Evergreen

A knight in shining armour. A movie star. A natural charmer with a smile to die for. Sima Fares was privileged to meet the man who introduced the equestrian sport into the Egyptain acting scene.

Ahmed Mazhar remembers how his passion for horses began.

As a child, Ahmed Mazhar began riding donkeys in his farm, whenever he got the chance to travel to the countryside. He loved riding and taking care of horses himself. Of his most pleasurable times, Mazhar recalls taking the horses for a swim in the river to cool off the hot summer days. His slender build and physical fitness helped him excel in riding, and at the early age of 20 he joined the Military college as a student, to be able to ride under constant supervision. He began riding religiously and developed an interest in show jumping. With a heart as brave as a lion's, nothing could stop Mazhar from riding any horse, no matter how dangerous or stubborn it was. Riding in the army Mazhar recalls one of his many braveheart stories.

At that time, for official ceremonies and funeral parades only black horses could be ridden. They were largely built powerful horses with a lot of energy; but since they were seldomly used except in training for the occasion, they became impossible to

control. On that day, 4 of those horses were harnessed to a carriage, waiting for a volunteer to drive them to their destination. After several failed attempts to stop the ever charging horses, the mission was called off. But that's when Mazhar took it upon himself as a challenge that he had to win. He sat in the carriage, took hold of the reins, and off charged the 4 horses with full speed. Mazhar did lose control and found it impossible to stop the horses from taking the lead. The spectators were expecting to watch another failing attempt, when Mazhar began directing the horses towards a wall - a dead end that is. They had no choice other than stopping, thought Mazhar to himself, because horses are smart animals and would not hurt themselves. And that is exactly what happened. After several rounds of cantering around and stopping against the wall, Mazhar gradually began bringing them to a halt away from the wall and the ride ended in a peaceful finale where all 4 horses obediently stopped in the middle of the arena. The spectators and officers present cheered hysterically for Mazhar, as he stepped down the carriage full of self-satisfaction and joyful pride.

Whilst Mazhar was still in the army, the director of the Arabic movie, "Zohoor El Islam," or "The Beginning Of Islam," asked for a good looking rider to act in his film. He auditioned for the role and was immediately given the part - the start of a brilliant career. Most of Mazhar's movies involved horses and revealed his equestrian talents. Eventually his acting career took over most of his time, but Mazhar's love for horses remained the same. He always owned horses, which he rode for pleasure on a regular basis. However, Mazhar still remained active and made appearances in many international and local shows. He was asked to judge constantly in competitions, as well as help design show jumping courses.

Talking about his equestrian career, Mazhar recalls Salli Alla El Nabi as his favourite mare ever. He was the one who broke and trained her, then rode her for some time before Mohamed Selim Zaki began competing with her. Mazhar was head of the Egyptian Olympic Equestrian team from 1952 to 1960. He was also Commander of the Army Barracks for a certain time.

About his favourite way to train horses, Mazhar prefers the free gentle way to the controlled method. A horse that has been treated harshly in its early years will always reluctantly submit to discipline, as it will have visions of the ill treatment in its memory forever. Whereas, a horse handled gently with care at a young age, will be willing to perform at its fullest to satisfy its rider.

Ahmed Mazhar is the definitive graceful horseman, the perfect star and so he shall remain: evergreen in the hearts of the Egyptian people.