUla are tremendous, and in many ways, we are only

at the beginning of that journey. One of our immediate milestones is the opening of our first dedicated equestrian centre, located alongside the existing competition village. The facility has been designed to support a wide range of activities, including livery services, riding school programmes, equestrian tourism, veterinary care, and farrier services. It represents an important step in creating a sustainable equestrian ecosystem within the region. At the same time, we are continuing to expand our competition infrastructure, including additional stabling facilities ahead of hosting the FEI World Endurance Championship. Looking further ahead, plans for an equine terminal at AIUla International Airport have the potential to strengthen not only AIUla's position but also that of the wider western region of Saudi Arabia as an international equestrian destination. What excites me most is that this development is about much more than hosting events. It is about creating opportunities for local riders, supporting horse ownership and education, promoting tourism, and building an equestrian culture that can be enjoyed for generations to come.



Looking back on your remarkable international career, what achievements make you the proudest, and what legacy would you ultimately like to leave within the horse industry?

Professionally, I am proud of every facility, event, and programme I have helped create, develop, or improve throughout my career. From stud farms and equestrian centres to international competitions and training shows, each project has brought its own challenges and opportunities, and each has contributed in some way to the journey. If there is a common thread running through all of them, it is a focus on raising standards, creating opportunities, and always putting the welfare of the horse

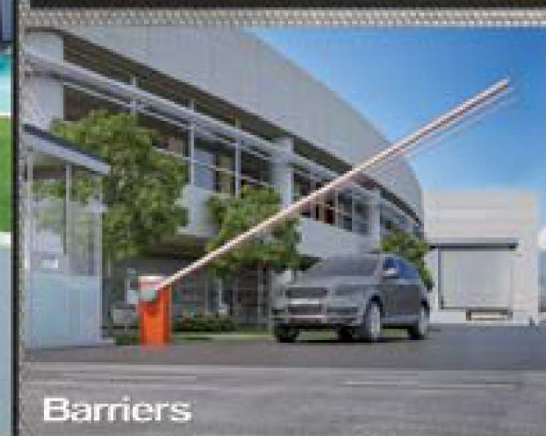
first. Throughout my career, I have tried to build environments where horses, riders, owners, and staff can all thrive, whether through facilities, events, education, or mentorship.

Personally, without question, the achievements of my daughters in endurance riding are what I am most proud of. Watching them develop their own passion for horses, work hard, and succeed in the sport has been far more rewarding than anything else I have achieved professionally. I remain as interested in the industry today as I ever have been, and I continue to enjoy being involved in projects that move it forward.

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PIERGIORGIO BUCCI TRIUMPHS IN A HISTORIC ROLEX GRAN PREMIO ROMA

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UNDER REFRESHING ITALIAN SUNSHINE AND IN FRONT OF A PACKED CROWD GATHERED IN THE MAGNIFICENT SETTING OF THE VILLA BORGHESE, THE ROLEX GRAN PREMIO ROMA DELIVERED A THRILLING CONCLUSION TO THE 100TH EDITION OF CSIO ROMA PIAZZA DI SIENA.



The highlight of the week on the Rolex Series calendar brought together 45 qualified riders for the prestigious two-round competition, designed by renowned Italian course designer Uliano Vezzani. Featuring 13 obstacles and 16 jumping efforts in the opening round, the technical and demanding 1.60m course immediately proved a true test of skill, precision and partnership.

Ireland's Denis Lynch and Vistogrand were the first to tackle the track. A rail at the oxer following the double combination resulted in four penalties, demonstrating the challenge awaiting the field.

Among the early contenders was defending champion Yuri Mansur, winner of the 2025 Rolex Gran Premio Roma. Riding QH Alfons Santo Antonio, the Brazilian incurred faults at the Rolex Series wall and another fence, joining a growing list of riders unable to master the demanding first-round course.

The Rolex Series wall quickly emerged as one of the most challenging obstacles of the afternoon, catching out numerous combinations and contributing to a tricky opening round where clear rounds proved extremely difficult to achieve.

As the competition progressed, riders realised that speed would become increasingly important in the battle to secure one of the coveted places in the second round.

The crowd finally witnessed the first faultless performance from Germany's Richard Vogel, one of the pre-event favourites and Rolex Testimonee. Riding Cloudio, Vogel delivered a top controlled round to become the first rider to complete the course without penalties.

More clear rounds followed. Khaled Almobyty and Diana du Plevau Z produced another excellent

performance for Saudi Arabia, while Marilyn Little and La Contessa added their names to the growing list of qualified riders.

The home crowd were on their feet when their own countryman Piergiorgio Bucci, riding Pallieter vd N.Ranch, produced an immaculate round. Germany's Jörne Sprehe with Toys and Sophie Hinners riding Iron Dames Combella also secured their places in the second round.

Last to enter the arena, Spain's Armando Trapote and Tornado VS delighted spectators with another clear round, ensuring an amazing conclusion to the



opening phase of the competition.

At the end of the first round, only seven riders remained on a score of zero. They were joined in the second round by six combinations carrying four penalties, including the fastest four-fault rider, Italy's Giulia Martinengo Marquet and Delta Del'Isle. Fellow Italians Riccardo Pisani and Chacco's Lawito PS, Olympic medallist Laura Kraut riding Baloutinue, Sweden's Wilma McMahon with Cicci BJN and Mexico's Andres Azcarraga riding Contendros 2 also progressed.

The second round, featuring eight obstacles, promised another intense showdown.

First to go in, Andres Azcarraga, retired before completing the course, while Wilma McMahon produced a clear round to remain on a total of four penalties.

Among the clear-round qualifiers, Jörne Sprehe was the first to return. Setting an ambitious pace, the German rider looked set for a leading performance before a rail down at the final fence added four penalties.

Then came the moment the Italian crowd had been waiting for.

Piergiorgio Bucci delivered a magnificent second

clear round, becoming the first rider to achieve a double clear. The atmosphere around the arena was electric as the home favourite moved into the lead and applied immense pressure on the remaining contenders.

One by one, the challengers attempted to surpass Bucci's benchmark. It all came down to the final rider, Germany's Sophie Hinner with Iron Dames Combella. A clear round would have secured her a win, but a costly fault at the final fence handed the win to the Italian rider.

The Villa Borghese exploded in celebration as Piergiorgio Bucci claimed a memorable victory on home soil, adding his name to the prestigious Rolex Gran Premio Roma honour roll during the centenary edition of the CSIO Roma Piazza di Siena.

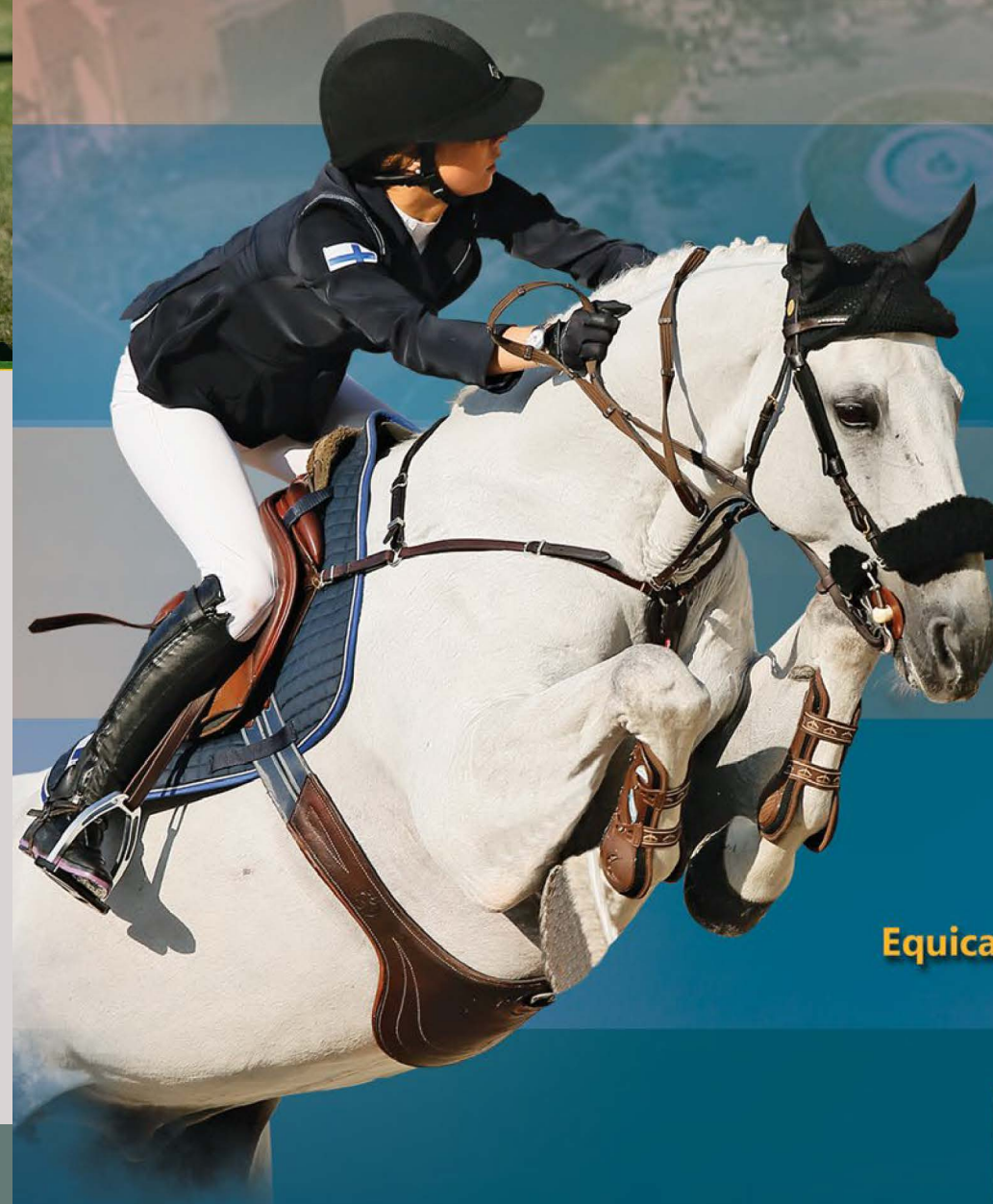
Rolex Gran Premio Roma Final Podium:

- 1 Piergiorgio Bucci (ITA) on Pallieter VD N.Ranch
- 2 Jörne Sprehe (GER) on Toys
- 3 Richard Vogel (GER) on Cloudio

Photos by Rolex Series

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RICHARD VOGEL WINS THE ELUSIVE ROLEX GRAND PRIX OF AACHEN

A Rolex Grand Slam of Showjumping Event

IN AN AMAZING DISPLAY OF PRECISION AND
SPEED, GERMANY'S RICHARD VOGEL AND HIS
UNRIVALLED 14-YEAR-OLD STALLION UNITED
TOUCH S, CAPTURED A WIN IN THE ROLEX GRAND
PRIX AT CHIO AACHEN.





Entering a packed, electric Soers arena under immense pressure as the Rolex Grand Slam of Show-jumping Live Contender, Vogel delivered flawless three-round clears to capture back-to-back Major victories and claim a glorious €500,000 bonus.

The demanding course designed by Frank Rothenberger, pushed the world's best to their limits. Only three horse-and-rider combinations managed to survive the demanding initial rounds to advance to the decisive jump-off.

First to set the pace was Vogel's business and competition partner, Sophie Hinners, who clocked a clear round in 51.62 seconds riding Iron Dames Singclair.

Unfazed, Vogel took to the arena and chased down the lead, crossing the timers in a blistering 45.57 seconds.

Last to challenge was Argentina's José María La-

rocca, who put up a valiant effort riding Finn Lente. Stopping the clock in 47.36 seconds, Larocca secured second place, splitting the field to leave Germany with a one-three finish at the top of the podium.

"A deeply emotional victory and a childhood dream realized on the sport's grandest stage," an ecstatic Vogel shared.

This win marks consecutive Major titles for Vogel following his victory at The Dutch Masters in March, keeping his pursuit of the ultimate equestrian grand slam alive as the journey heads to the CSIO Spruce Meadows 'Masters' Tournament. For the young German, winning in front of an ecstatic home crowd also redeemed a heart-breaking final-fence penalty from two years prior - sealing a monumental milestone in his career. 

*Photos by Baroness Ludwiga von Korff
Rolex/Tom Lovelock*



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AN EQUESTRIAN GLOBETROTTER IN EVERY SENSE, JEAN-YVES CAMENEN IS WIDELY RESPECTED FOR BRINGING FRENCH EXPERTISE TO MORE THAN 50 COUNTRIES, INCLUDING EGYPT. FOR MANY EGYPTIAN RIDERS AND FEDERATION MEMBERS FROM THE GENERATION X AND MILLENNIAL ERAS, HE REMAINS A WELL-KNOWN AND INFLUENTIAL FIGURE.

IN THIS EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW FOR HORSE TIMES, WE EXPLORE THE CAREER OF A MAN WHO HAS SHAPED THE SPORT ACROSS THE REGION. OUR OWN PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY BEGAN IN THE MID-NINETIES; WHILE CAMENEN WAS COACHING THE EGYPTIAN SHOWJUMPING TEAM, I WAS COACHING THE QATARI TEAM. WE MET FREQUENTLY AT INTERNATIONAL EVENTS FROM DAMASCUS AND AMMAN TO DOHA AND CAIRO.

CAMENEN EVENTUALLY BECAME A KEY FIGURE IN MY OWN CAREER. WHEN MY TIME IN QATAR ENDED, HE ENCOURAGED ME TO MOVE TO ALEXANDRIA, WHERE I WORKED FOR FIVE YEARS. LATER, AS I PREPARED TO LEAVE EGYPT, HE GUIDED ME TOWARD A ROLE WITH ARAMCO IN SAUDI ARABIA. A POST I HELD FOR THE NEXT 22 YEARS.

What is the most unusual skill that has actually helped you in your career?

My sense of humour! It's often questionable, but my lamest jokes have often broken the ice in tough situations. My self-deprecating sense of humour has saved me from plenty of missteps!

If you could swap jobs with anyone for a day, who would it be?

With you. So I could ask you silly questions instead of having to answer them.

On a serious note, your career of 40+ years has been quite diverse; rider, instructor, breeder, manager and entrepreneur. How did your journey with horses begin, and what first drew you to this world?

My journey in equestrian sports began, like that of many children in France, around the age of 12, at a riding school. Very quickly, I was drawn first to competition, and then to the desire to better understand and get to know horses. After putting my studies on hold and completing my military service (in Saumur), I began my professional career at the age of 23. My professional journey can be "summarised" as follows:

- Eight years as an employee at a riding centre to learn the job, obtain my instructor's certification, and advance in competition.

- Eight years as a self-employed entrepreneur, starting my first business - Sports Equestres Promotion - and diversifying its activities. It was during this time that I began travelling abroad to try to open up new markets.

- Eight years internationally, including six as chef d'équipe and coach of the Egyptian showjumping team, and two as Manager of the Oman Royal Stables.

-15 years as General Manager of UNIC.

Since 2017, I have been self-employed in various commercial and consulting activities: founding of my company C2C, shareholder of Fences, then founder of Equinia and Horses Equity, as well as technical and commercial partnership with Haras San Isidro and Haras Verley in Europe and Colombia

As a French horseman, what values or traditions from the French equestrian system have shaped your philosophy the most throughout your career?

Primarily my training in Saumur: the importance of method, the need for sufficient theoretical knowledge (joint mechanics, anatomy and educational psychology), respect for the horse and for oneself, and accepting the long-term commitment required to train both riders and horses.

I was fortunate to work with great riding instructors such as General Durand, Francis Rebel, and Jean Paul Magnien to name a few.

My relationships and exchanges with many professionals, notably Thierry Pomel and Eric Navet taught me precious and valuable concepts.

You have worked both in the saddle and behind the scenes at the highest levels. Which role has taught you the most: rider, coach, breeder, manager, Fences partner or your current role at Equinia?

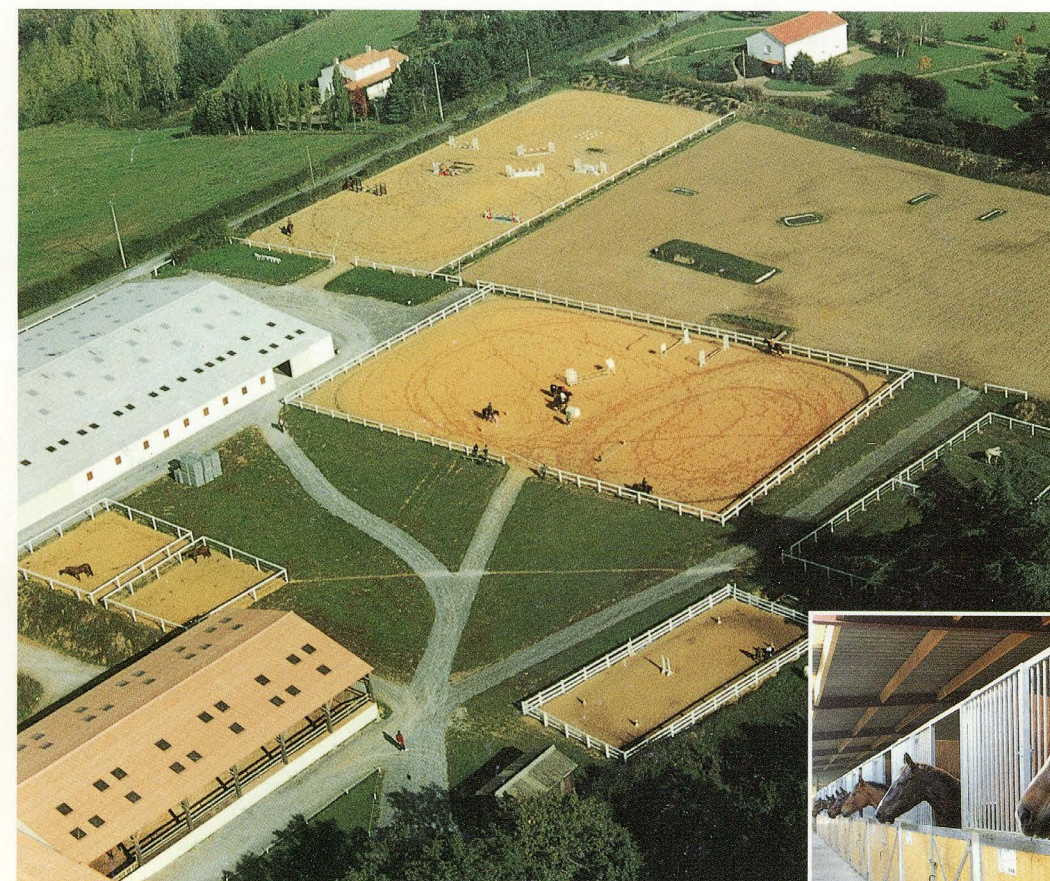
I learned from every step along the way. Looking back, I realise that I followed a certain logic, with each stage of my career laying the groundwork for the next.

The first eight years of my professional life were focused on learning the job of rider and trainer and on competition.

The following years were divided between business creation and management, and expanding my knowledge and activities (commerce, breeding centre, breaking in, competition.



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Carrière : 80 m x 40 m
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Parcours d'extérieur
Indoor Arena : 30 m x 20 m
Outdoor Ring : 80 m x 40 m
C.S.O. Jumping terrain (grass) : 100 m x 70 m
Outdoor training field



- Débourage/Dressage de jeunes chevaux
- Préparation et compétition : cycles classiques 4-5-6 ans
- Stages de perfectionnement C.S.O. (3 enseignants D.E.)
- Pensions
- Achat/Vente de chevaux de sports
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- Training of young horses
- Preparation and competition : classic cycles for 4-5-6 years-old.
- Internships for C.S.O. (3 instructors with state Diploma)
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- Buying/Selling of sport horses
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Renseignements :

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Fax : (33) 40 09 01 61

The skills I gained during these first two periods allowed me to move abroad to train at a high level.

Then came UNIC, an extraordinary period for expanding my knowledge: about horses (sport horses, but also racehorses and draft horses) and about all the professions and people connected to this industry. After returning to the private sector, Fences, Equinia, and a few other ventures allowed me to consolidate my skills in the commercial field.

Currently, I'm trying to make the most of these skills while narrowing my scope of work a bit. I am not getting any younger, so I'm trying to distill what I love most about the various professions I've practiced and share it with a trusted network.

During your tenure as Egyptian National Showjumping Trainer, what were the biggest challenges and satisfactions of working with a national team?

There were many challenges. First, the personal challenge; I knew nothing about Egyptian culture or the country, and I'd brought my family along with me. On the technical side, the Egyptian Equestrian Federation had been looking for a trainer for quite some time, and the initial job description was quite far from the realities on the ground. Technical support was not structured at the national level, and the quality of horse feed, farrier, and veterinary cares fell far short of the set objectives.

On the other hand, my greatest satisfaction came from having been able to contribute to improving all these areas and to opening up the team to the outside world with trips to Europe, participations in events throughout the Middle East, the arrival of French experts such as Jackie Bachellereau, Alain Fangeaux, the late Francois Bouyer, Luc Geffré and Olivier Lepage. You of course, were there too

during that period, as well as Thierry Pomel.

I also take pride in knowing I helped nurture young riders. Today, they are no longer young, yes, but some still compete all over the world, and a few others, who have remained in Egypt, still honour me with their trust.

How would you describe the evolution of showjumping in Egypt during your time there, and what potential did you see in its riders and horses?

The potential of Egyptian riders was and remains enormous. Many Egyptian riders are "naturally gifted". For the horses, everything depended on their initial quality, but as with the riders, it is hard work and training that make the difference.

Thierry Pomel's guidance and trust were invaluable to me. The annual trips to Europe and the Middle East contributed greatly to everyone's progress.

I focused on course designing and the quality of the obstacles; a big thank you goes to course designer Luc Geffré, who has since passed away.

We improved veterinary care like never before with Olivier Lepage.

Through ongoing discussions, supplementary feeds were first imported and then even manufactured in Egypt. "Barsime" then ceased to cause gas colic, which was often fatal.

You also held the important position of Manager of the Oman Royal Stables. What did that experience teach you about horsemanship, discipline, and managing excellence at an elite level?

There, I discovered different approaches to work-



INFORMATION
Elevage, races
Dressage, compétition
Organismes spécialisés

INFORMATION
Breeding, breeds
Schooling, competition
Specialized organizations

UNIC, l'interlocuteur privilégié des visiteurs étrangers

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Circuits commerciaux
Plans d'élevage
Recherche d'interlocuteurs adaptés
Formalités (transport, exportation, conditions sanitaires)

ADVICE
Commercial networks
Breeding plans
Adapted contacts research
Process (horse transport, export, sanitary conditions)

FORMATION
Organisation de stages pour techniciens, professionnels et amateurs (vétérinaires, maréchaux ferrants, cavaliers, jockeys...)

VOCATIONAL TRAINING
Courses organization for technicians, professionals and amateurs (veterinarian, farriers, riders, jockeys...)

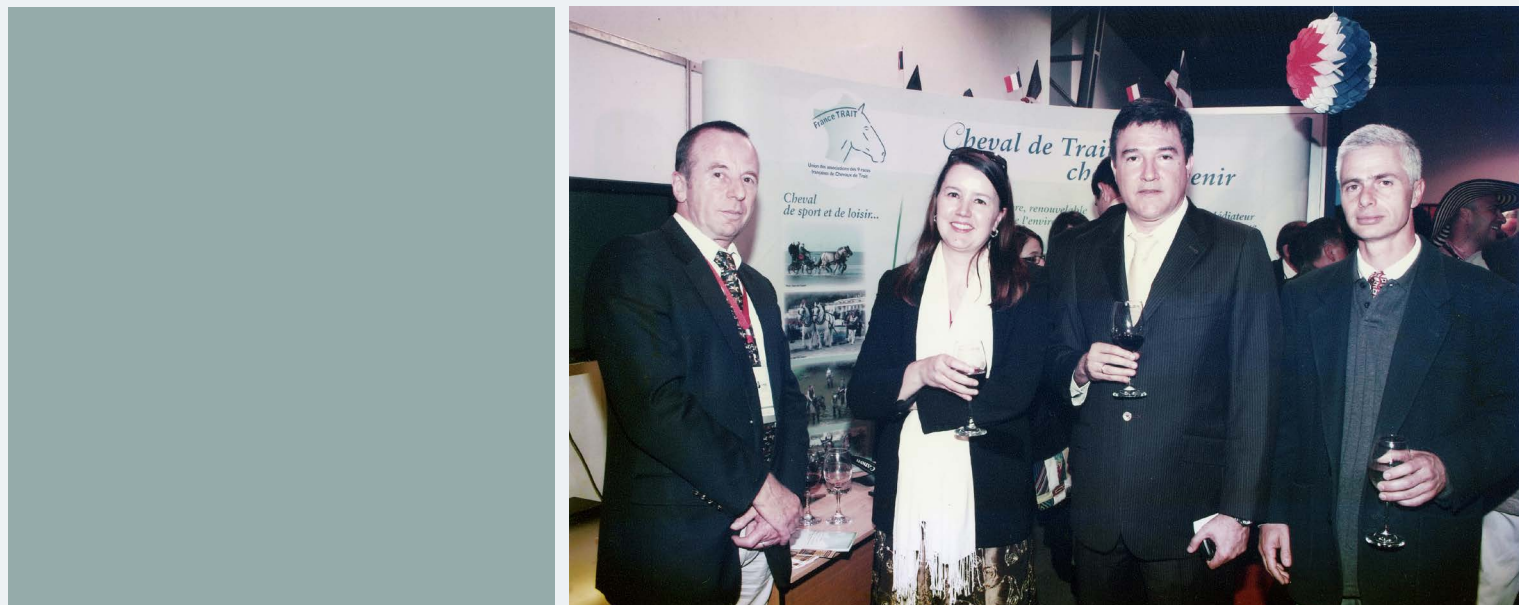
ASSISTANCE TECHNIQUE
Organisation de visites
Accompagnement bilingue (événements, manifestations)
Rassemblement de chevaux
Recherches (chevaux, matériels...)

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
Tours organization
Bilingual accompagnement
Horses gatherings
Purchase (horses, materials...)

UNIC, the key contact for foreign visitors in France

INTERVENTIONS A L'ETRANGER
Organisation de missions
Prospection
Plans de coopération
Opérations de promotion sur salons et foires
Partenariats (Sopexa, Ubifrance...)

INTERVENTIONS ABROAD
Observers missions organization
Canvassing
Cooperation plans
Promotion operations on exhibitions and fairs
Partnerships (Sopexa, Ubifrance...)



ing with and managing horses. The discipline was almost military in nature, and the goals were quite different. Many of the methods, particularly those related to breeding, were very cutting-edge. On the technical side, however, the lack of exposure to international competition was a limiting factor. Despite everything, it remained a wonderful experience in a beautiful country.

Having worked in different countries and equestrian cultures, how do you adapt your leadership and training methods to different riders, systems, and expectations?

The fundamentals of horsemanship remain the same everywhere; however, existing contexts, cultural and technical, must be taken into full account.

It is always a matter of striking a balance between substance and form; substance refers to the goal to be achieved and the technical resources available to reach it, in terms of people, horses and equipment.

Form is how we adapt our knowledge to the existing conditions on the ground. It is clear that we do not train a Chinese rider in the same way as an Egyptian rider. But we must teach them the same concepts and achieve the same types of goals.

The path may differ, the number of steps may vary, and priorities may sometimes shift, but the fundamentals remain the same: hard work, mutual respect for both horse and rider, adherence to a method and its logic of execution, and therefore acceptance of the time required.

As a trainer, what do you believe are the most important qualities a young rider must develop to build a lasting and successful career?

First and foremost, as in any sport, it is hard work and humility that yield results. Genius is 1% talent and 99% hard work as Albert Einstein said.

Next, you must respect the fundamentals: flat work, the hours required for learning, and an understanding of the horse's psychology and biomechanics. In this day and age, where deep thought has been replaced by scrolling on social network, it isn't always easy, but it is essential if you want to become more than just a "horse consumer."

Breeding is often described as both a science and an art. As a breeder yourself, what do you look for when producing or selecting a future sport horse?

I have some knowledge of breeding but don't claim to be an expert; besides, breeding is one thing, but



selection is quite another!!

Of course, studying maternal and paternal bloodlines is important, conformation must be taken into account, as must the competitive abilities and results of both the sire and the dam. But let's be realistic; we have very little knowledge of the genome and how it is passed down. If a stallion with a long back, crossed with a mare with a short back,

consistently produced a foal with a back of good length...it would be easy!

Thank goodness mother nature retains its own laws, and beyond the current bad trends in decline (Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection-ICSI, frozen embryos and excessive embryo transfers), I believe we still have a great deal to discover, particularly through epigenetics.

In the meantime, experience, good old-fashioned common sense, and a solid understanding of the subjects we are breeding remain essential.

You were also involved for over 15 years as General Manager of UNIC (Union Nationale Interprofessionnelle du Cheval) that exported the French equestrian know-how and expertise worldwide.

How important are strong organisations and vision in helping equestrian structures grow and remain relevant in today's industry?

It is true that my experience at UNIC has allowed me to visit more than 50 countries around the world and thus to compare not only the different technical levels but also the various cultural and meth-



odological approaches to the development of the sector. We are fortunate in France to have one of the most advanced sectoral systems in the world (even if politics and administrative constraints often undermine its effectiveness). The interfaces between breeding, sport (professional and amateur), and recreation are the cornerstones of how the system operates. Training (both professional and amateur) and funding sources remain its driving forces. Currently, I believe the major challenge for equestrian organisations is maintaining consistent technical foundations in a world that is becoming less and less focused on sports and increasingly driven by superficial and instant gratification.

Horseback riding, whether for leisure or sport, is the exact opposite. Staying relevant and profitable in this context is not easy. You can have fun playing

padel to avoid learning to play tennis, but if you apply that kind of approach to horseback riding, it's at the horse's expense. Therefore, only a return to basic values (as in any sport or recreational activity) will allow the equation work.

Your experience as a Fences agency associate gave you another unique understanding of the sport beyond riding itself. How much can course design, FEI rules and regulations influence the development of auctions and the way breeders breed?

Everything is interconnected; the wide variety of rules and regulations can influence the production and marketing of horses, but the positions taken by breeders, riders, and dealers drive, and sometimes even force, these rules and regulations to

evolve. The non-profit and the professional sectors still struggle to collaborate effectively to ensure the sustainable development of the industry as a whole. Professionalisation will remain the key to this evolution.

Today, as a partner at the horse auction platform Equinia, you are part of the digital transformation of the horse industry. How is technology changing the way horses are bought, sold, and valued?

The surge in online sales driven by COVID has significantly altered the behaviour of both buyers and sellers. Initially, the online sale of embryos sparked a veritable craze that bore little relation to market realities (whether frozen or fresh, from ICSI, sexed or unsorted). The birth of the offspring resulting from these sales and their often-unpredictable resale have brought this sector back to reality.

It is for foals and broodmares that these changes are most evident and long-lasting. Many breeders have noticed that the number of customers visiting their farms has dropped sharply. Some breeders have even gone so far as to offer them for sale exclusively through online auctions. For these two categories, many buyers have now gotten into the habit of purchasing them online based on photos and videos, without making a trip to the farm. Others make their selections first via videos and only visit the farm afterward.

For three-year-olds and older horses, the situation is somewhat different. New tools are increasingly being used (videos, photos, online veterinary visits), and online purchases are either at relatively low prices for mid-range horses or following trials and/or multiple exchanges with sellers for mid- to high-range horses

This new landscape gives rise to two key trends:

The surge in online sales has created an oversupply relative to a largely stagnant demand, leading to an automatic decline in average prices and/or an

increase in unsold inventory.

With the supply chain now largely digital, the veterinary requirements imposed by buyers are often excessive and unrealistic.

Generally speaking, markets have become more transparent for buyers, and potential buyers are better informed. However, exceptional products remain subject to confidentiality and are traded exclusively among experts and through appropriate sales organisations.

What advice would you give to owners, riders, or investors when it comes to identifying quality horses in an increasingly competitive international market?

Nothing can replace the advice of a trusted professional. Today's tools can save time and help better define a buyer's expectations, but acquiring real knowledge takes time and can't be gained on Facebook or through tutorials. While the range of options is certainly broader and more accessible, the risk of getting lost in it has increased accordingly.

Looking back on such a diverse and international career, what continues to inspire you today and what legacy would you like to leave in the equestrian world?

I have always been passionate about horses, but also about people and their diversity. My motivation has remained the same since the very beginning: the desire to learn and to understand better. Today, I strive to make the most of what I have learned... and to synthesise it. In this sense, my professional collaboration with the Piedrahita family is a concrete application of this approach.

I have been working with this family for over 15 years; they are managing the San Isidro and Verley stud farms in Europe and Colombia. The goal is to continuously improve the quality of breeding, training, and marketing.



On one hand, Kornet San Isidro, a six-year-old Colombian stallion who came to Europe to pursue a career and placed seventh in the five-year-old final at Fontainebleau.

On the other hand, Itchina Mail Verley, a seven-year-old finalist at Fontainebleau in 2025, whom you will be hearing about very soon (Itchina Mail Verley is now under the saddle of Steve Guerdat) are among others two “examples in the making” resulting from this synthesis.

As for the rest, I do not claim to be leaving a legacy; I have learned from many different people, and I thank them for that. If, in return, I have been useful to a few people in the horse world, then a certain balance will have been achieved, and that will suffice as my epitaph. 🏆

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RICHARD VOGEL & UNITED TOUCH RULE THE BRABANTHALLEN AT THE DUTCH MASTERS

A Rolex Grand Slam of Showjumping Event

THE 2026 ROLEX GRAND SLAM OF SHOWJUMPING SEASON MADE A HIGH-STAKES DEBUT AT THE DUTCH MASTERS IN 'S-HERTOGENBOSCH. SET AGAINST THE IMPRESSIVE BACKDROP OF INDOOR BRABANT, THE OPENING MAJOR OF THE YEAR CHALLENGED THE WORLD'S BEST WITH A DEMANDING COURSE DESIGNED BY DUTCH DESIGNER LOUIS KONICKX.



The competition saw 37 of the world's leading horse-and-rider combinations take part, with 11 qualifying for the jump-off. Notably, the defending champion, Simon Delestre, did not make it to the jump-off round after picking up a fault in his opening run.

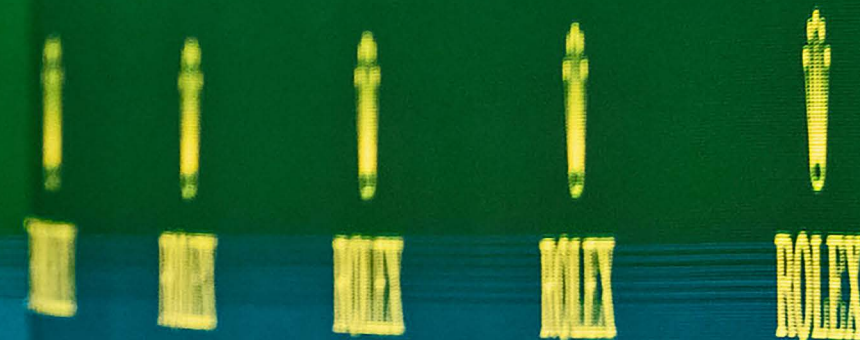
Competing for a share of the €1,000,000 prize fund, Martin Fuchs on L&L Lorde, Henrik von Eckermann on Qasirah van de Reistenhoeck, Pieter Devos on Casual DV Z, and Thibaut Spits on Impress-K van't Kattenheye Z all managed clear rounds in the jump-off. However, none could match the pace set by Richard Vogel and United Touch S.

Setting an unbeatable standard as the first combination to enter the jump-off, Vogel delivered a flawless performance in 39.42 seconds. His time remained unmatched throughout the evening, securing a dominant victory and marking the first step in his quest for the Grand Slam title. 🏆

Photos by Rolex Grand Slam/Tom Lovelock/Helen Cruden


ROLEX

ROLEX





DESERT DRAMA

ENGINEERING AL SHIRA'AA SPEED DERBY WITH
ELIO TRAVAGLIATI IN ABU DHABI

FEW NAMES IN THE WORLD OF SHOWJUMPING COURSE DESIGN CARRY THE WEIGHT AND ARTISTIC PRESTIGE OF ELIO TRAVAGLIATI.

A TRUE MAESTRO OF THE ARENA, TRAVAGLIATI IS THE ARCHITECT BEHIND SOME OF THE MOST SOPHISTICATED TRACKS ON THE INTERNATIONAL CIRCUIT, BLENDING TECHNICAL PRECISION WITH AN INSTINCTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE HORSE'S SOUL. KNOWN FOR HIS ABILITY TO WEAVE HIGH-STAKES PRESSURE INTO A SEAMLESS, FLOWING NARRATIVE, HE DOESN'T JUST BUILD JUMPS; HE ENGINEERS THE ULTIMATE TEST OF COURAGE AND SPEED, BEARING IN MIND THE SAFETY OF BOTH HORSE AND RIDER.

IN THIS EXCLUSIVE HORSE TIMES INTERVIEW, WE SPEAK TO THE ITALIAN MASTERMIND WHO WAS ON-SITE AT THE AL FORSAN INTERNATIONAL SPORTS RESORT FOR THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED AL SHIRA'AA INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW.

TAKING PLACE FROM 20 TO 24 JANUARY, THIS CSI4*-W WORLD CUP QUALIFIER BROUGHT A FORMIDABLE LEVEL OF INTERNATIONAL SPORT TO ABU DHABI. WITH A HIGH-ENERGY SCHEDULE FEATURING THE ADRENALINE-FUELLED JUMP & DRIVE, THE CREATIVE FLAIR OF THE FANCY DRESS, AND THE RAW POWER OF THE SPEED DERBY, TRAVAGLIATI REVEALED THE SECRETS BEHIND ENGINEERING A WEEK OF WORLD-CLASS DRAMA.



What is your core idea for designing a derby in a sand arena?

The goal is to create something special because a sand arena is a normal environment. To make it a true derby, you need a unique track and bespoke fences; otherwise, it is simply a standard course. You have to create something distinct to give the fans that specific Derby atmosphere.

Is there a minimum arena size for a derby, or were you able to resize the concept?

The arena here at Al Forsan is not a minimum size; it is a medium-to-large arena (120m x 65m), which is big enough for a real Derby. The challenge lies in finding the right lines: incorporating good turns, plenty of gallop, and a sophisticated mix of long and short distances.

How does the course layout differ from a traditional grass derby?

It is quite different. In a massive grass arena - such as Arezzo or Hickstead - the track is usually around 1,200 metres and includes a lake and a bank. Here on the sand, the length is shorter, roughly 800 to 900 metres.

Are you using the water jump?

No. I chose not to use the water jump here because jumping water under floodlights is not ideal for the horses. Instead, I am using special fences brought directly from Hickstead to recreate that iconic atmosphere.

Does jumping a derby on sand change the experience for the horse?

Yes. Horses generally find grass more familiar and easier for a derby-style gallop. While you can produce great sport on sand, you cannot perfectly replicate the ground conditions of a grass field. However, for the sport and the spectacle, jumping a derby on sand is no problem at all.

Can you tell us about the specific height and technical specifications?

Technically, this is a Table C (speed class) rather than a traditional heavy derby. It is set at a 1.45m height, just under 1,000 metres in length, and fea-



tures 17 fences including two double combinations. My aim is to create a track that feels entirely different from a standard sand arena jumping class.

Do riders need a specific Derby horse for this class?

In a traditional derby, yes, you need a specialist. You wouldn't usually use a top Grand Prix horse because they are too valuable to risk, and the requirements are different.

However, for the show here in Abu Dhabi, I suspect the horses ridden on Saturday will be the ones jumping in the medium-tour classes. Because the height is 1.45m and the course isn't overly spooky, almost any brave horse can jump it. You need something fast and courageous, but not necessarily a five-star Grand Prix specialist.

How many competitors are you expecting?

I hope to see around 20 to 25 horses.

Who is your favourite to win?

That is difficult to say without the starting list! We have some of the best riders in the world here in Abu Dhabi right now. It will depend entirely on which horses they choose to ride. You can have the fastest rider in the world, but they must be on their fastest horse to win this specific Saturday class.

Do you think there's a question I should have asked you, but did not?

No, it's all good. You asked me some very good questions! 🙌

The Speed Derby was held on Saturday 24 January.

This World Cup Qualifier was leg 5 from the 8 2025/2026 Longines FEI Jumping World Cup Arab League/Middle East Sub-League qualifiers.

ABDEL SAÏD FINDS THE LEAD AT HH SHARJAH RULER CUP

An FEI Jumping World Cup Arab League Event

ABDEL SAÏD RIDING QUAKER BRIMBELLES Z, STOLE THE SPOT-LIGHT AT THE SHARJAH EQUESTRIAN & RACING CLUB IN THE UAE, BY WINNING THE CSI5*-W 1.55M HH SHARJAH RULER CUP. SAÏD OUTCLASSED A COMPETITIVE FIELD OF FORTY PARTICIPANTS AFTER TWO CLEAR ROUNDS, NAVIGATING THE SECOND WITH PRECISION TO STOP THE CLOCK IN 50.18 SECONDS.





This win marks Saïd's second major success of the 2025/2026 Arab League season, following his impressive performance in December 2025 when he claimed the CSI3*-W title in Al Ain.

The podium in Sharjah took on a distinctly international flavour, though Saïd's nearest rivals couldn't quite match his pace. Germany's Sophie Hinners claimed the runner-up spot, guiding Iron Dames Kaleni Jo through the course in 51.62 seconds, while her compatriot René Tebbel secured third place riding Paulus-L with a steady clear in 52.81. Ireland's Shane Breen and Sweden's Antonia Pettersson Häggström followed closely behind to round out the top five.

Earlier, Irish fortunes were even brighter where Trevor Breen won the CSI5*-W 1.50m Presented by UAEERF class riding Konrad Obolensky. In a strong showing for the Irish contingent, Michael Pender won second place, leaving Germany's David Will to settle for third.

Photos via Sharjah Equestrian & Racing Club



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NO FOOT, NO HORSE
THOMAS FENZL'S PHILOSOPHY ON
THE SOLE OF A CHAMPION



IN THE WORLD OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE EQUESTRIAN SPORT, BALANCE IS EVERYTHING. HORSE TIMES RECENTLY CAUGHT UP WITH THOMAS FENZL, A VETERAN FRENCH FARRIER WHOSE 25-YEAR CAREER HAS TAKEN HIM FROM THE RACING STABLES OF EUROPE TO THE HEART OF SAUDI ARABIA. HAVING CARED FOR THE FEET OF CHAMPIONS LIKE ROMANTIC WARRIOR, THOMAS JOINS US TO DISCUSS THE EVOLVING SCIENCE OF SHOEING. PREPARE TO SEE THE ART OF FARRIERY IN A WHOLE NEW LIGHT.

Thomas, if you had to explain your job to a 10-year-old, how would you do it?

Imagine that either your nails get really long or your shoes are full of mud; it feels uncomfortable, doesn't it? Horses feel the same with their feet, which we call hooves. My job is to clean, trim, and make their feet nice again. That's what makes me really happy to do what I do.

If you were a showjumping horse, would you prefer to have horseshoes or not, and why?

Horseshoes for competitions, barefoot for the holidays. Even horses need time off!

Thomas, can you take us back to the beginning of your journey, what first drew you to the craft of farriery, and what made you dedicate your life to it?

Some passions start very young. My connection with horses began in riding centres of the Paris suburb around Fontainebleau. In 1998, at the age of sixteen, I entered farriery training in France, a profession built on demanding apprenticeship and field discipline.

I had the privilege of learning under Étienne Crahay, an innovative instructor who had patented what was then a revolutionary glued shoeing system. Very early, he showed me that this trade was not only manual, but also deeply technical and constantly evolving. My practical apprenticeship then took me to Deauville in Normandy, one of the great horse regions of France, where horses shape every part of daily life. That immersion gave me solid foundations, and from there farriery stopped being a training path and became my life.

With over more than 25 years in the profession, how have you seen the role of the farrier evolve within high-performance equestrian sport?

The hoof is the same as it was thirty years ago - what has changed is the level of expectation around it. When I started, farriery was still seen mainly as a traditional manual occupation. Today, it has become far more visible, far more specialised, and much more connected to the constant rise of high-performance equestrian sport.

Riders and owners have always carried this sport with high expectations; the increasing demands of top-level competitions pushed farriery to develop more sophisticated solutions year after year. I entered this profession at a moment when shoeing was beginning to move beyond simple protection and becoming an increasingly strategic part of the horse's preparation.

You have worked in some of the most prestigious equestrian environments, from Chantilly to Oman, the Saudi Equestrian Federation, and the Jockey Club of Saudi Arabia. How has each of these experiences shaped you professionally?

Every serious environment leaves you with a different lesson.

Chantilly was my school of rigour. Surrounded by elite trainers, international owners, and the permanent rhythm of racing, I learned very quickly that in such environments, details are never secondary.

Oman provided me with something different: perspective. Through an educational exchange supported by FEI Solidarity, I was reminded that this profession grows not only through practice, but also through the sharing of knowledge.

Saudi Arabia then brought me the institutional scale. Working with the Saudi Equestrian Authority, the Saudi Arabian Equestrian Federation, and the Jockey Club of Saudi Arabia exposed me to a rapidly developing equestrian structure with very high standards.

Altogether, these experiences taught me one clear lesson: in this profession, precision alone is not enough. Adaptability is equally essential.

Working across different countries also means working with different climates, surfaces, horse types, and competitive demands. How much does that influence your approach to shoeing?

Good hoof care always starts with understanding the environment. A hoof cannot be managed the same way everywhere. Whether a horse lives in a temperate country like France or in a desert climate like the Gulf, daily attention remains essential. Each environment creates different weaknesses and each horse reacts in its own way.

Some feet retain too much moisture, others dry too quickly, some become brittle, others remain softer. That is why there is no universal care formula. The farrier must first understand what the horse is dealing with. Every country also develops its own practical habits. In humid regions of France, for example, we traditionally use hydrophobic hoof greases to protect the foot from excess moisture, while in drier

climates the care strategy naturally changes.

Then of course, discipline changes the shoeing itself; racing, jumping, or endurance all require different mechanics. The principle remains identical: adaptation is part of good farriery.

At the highest level, how important is farriery in a horse's soundness, longevity, and performance, and why is it sometimes still underestimated?

Everything starts from the hooves. "No foot, no horse" remains one of the truest sayings in our profession. A horse can compensate for many things, but the body never forgets mechanical imbalance. An unbalanced hoof creates strain all the way up the limb. The horse tries to relieve itself by changing its movement, shifting weight or compensating quietly, and very often that is where future injuries begin.

I have seen many horses continue to perform with unsuitable shoeing simply because they are generous animals. Over time the physical cost will eventually appear. That is why farriery is not only a technical intervention; it is also a long-term responsibility toward the horse. Propulsion, stability, direction, and confidence are deeply connected to the quality of the hoof. If this role is still underestimated, it is often because many people only see the shoe and not the invisible balance underneath it. In reality, soundness is built long before lameness appears.

You have been the officially credited farrier at landmark events such as the Saudi Cup, the Longines Global Champions Tour, FEI World Cup, and Saudi Games. What does it mean to be trusted at that level of competition?

At that level, it is above all a great responsibility. Of course, to be officially present at such events is an honour, because these are some of the most demanding stages in international equestrian sport.

Very quickly, the event itself becomes secondary to the responsibility that comes with it. Horses and teams are under pressure; every technical decision has an impact at one point or another. It reminds you that this profession leaves very little room for approximation. You are there to bring calm, precision, and reliability when the level around you is at its highest. More than a title, I see that trust as a duty to remain discreet, consistent, and fully dependable for the horse and for the people working around it.





What are the biggest technical and logistical challenges of working as a farrier during major international championships and elite events?

On major events, it is not enough to know shoeing. You must know how to read everything happening around it. Each discipline has its own rhythm, constraints, sensitive areas, and moments when an intervention is possible without disturbing the organisation.

Racing, jumping, endurance, and other top competitions therefore require not only different materials, but also a very precise understanding of the environment in which you are working. With experience, you learn where you need to be, who you need to coordinate with, and above all when you need to act in order to help the horse without slowing down the whole mechanism around it.

You need the right tools, the right equipment, and to remain available from the beginning to the very

end. Above all, you must keep that discreet anticipation that allows all matters to be solved before they become visible. In elite championships, technical skill matters greatly. Reading the ground and understanding the right moment often make the real difference.

In your opinion, what separates a good farrier from a truly exceptional one, especially when working with top sport horses?

Before even trying to make a distinction, I believe it is important to remember the immense importance of the horse world and of all those who serve it. The horse brings to human beings far beyond competition. Both horses and humans have been sharing a common history for thousands of years. All the professions that live around the horse silently contribute to that continuity, and the farrier holds a central place in it. At the end of the day, everything rests on the horse's foot. That is why I have a deep respect for all farriers, whatever their country, their

field of work, or their level of intervention.

If one must define what makes some truly exceptional, I would say it is their ability to bring together all the qualities of the profession at the same time. It is not only about being skilful with either hands or words. One must know how to handle a difficult horse, find the right solution, accomplish the required task properly, satisfy the surrounding team, and above all bring each horse as close as possible to the most suitable shoeing - be it simple or sophisticated - so that it feels as free as possible and can fully express its natural abilities. When all these qualities come together consistently, one comes close to a truly exceptional farrier.

Every discipline requires different demands from the horse. How does your work differ when dealing with racehorses compared to showjumpers or other performance horses?

Whatever the discipline, the first constant must always be the horse's comfort. Shoeing should remain a form of protection that stays as close as possible to the horse's natural balance. The goal is never to force performance artificially, but to allow the horse to express its movement as freely as possible.

From there, adaptation begins. Racehorses generally require lighter shoes for speed and efficiency, while show jumpers often need a more supportive and profiled balance for stability on take-off and landing. Then other factors come in: age, pathology, workload, and the individual way each horse uses its body. An older horse or a horse beginning to show certain weaknesses will naturally need different adjustments. Materials also play an important role today. Weight, shape, and composition can bring real benefits when they are chosen wisely. Whether we are talking about elite athletes or ordinary riding horses, the principle never changes — comfort remains the true foundation of good shoeing.

In your day-to-day work, how closely do you collaborate with veterinarians, riders, trainers, and grooms - and how essential is that teamwork to the horse's welfare and success?

Around a horse, each eye sees something different. The veterinarian sees the pathology through imaging, the owner knows the horse's history, the groom notices the daily habits, the rider feels

the movement, and the trainer sees the change in performance. My job is to listen to all, connect the information, and bring the most practical answer through the foot, whether in the application itself or in choosing the right type of shoe, the right material, and the right equipment available.

In many difficult cases, especially therapeutic ones, the shoeing plan is built in consultation with all parties. In Saudi Arabia, where equestrian sport brings together many nationalities, mastering several languages and keeping a multicultural mindset has become an important part of an efficient collaboration. The more information circulates, the better the horse is understood.

Have there been particular horses, moments, or career milestones that left a lasting mark on you and confirmed you were on the right path?

There are some moments in this job you simply never forget. One of mine was in Deauville, France, discovering the remarkable horse world of the late Alec Head, where breeding, training, and reproduction were running on a scale I had never seen before. It was also there that I saw Octagonal arriving from Australia for the breeding season, a horse so famous he even had his own statue back home. For the young farrier I was, it was the moment I realised how vast this world was - and how much ambition it could awaken.

Later came the major French racing stables, then Saudi Arabia and its international dimension. And of course, shoeing Romantic Warrior (the world's highest-earning racehorse) during his visit for the Saudi Cup in 2025 remains one of those symbolic milestones. In this profession, some horses quietly remind you how far your work has taken you.

Saudi Arabia's equestrian scene has grown tremendously in recent years. From your perspective, how has the Kingdom evolved in terms of professionalism, infrastructure, and standards of horse care?

In fifteen years in Saudi Arabia, I have seen the horse industry grow with remarkable speed. One advantage of my profession is that it takes me inside many different stables, disciplines, and working environments, which gives me a broad view of how the level has changed over time.

The evolution is visible not only in the horses and the competitions, but also in the infrastructures

themselves. I have seen stables become more functional, better designed, more technical, and more integrated with everything a horse needs on a daily basis. Inside those stables, collective organisation, technical planning, and attention to details have also become increasingly stronger.

From the highest level of leadership down to the daily people working on the ground, the will to make this sport evolve can clearly be felt. I have seen this particularly in endurance. Saudi teams have worked consistently on horse management, hoof care, conditioning, and long-term preparation, and the level has risen impressively. Nebras Muscat, ridden by Saudi rider Muhannad Alsalmi, winning the Al Fursan Cup two years in a row against top international competition, is a strong proof of that evolution. Having followed part of this progress myself through hoof care and technical exchanges, I can say that Saudi Arabia is growing together with the horse industry and contributing positively to its international development. It is the kind of place where practical experience can still make a difference.

What are some of the most common misconceptions riders or owners still have when it comes to hoof care and shoeing?

One of the biggest mistakes is to think about the hoof only when a visible problem appears. In reality, many problems begin much earlier. I still see people buying horses without paying enough attention to the quality of the feet and limbs, then later facing issues that no shoeing can fully solve, especially in sport horses. A farrier's eye before purchase is often essential.

I also see technical solutions used too automatically. Heel elevation, for example, has a purpose in specific cases, but without a full understanding of the horse's balance it can easily be misused. And finally, many owners wait too long between appointments, forgetting that a horse can still move and perform while the hoof balance is already deteriorating. The real key is not to treat hoof problems too late, but to know how to recognise them early.



Technology and materials in farriery continue to progress. How do you balance traditional craftsmanship with modern innovation?

Today, a farrier no longer works with hammer and anvil alone. Modern technology has changed the profession long before we even touch the hoof. Video analysis, imaging, and advanced diagnostic tools now allow us to detect imbalances and document pathologies with a level of precision that was difficult to achieve years ago. The real progress lies in the association between human expertise and technology.

I have seen many cases where the veterinarian's or farrier's first diagnosis was later confirmed by the machine. Technology gives us more security, more accuracy, and better follow-up, but professional judgement remains essential. It also makes daily work more efficient. Many administrative and monitoring tasks are now easier, which allows us to dedicate more time to the horse itself and to the quality of care. Today we also have custom-made shoes, lighter alloys, therapeutic supports, and many compensated models that allow us to guide movement and relieve pressure with far greater effect than before. Yet despite all these advances, one principle remains the same: the best horse is always the one that can stay as close as possible to its natural movement.

For young farriers aspiring to work at the very highest level, what advice would you give them about building both skill and reputation in this demanding profession?

Farriery is not just a job. It is a heritage. In France, this craft survives because one generation gives it to the next. Men spend their lives practicing it, then teaching it, and that is what gives this profession its nobility. Yet even after school, many leave the profession, and many others stop later in life for different reasons. Very few remain in it for an entire lifetime, which shows how special this trade truly is.

To enter this "métier" is to accept real commitment. It needs strength, patience, discipline, and a true respect for horses. Passion is important, but pas-



sion alone is not enough. My advice to a young farrier is simple: work hard, stay humble, keep learning, and this profession can take you further than you imagine. Saudi Arabia now has a real opportunity to build a proud new generation of local farriers with strong foundations and international vision.

After such a rich international career, what continues to motivate and inspire you every day when you step into the forge or beside a horse?

What would excite me most for the future is to see this profession one day carried by a real generation of Saudi farriers. Saudi Arabia already has an enormous horse population, far beyond competition alone. Across many regions of the Kingdom, horses remain part of private farms, breeding projects, riding education, and daily equestrian life. The next major step, in my opinion, is to see the technical professions around the horse grow with the same national strength. Farriery should be one of them.

I would love to see a true high-level institution created here - not a symbolic project, but a serious centre of excellence capable of training young Saudis on strong and lasting foundations. For that to succeed, quality would be everything. This trade cannot be built on shortcuts or improvised teaching. It needs experienced people, solid foundations, and the right bridge between cultures, languages, and working mentalities.

After fifteen years working inside Saudi equestrian life, I have seen how important that human connection can be. If such investment is made with real vision, Saudi Arabia could not only continue growing its horse culture, but also build the technical generations that will sustain it for decades. Horses have always carried civilisations forward; the people trained around them will decide how far that future can go. 



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DOHA EQUESTRIAN TOUR 2026

HH THE FATHER AMIR'S PRIX



TOUR 1 CSI4* 1.55M GRAND PRIX
HARRY CHARLES AND CASQUO BLUE (GREAT BRITAIN)



TOUR 2 CSI5* 1.60M GRAND PRIX
SCOTT BRASH AND HELLO JEFFERSON



TOUR 3 CSI5* 1.60M GRAND PRIX
SCOTT BRASH AND HELLO MANGO

TOUR 4 CSI5* 1.60M GRAND PRIX
SCOTT BRASH AND HELLO JEFFERSON

HH THE AMIR'S SWORD CSI5 1.60M GRAND PRIX*
ABDULLAH AL SHARBATLY AND DIRIYAH (KSA)

CHI AL SHAQAB CSI5 1.60M GRAND PRIX*
MARLON MODOLO ZANOTELLI AND CHARLY HEART (BRA)

AL SHAQAB CUP CSI5 1.60M GRAND PRIX*
CYRINE CHERIF AND TRIPLE T CALAMANDO BLUE (FRA)

QATAR EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION CUP CSI5 1.60M GRAND PRIX*
KRISTEN VANDERVEEN AND BULL RUN'S JIREH (USA)



Photos BY DET/Lukasz Kowalski

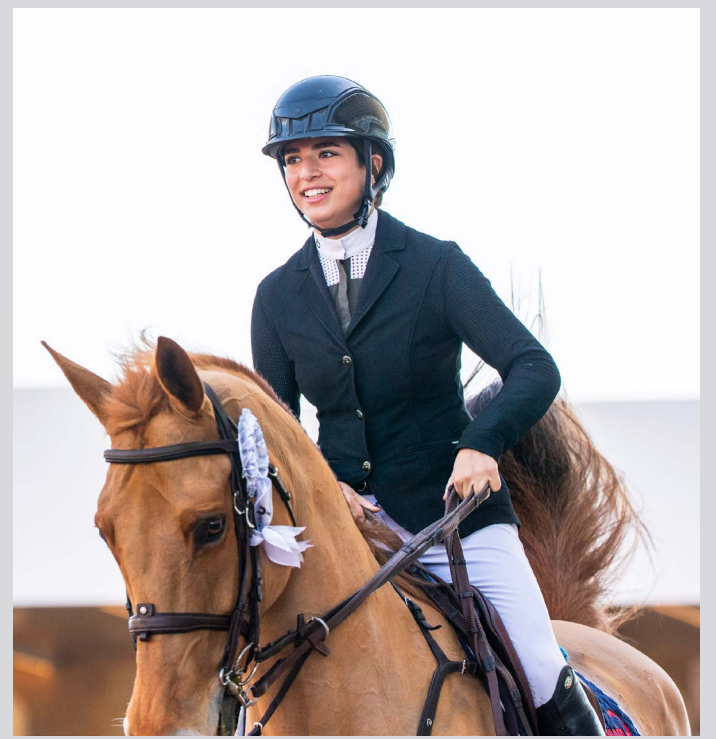
DOHA EQUESTRIAN TOUR 2026

EGYPTIAN ATHLETES TAKE 1 & 2 STAR PODIUM FINISHES

Egyptian showjumping athletes made a strong impression at the 2026 Doha Equestrian Tour held at the world-class Al Shaqab arena, yielding standout podium finishes, especially during the early legs of the series.

445 horse and rider combinations travelled from Egypt to Qatar to compete, and were hosted in Doha starting November 2025 for the FEI Group VII Finals – up until March 2026.

The athletes were successful in achieving a string of notable results and podium finishes in the CSI 1* and 2* classes.



Photos BY DET/Lukasz Kowalski

JOSEPH STOCKDALE GUIDES EBANKING TO WIN THE CSI5* UAE PRESIDENT'S CUP GRAND PRIX

THE CSI5* UAE PRESIDENT'S CUP WRAPPED UP IN ABU DHABI AT THE ABU DHABI EQUESTRIAN CLUB MARKING TOP-TIER INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION. A WORLD-CLASS FIELD OF 42 INTERNATIONAL RIDERS TOOK TO THE ARENA, ALL CONTESTING FOR THEIR SHARE OF THE SUBSTANTIAL €310,000 PRIZE FUND.



The final day centred around a formidable 1.60m Grand Prix course designed by Ireland's Alan Wade. Known for his technical precision, Wade's track proved a significant test for the seasoned combinations, demanding both scope and absolute accuracy.

Only five riders managed to clear the technical challenge of the first round to secure their place in the jump-off. The atmosphere remained tense as Germany's Maximilian Lill on Viverter PS, Saudi's Ramzy Al Duhami on Cayadino, Great Britain's Joseph Stockdale on Ebanking, Germany's David Will on Xixo Borgia and Brazil's Luiz Felipe Cortizo Goncalves De Azevedo Filho on Sierra du Piedroux Z prepared to battle it out against the clock for the title.

Lill set a blistering pace on Viverter PS, but knocked down the very last fence, leaving him with four faults in 37.55 seconds. Al Duhami faced a similar fate; despite a fast time of 37.93 seconds, a costly rail relegated him down the standings.

The momentum shifted when Stockdale entered the ring and guided Ebanking to a flawless clear round in 38.12 seconds, moving straight into the lead.

The pressure was on Will, who flew through the course to post the fastest time of the day at 37.45 seconds, but a fence down ended his hopes for the win. Finally, Brazil's Luiz Felipe Cortizo Goncalves De Azevedo Filho finished on eight faults, confirming Stockdale as the only rider to go double-clear and secure his victory in The President's Cup UAE Showjumping Presented by Longines.

Photo via Abu Dhabi Equestrian Club



SAMI GHAZWAN PERPETUATES THE RICH LEGACY OF HIS FAMILY

HORSES HAVE BEEN IN THE GHAZWAN FAMILY FOR FOUR GENERATIONS. FROM HANDLING RACEHORSES AT THE BAHRAINI ROYAL STABLES IN THE LATE 1940S AND GAINING KNOWLEDGE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, TO CREATING THEIR EQUESTRIAN CENTRE IN 1969 AND ORGANISING THE FIRST OFFICIAL BAHRAINI SHOWJUMPING COMPETITION IN 1984, THE GHAZWANS WERE EQUESTRIAN PIONEERS ON THE ISLAND. HORSE TIMES SAT DOWN WITH SAMI TO GO BACK IN TIME AND GET HIS VIEW ON HOW SHOWJUMPING IS EVOLVING TODAY IN BAHRAIN.



Your father, the late Mohammed Ghazwan, founded the family equestrian centre in 1969. What inspired him to start such a project at a time when organised equestrian sport in Bahrain was still in its infancy?

My late father inherited his love for horses from my grandfather Jaffar, who inherited the same from my great-grandfather Mohamed. Horses are part of the Ghazwan family's DNA. My father and his brother worked for Bahrain's former ruler, the late Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, grandfather of the current King of Bahrain, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. They were both working as horse racing jockeys at the Safra Horse Racing Track back in the '50s and '60s. From there, my father decided to open a horseback riding school. The idea came after a meeting with His Majesty the King, who supported the project.

Your father organised the first official showjumping competition in Bahrain. What do you remember about that milestone event and the atmosphere surrounding it?

He decided to organise the first official showjumping competition after his return from the UK, where he competed in many shows back in the '70s. He wanted to introduce showjumping to local stables in Bahrain. In those days, only a few European riders living in Bahrain were practising showjumping; just a handful of Bahraini riders were into the discipline. The 1984 official showjumping competition was an important event in terms of scale. I remember many Bahraini government officials attended as VIPs. I will also never forget winning my first competition as a Junior. It was simply magical and the start of many future successes and victories.

What were the main challenges your father faced in developing showjumping in Bahrain during those early years?

The majority of Bahraini riders were interested only in racing and speed rides. When showjumping was introduced, the majority carried over their racing style to showjumping, keeping speed as the priority to clear any obstacle. My father visited several stables to try to teach riders the proper basic flatwork and jumping techniques. Since that day, I have carried on his legacy and am still coaching well-known Bahraini riders today. Currently, with the assistance of Dawood Ahmed, who created David Equestrian Services, we have set up several showjumping clinics for Bahrainis with the intent to review all showjumping basics. The first clinic took place at my stables on 14 March 2026. It was so well received that we have scheduled a second clinic on 27 March 2026.

How did growing up in such an environment influence your own path as a rider and later as a coach?

I grew up surrounded by horse lovers, listening to their racing stories and visiting the race track regularly. I wanted to take a different path and showed a great interest in showjumping. I cannot thank my father enough for sending me to the UK in 1986 to sharpen my skills.

The experience was an eye-opener for me, and since then, I have never stopped developing both my horses and myself. Naturally, a few years later, I was selected to ride for the first Bahraini show-jumping team. This was a milestone in my career—the result of many years of hard work and success as a young rider in local shows. I eventually took part in my first international competition in 1989 at the Dubai Dunhill International Show, held where the Dubai Racecourse is located today. Success has never left me since. I have set up a gallery at my riding centre that houses over 500 trophies. My last major victory was first place at the World Military Equestrian Championship organised in Egypt in May 2025.

To build on this momentum and give back to the sport, I use social platforms to transfer my knowledge through training videos covering all aspects of horsemanship. I am glad that thousands of followers from across the Arab world appreciate and benefit from them. In a way, I am simply keeping up with the family tradition and the legacy of promoting horsemanship.

How has showjumping in Bahrain evolved from the early days of the 1970s and 1980s to the present?

Showjumping in Bahrain kicked off in 1984. It evolved as a local sport until the government established the Bahrain Royal Equestrian Federation in 2003. This body set up rules and regulations, supported competitions financially, and provided substantial awards for winners. Then, the first international competitions were organised under the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) umbrella. This definitely promoted showjumping and encouraged more Bahrainis to become show-jumpers. As the years pass, racing and endurance remain ahead of showjumping and dressage in terms of popularity in the Kingdom. The federation releases yearly showjumping and dressage calendars with their respective national championships. Additionally, one international showjumping competition is usually organised in February. Due to the many attractive showjumping tours in the region (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE), it is difficult for Bahrain to attract professional riders from abroad. Our last international competition a month ago featured only three nationalities: Bahrain, the



UK, and Ireland. All riders and horses were based on the Island; unfortunately, no one came from abroad. There is a huge margin for progression for our sport in Bahrain; therefore, there is hope for a bright future.

What role did your family's equestrian centre play in developing new generations of riders in Bahrain?

Since the establishment of the Ghazwan Equestrian Centre, a large number of riders have benefited from our diverse programs. It continues to do so by graduating young and adult riders in both dressage and showjumping.

Looking back, which moments make you most proud when you think about the Ghazwan family's contribution to the sport?

Whenever I hear or read an interview with a Bahraini rider who mentions that their first step in horseback riding was at the Ghazwan Riding Centre, it makes me proud.

What advice would you give to young Bahraini riders who dream of following a similar path?

Patience is key for me. You know as well as I do that "Rome wasn't built in a day." Any rider must ensure they complete their "mileage" as an amateur in novice classes before moving up to more advanced levels.

Finally, how would you like the legacy of the Ghazwan family to be remembered in the history of equestrian sport in Bahrain?

I would humbly say that the Ghazwan family name is well established. It has been known in the field of horseback riding for many decades.

As long as our equestrian centre is running with its great team of dedicated grooms and instructors, I have no doubt that our family name will always be remembered. I am doing my part to follow in the footsteps of my predecessors, and I hope that my children and grandchildren will continue to build on this momentum.

LINDA AZAB'S FULL-CIRCLE
FROM CAIRO TO THE GLOBAL STAGE



I FIRST MET LINDA IN THE EARLY 2000S IN SAUDI ARABIA, WHEN SHE BEGAN TAKING RIDING LESSONS UNDER MY TUTELAGE. FAST-FORWARD TWENTY YEARS TO THE HEIGHT OF THE PANDEMIC, AND I RECEIVED A CALL FROM HER MOTHER, ASKING IF I MIGHT HELP LINDA FIND A COACH AND SUITABLE STABLES IN THE UNITED STATES. I DIRECTED HER TO A CLOSE FRIEND WHO RUNS A PREMIERE SHOWJUMPING FACILITY IN CALIFORNIA. I RECENTLY SAT DOWN WITH LINDA TO DELVE INTO HER REMARKABLE JOURNEY: A CLIMB UP THE COMPETITIVE LADDER THAT SAW HER TRANSFORM FROM A COMPLETE NOVICE INTO AN ACCOMPLISHED INTERNATIONAL SHOWJUMPER.

Linda, you started riding at an early age. How did your first contact with horses happen?

I started riding in Egypt at when I was six years old. My first contact with horses happened at the Gezira Sporting Club in Zamalek, where my mother, sister, and I would go for various sports practices. On our way out, I would always pass by the stables and watch people taking riding lessons. I fell in love immediately and knew horses would always be part of my life. When we moved to Saudi Arabia, I continued riding at the Saudi Aramco Dhahran Arabian Horse Association (DAHA) known also as Hobby Farm from between ages nine and eleven. After that, we moved back to Egypt where I resumed riding until I left for university in the United States.

What are your earliest memories of the riding school and the horses in Saudi Arabia?

When we first entered the Saudi Aramco community in Dhahran, my very first priority was finding the stables. I had asked my father, who had arrived before the rest of us, to locate the nearest one, and thankfully it was close enough that my sister and I could bike there. At the time I didn't have my own horse, so I would spend entire days just watching lessons, waiting for any chance to get in the saddle. I was only nine years old, and I remember sitting on the bleachers posting the trot in the air while I watched.

My first opportunity came with a mare named Annie who had some behavioural issues and would only want to go backwards. Over time, she began to trust me and we started working together normally; it was a meaningful early lesson in patience.

I started competing at ten, with my first event being the cross-country team challenge at the Hobby Farm. Honestly, the competition wasn't what drove me then; it was simply the joy of being around horses. As I was exposed to higher-level competitions, though, I became increasingly drawn to the competitive side of the sport. When we returned to Egypt and I was competing more frequently, the desire to become the best rider I could be really took hold, and it has never left me.

What early experiences first sparked your ambition to pursue the sport at a high level

You have been training me throughout my entire time in Saudi Arabia and you taught me the true foundation of the sport, both in and out of the saddle, grounded in genuine horsemanship principles. That foundation has stayed with me throughout my entire career.

Several times we went looking for horses out-



side of Aramco premises. The quality of horses I tried and the level of competition I observed truly awakened something in me. It was the first time I really understood what was possible in this sport, and it planted the seed of a dream I've been chasing ever since.

Do you remember your first competition and what motivated you to pursue showjumping more seriously?

I remember it clearly, I was excited, I didn't know exactly what to expect, and I was genuinely just having fun. There was no pressure, just pure joy. I think that spirit of enjoying the moment is something I try to carry with me to this day.

I joined a team at the Forosiya Club in Cairo, and my first competition there went really well. It gave me a lot of confidence that the skills I'd built in Saudi Arabia had translated, and from there I just kept building. The competition scene in Egypt felt more formal and more competitive. It pushed me to raise my standards and take the sport more seriously. Moving from competing on lesson horses, which were all Arabians, to riding my own horse and some of my trainer's warmbloods was a significant milestone. That step up in quality opened my eyes to what the sport could truly look and feel like. I was fortunate to learn from a number of exceptional trainers in Egypt: Rami Iskander, Merit Fanous, Khaled Assem, Sherif El Demerdash, and Georges Valladier. Each one helped advance me to the next level in a different way, and I'm grateful to all of them.

The biggest challenge as a young rider in Egypt was balance. I was also a competitive swimmer at the time, so managing my riding, swimming, and academics simultaneously was genuinely difficult. But thanks to my parents, who believed in and supported all of my dreams, I was able to pursue all three to the best of my ability.

Then my journey took a significant detour. I took a nine-year break from riding when I was 17 after a lung injury. When I moved to the United States for university, the equestrian team's facility was over an hour from campus, making it impossible to ride during my studies. The moment I graduated and settled in Los Angeles; I came straight back. The dream had never really left me. My ambition to be a competitive rider and to keep improving is some-



thing I think about every single day.

Any memorable horses played a role in your development as a young rider?

That's always a difficult question for me, because I genuinely believe every horse I've had the privilege of riding has shaped me in some way. Each one has taught me something different and those lessons have never been forgotten. I could honestly trace my development through every horse I've ever ridden.

The greatest overall lesson was learning to give

each horse the chance to be themselves, and to adapt myself accordingly. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to riding. You have to listen to the horse and understand how he wants to be ridden. Horses taught me early on emotional control. Frustration and tension are the greatest barriers to connection with a horse, learning to manage them (even when the communication isn't working) is one of the most important skills a rider can develop.

My current horse, Eavantus C, who I own in partnership with Andrea Bucko. He is a once-in-a-lifetime horse who has taken my riding to an entirely

new level. Having the privilege of competing on a horse like him is something I don't take for granted for a single day.

What led your decision to move to the USA to continue your equestrian journey?

Following my graduation from university, I was offered a position at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. I feel incredibly fortunate that life led me here. The USA equestrian system, through USEF, offers a truly exceptional pathway for riders to develop and advance all the way to the top of the sport. The



competitions, programmes, and resources available are world-class.

The USA does an outstanding job of creating a clear, structured pathway for riders to advance. There are programs and resources at every level to help riders reach their next milestone. One major difference I've noticed is the emphasis on equitation at the foundational level that focus on correct position that creates a much stronger base for high-performance riders later on.

As a rider, the biggest adjustments were adapting to a new training system and stepping up to bigger, more technical courses than I had previously experienced. I had to recalibrate my riding to meet that standard which was both challenging and exciting. Personally, the most significant adjustments have been balancing a full-time career in healthcare with the demands of the sport. Horses are full-time passion, and taking full ownership of that responsibility as a working professional requires real commitment. It also makes every result feel that much more earned.

Tell us more about some of the trainers, programmes, or competitions in the USA that helped you grow the most?

My current trainer, David Bustillos at Durango Farms, has made a profound difference in my riding. From refining my position in the saddle to deepening my connection with the horse. Perhaps most importantly, he has helped me believe in myself and attempt things I never thought I was capable of, giving me the confidence that has become

the cornerstone of my riding today. The A-circuit competitions, such as Desert International Horse Park and Split Rock Showjumping, have also been transformative in making me a more competitive and well-rounded rider.

Riding in the USA has deepened my appreciation for equitation as a discipline (something we didn't have back home) and reinforced my belief in the importance of creating high-level competition environments to drive rider development.

How would you describe your riding style today?

Confident. That one word captures the biggest shift in my riding over the past few years. I trust myself, I trust my horses, and I go in with a plan.

I believe the most important quality for a successful showjumper is patience and perseverance, they go hand in hand. This sport has far more lows than highs. I genuinely believe the difference between riders who make it and those who don't is the willingness to keep going through the difficult moments instead of giving up.

Can you let us know how do you prepare mentally before entering the ring, what role does horse welfare play in your daily training and how you build trust and partnership with a new horse?

I visualise the entire course, every line, every jump, exactly how I want to ride it and then I focus on executing that vision as precisely as I can. Having a solid plan and trusting it is the key to success.

Horse welfare is everything. Without it, we have no sport. Our horses simply cannot perform to their potential. It's not something I consider separately from my training; it's the foundation of everything I do.

Patience is the starting point to build trust with horses. I spend time learning their body language, observing how they respond, and investing time on the ground, grooming, turnouts, just being present with them. Trust is built slowly, and I think horses feel when you're genuinely trying to understand them rather than just asking things of them. I spend

every available moment at the barn or in the saddle. I rarely even want to take vacations because all I want to do is be with horses.

What has been the most difficult moment in your riding career so far?

There have been many, as there are for every rider. One of the hardest periods was a stretch a couple of years ago when I was competing on different horses and consistently not getting the results I had hoped for. I made the decision to step back from showing, commit entirely to working on my riding, and not return to competition until I felt genuinely ready. Nine months later, I went back, and it paid off. That experience taught me a great deal about trusting the process.

If I may, on one hand at my last horse show, I retired in the 135cm classic after the fourth jump. I had the very first rail, and in that moment the pressure of wanting so badly to jump clear got the better of me. I had mentally given up before the course was even halfway done, and I let one mistake unravel everything. The regret of not finishing has stayed with me, and it continues to shape how I approach competition. My bad rounds teach me far more than my good ones ever could.

On the other hand, I will never forget the 135cm classic the week before, because it was the complete opposite. I rode exactly as I had visualised, with total confidence from start to finish. That feeling of full alignment between plan and execution is what I chase every time I enter the ring.

As an Egyptian rider competing internationally, do you feel a sense of responsibility representing your country and how do you see the development of showjumping in Egypt today?

Absolutely. Representing your country, especially when you are far from home, is always a deep honour. It gives meaning to the work beyond personal achievement. I haven't been to Egypt in some time. However, from what I see on social media and through the achievements of friends still competing there, the level of the sport has advanced enormously. I genuinely cannot wait to go back and experience it first-hand. What I can say to the young



Egyptian riders who would love to pursue a career at a high level is as follows: take it one day at a time. Show up and do your absolute best every single day, while keeping your bigger goals in sight. Everything is possible with hard work once you truly commit to it. Don't let the distance between where you are and where you want to be discourage you.

What are your main goals for the next few years in sport?

My goal is to be competing and performing competitively at the FEI Grand Prix level, not just partic-

ipating. That's what I'm working toward every day. Watching Cyrine Cherif winning her first ever CSI-5* Grand Prix in Qatar recently was very emotional. The Longines Global Champions Tour is a dream, particularly the new leg in Cairo, which would be an incredibly meaningful full-circle moment for me. To compete at that level, in the country I call home, where my love for horses first began, would be something truly special.

Outside the stables, what are your interests or passions?

I'm a huge foodie. I love discovering new restaurants and experiencing different cuisines. I'm also deeply passionate about my career in healthcare, and AI, which sits at a fascinating intersection of technology and medicine.

If you had to describe your equestrian journey in one sentence, what would it be?

It has been a rollercoaster, and I wouldn't trade a single moment of it. 🐾



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