

Evergreen

BY SIMA FARES

He had a passion for flying all his life.

His childhood dream was to become a pilot.

He never fulfilled his dream.

Instead, Mohamed Selim Zaki became a showjumper competing on an Olympic level.

Sima Fares finds out more.



This is no ordinary success story. All its events are different, yet enchanting.

As a child, Mohamed Selim Zaki was interested in playing tennis and squash. He had no attraction to horses or riding at all. However, his father a keen rider, wanted his son to become a rider too, so he started pushing him to ride during his early teen years. Obedient to his father's wishes, Selim Zaki began riding, but his heart was still set on flying.

At the age of 21, Selim Zaki decided to join the tanks at the Military University, and not to enter the mounted cavalry, much to his father's dismay. He had never felt a strong bond to the equestrian sport, even after several years of riding. However, the cavalry regiment soon notified him that he would be transferred to the mounted cavalry force.

With not much choice ahead of him and a long forgotten dream to become a pilot, Selim Zaki began changing his perspective about riding with the arrival of the new French trainer, Colonel Pierre La Farg. "It was Col. La Farg who made me feel the horse," recalls Selim Zaki "and that enables you to overcome difficulties and control your horse." Col. La Farg's concept was to ride dressage first because that helps you understand the horse and feel all the different moves. Jumping comes last. Although Selim Zaki was not an avid dressage enthusiast himself, he admits that after almost 7 years of riding, it was not until he began riding with Col. La Farg that he began understanding and enjoying riding more.

The picture shows Selim Zaki riding the Irish mare Salli Ala El Nabi in Paris, 1952. The mare was first ridden by Ahmed Mazhar, but then given to Selim Zaki to compete with.

One of his most prominent achievements, is the Irish Cup, which took place in Lucerne, Switzerland. This is considered as a challenging cup and is held every two years. To win the trophy the rider has to either win first place for three consecutive years or to win first place title five times during a rider's lifetime. Selim Zaki won first place in 1954 and 1956 successively, but lost the title by one fifth of a second in 1958. Nevertheless, his name was engraved on the trophy awarded to the winner.

Quoted from L'annee Hippique 1954, was the following about Selim Zaki's victory in the Irish Cup.

"Inch'Allah - Selim Zaki, un couple dont les noms resteront gravés en lettres d'or dans les annales du tout grand jumping international!"

It means that Inch'Allah and Selim Zaki are a couple whose names will remain engraved in gold in the archives of International Show Jumping.

Selim Zaki still rides today, and enjoys tremendously the relationship he has with the mare Cookie at the Ferousia Club. "Although the groom feeds, cleans and spends most of the time with the horse," Selim Zaki states, "there must be a strong communicative relationship between the horse and the rider."

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