

HT EXCLUSIVE WITH  
« LE CAVALIER FRANÇAIS »

# FREDRIC COTTIER

BY KARIM HABASHI

HE IS AN ICON IN THE EQUESTRIAN SPORT WHO SPENT A LIFETIME OF RIDING AND COACHING CROWNED WITH AN OLYMPIC BRONZE MEDAL WON IN SEOUL SUMMER OLYMPICS 1988. HORSE TIMES WAS SO INTRIGUED AND EXCITED TO MEET HIM !

**Tell us about your Professional life since you retired from International competition?**

When I was a professional rider, I was already interested in course designing and I was also interested in training riders.

These are the 2 main reasons that led me to turn the page on High Level Sport in the 90s. Today, even though I continue to ride and train horses every day, to do some competitions with young horses, I like being able to pass on my experience through training to riders from all over the world.

During my «clinics», I also like to ride my students' horses. It allows them to see me on their horses and it also allows me to give better advice after 15 minutes on a horse.

The activity of «**Chef de Piste**» (course designer) is

also gratifying, because beyond High Level Sport, my experience as a rider allows me to set up an appropriate **educational system** in order to better educate horses. in their early years of competition. For the High Level, my philosophy is to design and build technical challenging courses for riders yet as comfortable as possible for horses.

**Many of us remember you with the great Flambeau C.**

**What made Flambeau C special ?**

Many «Star Horses» have a particular personality. These horses have extreme sensitivity and extraordinary courage when they are confident with their rider.

**Do not think that they are easy to ride?**

In my days, horses like Deister, Appolo, Milton,

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Touch of Class and many others would never have been amateur horses. Same logic more recently with horses like Baloubet, Shutterfly, Bianca, Hickstead, Clooney and others as well.

They have also spent their entire career with their riders without being sold.

Flambeau was one of those horses; “**very worried**”, but also very «**warrior like**» when they hit the track on the only condition that the codes are perfectly set up with their rider so that they are completely at ease.

**The last 12 months have been undoubtedly difficult & unprecedented. What were your biggest challenges for yourself and your students?**

2020 has been a difficult year for High Level Sport and an even more difficult one for **professional riders** on the financial level.

Amateur sport was less impacted because the organization of competitions with few endowments remained possible.

For my part, having most of my activities abroad, I hardly traveled.

Some clinics in video conferences still allowed us to keep in touch, but in fact it is high time to turn the page on Covid 19.

A year almost wasted for 4, 5 or 6 year old horses wouldn't matter, but for an 11 year old it is much more of a hassle.

**The Sport has changed a lot since your days at the top level and there has been a lot of discussions about that.**

**What are the main positive & negative changes in your opinion ?**

Yes, top Sport has changed a lot, and in many areas since the 80s / 90s, other than on a purely technical level. Indeed, the very good riders of those years who remain on the circuits today can still be perfectly competitive, despite their age!

Huge progress has been made in the quality of the soil (footing).

The use of safety cups is also a very good thing.

The evolution of breeding with genetic crosses where horses of a model like Galoubet, Livius, Aramis, Quito de Baussy and others of this type, exist less and less. Many high level competition

grounds are made of sand, of reduced dimensions and therefore require smaller horses, more manageable, with a lot of blood and very fast...

The appearance of amateur riders or riders from emerging equestrian countries in the High Level.

This **new situation** allows these new riders to represent their country at the Olympic Games and the World Championships. This is a good thing because the I.O.C has opted for the universality of the sport. In the 1980s, these riders were rare. Alfonso Romo was one of the few.

The height of the obstacles today may be a little lower, but the oxers are also much narrower. Seems to me like this can be a problem, as a wide oxer must be a difficulty that is asked to the rider.

Some Course designers set up obstacles that are too fragile, such as the building of a fence consisting of a too light plank. This type of obstacle forces many riders to prepare their horses in a sometimes rather harsh way.

The emergence of the «**Global Tour**» set new standards for the importance of money in our sport. The talent, the effort and the love that we have for this very particular sport is so special because it is based on the intimate relationship between a rider and his horse while also faced with a very significant financial burden. A less talented rider can have the means to buy the “**total package**” which will include the purchase of very good horses, the price to pay to participate in this circuit, and a support team allowing him to jump a «clear round» at 4 and 5 \* events.

**“After all, the real athlete is the horse, and the rider in that case is just a pilot.”**

Personally, I am not opposed to this type of circuit, but it seems to me that the power of money should not take precedence over Sport.

For example, I would like that on circuits like this one, which I qualify as «Pro-Am», reserved for free for the first 15 in the ranking and extremely expensive for the others, no «Ranking» points are distributed. This would avoid a certain monopoly.

**How do you think it is possible for a “good” amateur nowadays , without an unlimited budget , to compete at a decent international level , say 2-3 Star ?**

The answer to this question is the corollary to the previous point. An amateur rider, without an unlimited budget, can logically participate successfully in CSI2\*.



Above that, it becomes more complicated, due to the essential fact of the value of the horses. It is indeed the rich amateurs who have this market in hand and the law of supply and demand has driven up the prices of very good horses.

**If you were in the management seat in the Equestrian sport, what would you recommend or change in terms of strategy ?**

It is important today that the National Equestrian Federations as well as the F.E.I. become aware of the risks they run with the various actions carried out by “animal wellbeing” associations, which are widely followed by the media.

«**Animal welfare**» is becoming a topic that

politicians are picking up on.

After Corrida and Hunting, the use of the Sport Horse can become a sensitive subject. For 2 years, actions have already been carried out on sports events by these associations.

As an indication, in the world of racing, the riding whip is banned in some countries and it will eventually be abolished.

It is also in this logic that I have led a campaign since 2014 for the ban of «hind boots», which I have always considered as «**Mechanical doping**» and I believe action, is already being taken on this by FEI.