

A BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE

By Khaled Assem
Photos by Cris Bouroncle



Dr. Ahmed Shawki is the managing partner of Mostafa Shawki & Co. which is a member firm of Moores Rowland International (MRI), one of the largest worldwide accounting firms. Dr. Shawki is committed to the improvement and expansion of the business environment in Egypt due to his outstanding professional related activities. He has actively participated in the development of audit and accounting standards for Egypt and has worked with the Capital Market Authority to rationalize policies for the evaluation and audit of unit trusts. His professional affiliations include being the President of the Egyptian Taxation

Society, the President of the Arab Taxation Society, the Chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in the Egyptian Foundation, a Past-President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, a member of the International Fiscal Association, and past member of The Ethics Committee of the International Federation of Accounting. Dr. Shawki is also a board member of the Ferousia Club. Khaled Assem met with him to spot his views on how to continue to develop the equestrian sport in the future, in Egypt.



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Khaled: How long has it been since you took an interest in horse back riding?

Dr. Shawki: I started riding when I was quite young at the Ferousia Club. At that time the club was located next to Al Ahly Club. My enthusiasm and passion for the sport grew very quickly through my late teens. However, on one occasion, whilst I was riding with some friends at the Giza Pyramids my horse stumbled, I fell and badly twisted my arm. That incident put me off riding temporarily. During my university days I didn't ride and while studying in the UK I played squash and basketball.

After returning to Egypt from the UK where I completed my post-graduate studies, my interest in horses and riding returned. As my children grew up, I started to take them to the Ferousia Club. They showed a very keen interest in horses and riding. Because of my children's interest in the sport, I started to ride again so I decided to buy my first horse and everything progressed from then on. So I would say that I have been enjoying the company of horses and riding for the past 30 years now.

Khaled: I also understand that you have become more and more involved in the management of the Ferousia Club and you have been a board member for quite a while now?

Dr. Shawki: As a regular rider, I started to spend more time at the

club and to become active in the club's affairs. I joined the board some 10 years ago, at first as a board member and, for the past 8 years, as the treasurer. As treasurer, I am very involved in the financial affairs of the club and the development of the club's financial resources to enable it to be one of the prominent horse riding centres in Egypt and the Middle East.

Khaled: How do you perceive the equestrian sport evolving in Egypt in the foreseeable future especially in view of the current economic conditions?

Dr. Shawki: For a long time now the equestrian sport in Egypt has centred on the rider. Egypt does not have the natural habitat needed to breed show jumping horses. Egypt is famous and has an excellent international reputation for breeding fine Arabian horses. We have a well established line of Arabian-bred horses which we export all around the world. The Arabian horse is a very elegant and beautiful horse renowned for its speed and agility. However, due to its small size, the Arabian breed, has its limitations and cannot be used to compete in international show jumping events. In the past, it was the Egyptian aristocracy who promoted the equestrian sport of show jumping because they could afford to import European-bred horses to Egypt.

Also, the Egyptian Royal Cavalry has successful history with many of its Riders competing in both

international and Olympic show jumping events. At the 1960 Olympics in Rome the Egyptian Equestrian team's performance was up amongst the top ranking teams but, sadly, since then, Egypt started to see a decline

In its competitive ability. However, within recent years we have started to see a renewed and growing enthusiasm for the sport by some Egyptian entrepreneurs who became interested in the sport through the fostering of a new generation of young riders. Some 12 years ago, the Egyptian Equestrian Federation took the lead to import several French-bred show jumping horses which they gave to Egypt's top riders. Other equestrian centres have since followed suit by importing similar horses from Holland, Belgium, France, Germany and the UK. The sport is developing quickly and with good success.

In recent years, the price of an European-bred show jumping horse has become increasingly prohibitive. I believe that the enhancement of the equestrian sport in Egypt is hinged on our ability to finance the importation of expensive show jumping horses. However of late, several institutions and individuals have shown an interest to participate in the development of the equestrian sport in Egypt. Yet, we have to come up with the right partnership between those who have the financial resources and those with the talent for horse riding and show jumping. I don't think that we will see a high performance international sport in Egypt within the immediate near future. We will most probably be limited to only a modest level of show jumping. We do not possess

the infrastructure, at the moment, to be able to maintain a high level competitive sport. That is why most of our promising young riders reside in Europe where they ride and train. The European arena is where they are able to compete on an international scale. Regrettably, I do not think that those Egyptian riders who are living permanently in Egypt will be able to compete internationally.

Khaled: As you are a part of the club's management, how do you see its role as a pivot in the development of the equestrian sport, even on small level?

Dr. Shawki: The Ferousia Club has a long history in show jumping. It is the oldest equestrian club both in Egypt and in the Middle East as it was established in 1938. At present, the club is under the leadership of Gen. Elwy Ghazy, who is an international and Olympic rider and was a member of the very successful Egyptian Olympic team which competed in the Olympic Games in Rome in 1960. Under his leadership, the club is undergoing a comprehensive plan to upgrade its infrastructure, facilities and stables. Also, the club is stabling young high-quality horses to raise the standard of both its riders and show jumping school. I can see a sincere effort to improve both the infrastructure and technical standards of the riders and horses to become more competitive. The only restriction is whether the necessary financial means are available or not.

Khaled: How did you become an international judge?

Dr. Shawki: Watching my children learn to ride and seeing their interest and love for horses start to grow, encouraged me to renew my prior interest in horses. During this time I started to become interested in the technical aspects of the sport. Both Gen. Elwy Ghazy and Gen. Gameel Harris encouraged me to become an equestrian judge and both, were in fact, very instrumental in my decision to attend and

participate in various international equestrian seminars and conferences and urged me to study and train to become a show jumping judge. I enrolled with the International Equestrian Federation as an international candidate judge and participated in several European show jumping events which is pre-requisite to become an international judge. I traveled to Switzerland to sit for the qualifying examination, which thankfully, I passed and was invited to judge at various international events. After 2 years as a International candidate judge, I sat for the qualifying exam in Germany and became an international judge. During the past 8 years, I have traveled to Royan, Biarritz and La Baule where I have participated in their annual showing jumping event as the foreign judge, and just this year, I was also invited to LeMans also as the foreign judge.

Khaled: Do you have any aspirations or specific plans with regard to the future of the equestrian sport? Can we develop or integrate this sport in any way? Perhaps the government could help by reducing the taxes and customs duties levied on imported horses? What are your hopes?

Dr. Shawki: I strongly believe that private institutions should become more actively involved in the financing of horses. Actually, at present many multinational companies are sponsoring the sport but we need to develop this concept throughout the business community at large. As you know, there are 18 medals given in the Olympic Games to equestrian events. However, if one compares the per capita of each medal to the amount spent on other spectator sports we could achieve much more. If you think about the amount of money which is spent on football, for instance, we only need just one tenth of that money. Egypt is a developing country. There is a huge interest in all sporting events and activities and, I think, we will start to see an increase in the level of sponsorship for all sports. Still, I'm not

happy about the diminutive media coverage given to the equestrian sport. For an event organiser to be able to attract sponsors you must be able to give them a certain amount of mileage on prime time television and media coverage in general. If we succeed to put show jumping and riding within the same framework as football we would have no problem to attract sponsors. As I previously mentioned an Egyptian rider will not be able to compete internationally if living in Egypt permanently. To give you an example, there are 1.5 million riders registered in the French Equestrian Federation, of which a third (600,000) are show jumping riders. Compare these figures to the Egyptian Equestrian Federation, you will find only 1,200 riders. What we need to do is to increase our base so Egypt can become more competitive. And with that, I'm sure we will start to see more Egyptian sponsored competitions. In Europe, during the summer months, there are at least 3 or 4 international competitions each weekend so riders are able to compete every weekend for 5 or 6 months which is the best training for them. I am sure that reducing the taxes and customs duties on the importation of horses will greatly help the sport. This will encourage the private sector to import horses.

Khaled: So this puts a considerable load on your plans regarding the development of the club and its future role?

Dr. Shawki: Quite simply, hard work and tenacity is the best formula to attract more riders and more corporate sponsors. We must create a greater awareness through the media about the history of the equestrian sport in Egypt. How many Egyptians know about the success of the Egyptian Equestrian team in the 1960 Rome Olympics and the silver medal Egypt won at the Mediterranean Games? The community should look at the sport as a source of recognition and medals in international and Olympic events. ■