

EGYPT'S NATIONAL CHAMPIONS BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

By Khaled Assem

EGYPT HOSTS A PROMISING EQUESTRIAN SCENE AND OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS THERE HAS BEEN NOTICEABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN SHOW JUMPING AND DRESSAGE, DESPITE ALL THAT THE COUNTRY HAS BEEN GOING THROUGH. THE 2013/2014 NATIONAL SHOW JUMPING LEAGUE AND CUP WERE WON BY KARIM EL SOBKY AND SHADY SAMIR, WHILE SHAHINAZ EL-NAGGAR WON THE NATIONAL DRESSAGE LEAGUE. HT DECIDED TO CATCH UP WITH THESE EGYPTIAN NATIONAL CHAMPIONS AT ONE OF EGYPT'S MOST HISTORIC AND MAJESTIC NATIONAL SITES, THE SALADIN CITADEL WHICH HOUSES AL-ABLAQ PALACE (THE STRIPED PALACE). THE PROMINENT CITADEL ALSO HOUSES THE IMPRESSIVE MOSQUE BUILT BY AL-NASIR MOHAMMED WHO WAS A FASCINATING AND INFLUENTIAL SULTAN OF THE 1294-1295, 1299-1309 AND 1310-1341 ERA. THE MOSQUE AND THE GREAT HALL OF JUSTICE WERE BUILT WITH A GREEN DOME THAT TOWERED ABOVE THE OTHER STRUCTURES IN THE SOUTHERN ENCLOSURE OF THE CITADEL. AL-ABLAQ PALACE HAD A STAIRCASE LEADING DOWN TO THE LOWER ENCLOSURE AND THE ROYAL STABLES WHERE AL-NASIR KEPT 4,800 HORSES, OBVIOUSLY, AN APPROPRIATE VENUE FOR OUR EXCLUSIVE PHOTO-SHOOT OF OUR PROFILED WINNERS.





**KARIM
EL SOBKY**
NATIONAL LEAGUE WINNER:

PERCEPTIVE TEAMWORK:

“This is the fourth time for me to win the National League; I came in 1st place with Tistarosa and 4th place with Dalivina. The effort exerted in winning the 2013/2014 season was a lot less than before because I had started to think about the sport in a different way; my focus is currently based on the balance of the horse which was a major contributing and developing factor for my recent results as well as Shady’s. Even though our horses jump the biggest classes here, we decided to invest in training them over smaller fences almost completely without contact in order to



develop their own natural balance in front of the fence, where in time they would independently assess the take-off point, and moreover create the necessary disposition for ascent. This helped the horses refine their perceptions and feels for the distance because the difference between a horse with a winning attitude and another one without is that the former helps the rider figure out the better take-off point to the fence, and responds accordingly. I focus diligently on the balance of the horse along with that of the rider and I also tried to implement with Shady forward riding and how to apply it. Now, Shady focuses on riding the corners forward to the fences all the time and afterwards feels his distance as a result. This tremendously helped him in keeping a continuous tempo and pace throughout the course.”

FUTURE PLANS:

“I hope that the equine ban imposed on Egypt four years ago would soon be lifted because I would like to go to compete in the Arab League. I would be unable to base my horses in Europe the way many other riders are doing so now because of my full-time job at my dentistry clinic here. I would also be keen to pass on the experience I have through local training workshops which I could consider giving twice a month for two or three hours.”



SHADY SAMIR

NATIONAL CUP WINNER:

THE HORSES AND THE CONFIDENCE:

“Being in the top league is very exhilarating and quite frankly takes a lot of work and mileage, not just to reach the top but to stay there. A lot of hard work locally and internationally as well as a management plan for the choice of which horses to ride in which class and which shows to attend, allows me to accordingly define my bigger goal.

“Locally, I came in 2nd in the Egyptian League with Alejandro and 3rd with Elkbeer Awe. In the Egyptian Cup, I came in 1st with Elkbeer Awe yet 6th with Alejandro. Internationally, it took quite some time to find the right horses to buy and proceed with my training in Holland which added tremendously to my exposure at international shows and my ability to cope better in front of a bigger crowd. As such I also decided to go the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and participate in some World Cup Qualifiers. It was then that I realised that I needed to redefine my horse purchase strategies as I am a rider that needs time to communicate and bond with my horses before I suddenly take them to bigger classes. The League in the UAE was very tough as all top Arab riders are present and the remarkable increase in prize money. I was lucky I had some good results; I was placed 3rd in Sharjah’s Grand Prix with Cuba Libre, a seven-year-old mare. Such exposure made it much easier for me to ride locally especially since I have better horses here. I could have done better in the Egyptian League, but as I mentioned, I was showing in the UAE and as a consequence didn’t participate at all the shows here.”

RIDING PARTNERS:

“Elkbeer Awe was a horse originally ridden by Karim who helped me a lot and mentioned that the horse would improve my overall skills because he has a very sensitive back and mouth, he doesn’t let anyone touch him; as such, I would learn plenty from the horse. Even though I got a lot of advice from others against that horse, I purchased him anyway and he turned out to be a useful horse as advised by Karim. The points that Karim elaborated on were using much less hands and it was much more about balance instead, not just the rider’s balance, but mostly the horse’s. “You can always compromise the distances but never the balance of the horse”, he would say. For example, even though Alejandro is a fast and hot-blooded horse, I am now able to ride him with a lot less contact. In the past he was more dependent on the hands and accordingly was always too sharp. Now that he is more balanced and less dependent, he is much more manageable in the ring. Karim is like my mentor to me, whenever I choose a new horse I always refer to his opinion. Riding forward has saved me a lot of time faults which has led to my better results this season.”

FUTURE PLANS:

“I will take Alejandro and Elkbeer Awe and head over to France to train with Alice Debany Clero as she has organised a 10-week-plan for us until we start the 2014/2015 Arab League season in Morocco. Her plan is to help us in the preparation; the horses are 12 and 13 years old respectively and they’re the ones who are ready to compete in these events and I think that I have a big chance at winning with them. Alejandro is brave, I will use him for all the bigger classes while Elkbeer Awe is more competitive so I would ride him in grand prix. I have another nine-year-old horse who I just bought and jumped in Lummen this year. I will use him with the other horses in Europe for the medium tours and above and at the beginning of the 2015 season I will take him back to Egypt. I do hope that after showing in Europe this summer, I will be able to compete in the 11 World Cup Qualifiers of the 2014/2015 Arab League season so I can actually make it to the World Cup.”

SHAHINAZ EL-NAGGAR

DRESSAGE LEAGUE WINNER:

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP:

"I started riding when I was twelve years old yet I was never as consistent as I would have liked to be. At that time I trained very hard as the early stages of development in general take lots of work such as riding without a saddle, developing balance, and understanding more of the routine that I had to refine every day. Fortunately, I've been riding continuously since 2005 and my first serious championship was in 2009. I have been riding Hurricane since 2007 and he added a lot to my riding because when I first started riding him he wouldn't respond to my aids as he was too sensitive and delicate. In fact, he would respond differently to what I asked for, yet with time and training, we became more of a team. I adapted to his sensitivity and he responded to my requests. Truly, he added a lot to my personality and I became more confident and placed plenty of trust in him. During the warm-ups I take control but when we're in the arena he knows what to do; he can always tell the difference between warming-up and actual competition. In the arena he carries himself well and always produces beyond my expectations. It's like he shows-off himself and his performance; to him, it's all about character."

MY HORSE AND I:

"I have a very nice relationship with Hurricane and during my low moments I would always go to ride him and feel much better. He trusts me, and I know that he loves me. I always keep contact with him by going to see him daily whether I'm riding or not; he loves apple juice so I always bring him some. He is more like a pet in the stall."

THE PASSION WITHIN:

"Riding is one of the main priorities in my life; I can't live or function properly without it. It also provides another dimension as I share this passion with my daughter Nabila, whom I'm very happy to pass on the love for this sport to. This passion for riding has increased the bond between us, and when we ride together you can't tell who is who."

FUTURE PLANS:

"Next year I will be competing with Hurricane as well as two other horses: Usual Suspect, the son of Jazz who was a well-known Olympic dressage horse, and Bud Spencer, who I'm supposed to compete with in the A1 Class and he's the son of Biotop, another Olympic dressage horse. My long term goals are to compete in the World Equestrian Games and eventually the Olympics, as for my short term ones, I'm looking forward to the 2015 Pan Arab Games in Lebanon." 🏆

All photos by Khaled Fadda

