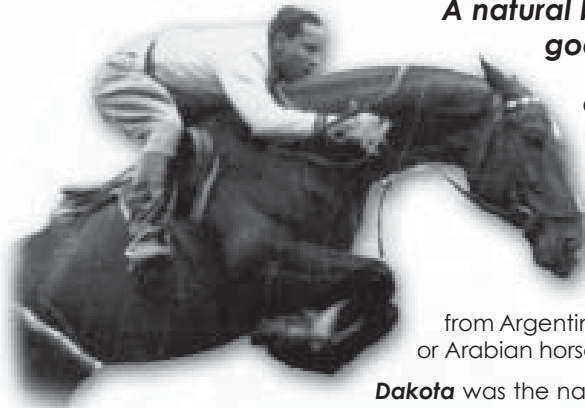


Evergreen

A natural born storyteller, Omar El Haddary joyfully reminisces the good old times, as Sima Fares discovers the inside story.



Omar El Haddary graduated from the Military Academy in 1944 to join the Horse Regiment in the Royal Egyptian Cavalry. The prominent riders at that time were Ahmed Mazhar and Taha El Zenini who taught him the principles of riding and introduced him to show jumping. El Haddary was already a well-trained rider, following his father's footsteps, who was an artillery officer and a keen polo rider.

Because of the restrictions after World War II, imports of foreign horses into Egypt were prohibited; the last shipment before the war being horses from Argentina. So El Haddary and the other riders had to break and train mixed breed or Arabian horses to ride.

Dakota was the name of the mixed breed gelding, which El Haddary took upon himself to train and school. His hard work and dedication certainly paid off, because he rode Dakota all the way to his national & international fame and fortune. During the "High Jump Championship for Arab & Other Horses," held at the Mena House in 1948, (then) Lieutenant El Haddary, set a new worldwide record winning the championship with Dakota. The record fence was put up at a height of 160cm and by the time the fence reached 180cm, there was only one rider left - El Haddary, the winner.

As of 1948, shipment of horses from UK and France resumed once again, and the Frenchman, Colonel Pierre La Farg, was brought to train the national team. La Farg's training methods and techniques improved the Egyptian riders' overall performance, which allowed them to travel to France in 1949 for international exposure. The competitions in France unfolded fruitful results and revealed the Egyptians capacities worldwide.

The city of Nimes, was on the French-Spanish border, so the competition was held in a bull fighting arena making it quite hard for the big horses to canter, turn and jump. But then came El Haddary riding the slender Arabian horse, Sayed El Wadi, winning "La Grand Prix de la ville de Nimes" with fences put up as high as 140-150 cm.

The Grand Prix in Vichy was Concours Hippique Internationale, a one round course with fences at 140-150 cm. El Haddary had secured first place with his Arabian horse, until the last rider chevalier D'Orjex beat him by 1/5 of a second on a foreign horse.

The arrival of a new German trainer and former gold medal winner in the 1936 Olympics, Hans Brinkemann, was the gateway to introduce the German horse to the Egyptian riders. He trained for two years, and coached the team during the Stockholm Olympics in 1956.

El Haddary personally benefited most from the Italian trainer, General Gerardo Conforti, who was an Olympic veteran and Ex-president of the Tour di Quinto school, the biggest Equestrian school worldwide. Using Brinkemann's German horses, Conforti began planning for participating in the Rome Olympics in 1960 a year earlier and devised an intense training schedule solely for that purpose. El Haddary was made Chef D'Equipe and the Egyptians victoriously finished 4th in the 1964 Olympics.

Of his most precious memories, El Haddary recalls his triumph with the 8 year old Irish gelding Sea Ferrer. It was in 1954, in Nice by the seaside. The competition was called "Puissance Progressive" and started off with 55 riders jumping 6 alike fences. After

every round 2 fences are removed, and the remaining number of fences are put up even higher. 33 riders made clear rounds to jump the 4 fences, and a remaining 5 were to jump the last 2 fences put up at 180cm and 205cm. El Haddary, being one of those unique 5 riders, considered it sufficient enough to finish at 5th place and not enter the final round, however Lieutenant Colonel Ahmed Mazhar encouraged him to participate with a winning attitude. Surely enough, El Haddary finished 2nd place dropping a rail of the 180cm fence and faultlessly flying over the 205cm fence, being the highest fence he ever jumped in his life.

After participating in 9 Nations Cup worldwide, El Haddary left the Army in 1967, when all equestrian activities came to a halt because of the war. When it resumed once more in the 70's, El Haddary became the trainer for Sporting Club from 1976 to 1978, and then the Army from 1978 - 1985. Still a dedicated horse lover, El Haddary trains the riders in the Gezira Club regularly.

