

FUNOON ALHUM AidAN

A HORSE SERENADE

FUNOON ALHUM AidAN IS A VIBRANT 24-YEAR-OLD SAUDI SHOWJUMPING RIDER WHO EMBODIES BOTH A MATURE OUTLOOK ON LIFE AND A FEARLESS SPIRIT. CHEERFUL, GIGGLY, SHARP AS A TACK, AND BRAVE AS A LION, SHE'S UNAFRAID TO SPEAK HER MIND, PARTICULARLY WHEN IT COMES TO KEEPING POLITICS OUT OF HER BELOVED SPORT. OFF THE ARENA, SHE REVEALS A SOULFUL SIDE, PLAYING THE OUD TO SOOTHE HER HORSES DURING CHERISHED MOMENTS TOGETHER. ROOTED IN KINDNESS, COURAGE, AND AUTHENTICITY, SHE STANDS OUT AS A PROMISING ATHLETE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ARAB EQUESTRIAN SPORT.



When did you start riding, who are your trainers, where are chiefly based, and who are your sponsors?

My family played a significant role in helping me discover my passion; they encouraged me to explore many sports and activities. In 2012, I found myself truly drawn to the joy and connection of horse riding. Over the years, I've had the privilege of working with many talented trainers both in Saudi Arabia and abroad, but the ones who have influenced me the most are Mazen AlYousef, Cédric Triolet, and Sergio Neuppman, Jr. Their guidance has shaped me as a rider and inspired me to keep pushing forward, always striving to learn and improve.

Today, I am grateful to be surrounded by a dedicated support team: with Mazen AlYousef as my head coach, Ahmad Ezzat as my trusted groom, and the unwavering support of my sponsors, Al-Samawwy Stables and Ouma. Every achievement and podium moment has been a collective celebration shared with my team.

Tell us about being based in Saudi Arabia and riding there.

As a Saudi female rider, I truly appreciate the advantages of being based in my own country, where supporting women in sports is a core goal of 'Saudi Vision 2030'. It's inspiring to see how Saudi Arabia is fostering opportunities for women to excel in fields like showjumping.

Why did you choose showjumping as your sport?

Showjumping was my initial choice, but if I had to pick again, I'd still choose it! It combines techniques from various disciplines, which keeps it exciting. I love the adrenaline and the constant challenge, there's always something new to learn.

How do you choose a horse, and how do you bond with them?

In my view, you don't exactly choose a horse, there's a spark that develops after spending time with them. Bonding requires good intuition and proper care, both inside and outside the ring. It's about building trust and understanding, which forms naturally through consistent care and shared experiences.



Who do you turn to for advice on the sport?

I like to gather perspectives from different people, so there's no single person I rely on exclusively. Of course, I value the insights of those with extensive experience and a deep understanding of the sport.

How do you handle pressure?

Pressure and fear are what keep me motivated; I don't try to suppress them. Instead, I work with these feelings, facing whatever challenges come my way to achieve my goals.

What are your thoughts on rising entry fees at most shows? Do you believe this trend limits opportunities for average and aspiring riders?

It largely depends on the prize money involved. If the rewards are worth it, higher entry fees might be justified. However, I believe these increased costs can create barriers for riders who lack the financial means to compete frequently. This could hinder many aspiring riders from gaining vital experience. One of the most beautiful aspects of showjumping is its ability to bring together people from diverse backgrounds, united by their passion. It's important that opportunities remain accessible to this di-

versity and that the unique spirit it fosters continues to thrive.

Is there something you'd like to change about the showjumping industry?

One major issue today is the high prices of horses. I believe establishing a clear range or average price for horses at each level, based on their characteristics, could be a game-changer for the industry.

How would you respond to those who claim that Saudi Arabia violates women's rights or to those who chose not to cover the 2024 FEI



World Cup in Riyadh, citing feminism as a justification?

I'd say that those who speak without understanding are like empty vessels, loud but lacking substance. Saudi women in sports let our results and actions speak louder than words. Our achievements, both nationally and internationally, demonstrate the progress we're making. The Saudi government has been incredibly supportive, creating opportunities for women in sports including showjumping. Over 1,000 women are registered with the Federation, and they've even established a women's league with a points system.

Showjumping, at its core, is about uniting people through passion and excellence. That power surpasses outdated stereotypes or selective narratives.

If you could swap lives with any celebrity for a day, who would it be and why?

Richard Vogel, just to experience what it's like to ride United Touch S.

Any guilty pleasure TV shows or TikTok trends?

I'm not someone who spends hours on TikTok. I prefer to keep my mind sharp and stay updated on recent scientific studies.

What did you study in university, and how did you balance studying with riding?

I earned a Bachelor's degree in Life Sciences from AlFaisal University here in Saudi Arabia; I like to think of myself as a scientist! The programme was demanding, with long hours from 9 to 6. I'd bring my riding gear to the lab, and once my classes were over, I'd quickly change into my riding attire and head to training.



If you weren't riding, what do you think you'd be doing?

Karting. I'm a huge fan and love racing whenever I get the chance.

Where's your dream showjumping destination?

Visiting the World Equestrian Center in the USA is definitely on my bucket list.

What emoji best describes your personality in the ring?

The lion.

What's the best piece of advice you've received at a show?

Focus on giving your best with every round, rather than worrying about outperforming your competitors.



Funoon was born on 17 December, 2001.

Her best horses are Underline Des Marais, Oliver Twist VD Berghoeve, and Matcho van de Maashorst, and some of her notable results with Underline Des Marais include:

- * 1st place at the Grand Prix of the Amir's Sword in Doha*
- * Best Saudi female showjumper*
- * 2nd place in the small tour at the Saudi Equestrian Federation Finals*
- * 1st in the 3* small international tour*
- * 1st in the 2* small tour*

Other significant results include:

- * 2nd in the individual and 3rd in the team events at the Arab Women's Sports Championships, fully supported by the Saudi Equestrian Federation*
- * 2nd place in the Saudi Games final*