

A photograph of a grey horse running in a desert. The horse is in motion, with its tail and mane flowing. It is wearing a red saddle pad and a black saddle. The background shows the Great Pyramids of Giza under a hazy sky.

ENDURANCE

AT THE 11TH PAN ARAB GAMES

By Maryanne Gabbani

Endurance racing made its first appearance in the Pan Arab Games this fall with a 120 km, 5 loop race based at Sakkara Country Club. An Abu Dhabi based firm prepared the impressive base camp at the club prior to the November 19 race with stables for the participating teams, entertainment and service tents, the vet check facilities and a hospital tent for any horses that might require it. Eight countries, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, participated in the event.



Endurance racing requires a great deal of preparation on the part of the horses and riders and the teams brought horses of the highest standards to this contest; horses bred and trained all over the world in some cases. The horses are examined by veterinarians the day before the event to assure that each horse is capable of the demands that will be made during the race, and there is an additional vet check after each of the five loops of the race. If a horse is judged to be unfit to continue it is withdrawn from the competition. A rider may also pull a horse from competition if he/she feels that the horse is not performing at the necessary level. Additionally, after each vet check, the horse and rider have a mandatory hold time of approximately thirty to forty minutes during which the horses eat, drink and rest.

The race began at dawn from the desert in front of Sakkara Country Club with forty-two horses accompanied by even more SUV's left for the first loop at 6 am. The initial loop was the longest, 36 km out to the Bent Pyramid at Dahshur and back. The footing was ungroomed natural desert sand with a light cover of rocks, a footing that was to cause many pulls due to lameness during the day. The UAE team went out at a blistering pace of about 22 kph and took an early lead that they held

all day. Each team was allowed six horses and riders, three of whom had to finish for the team medals. Most teams brought more than six horses and selected the best of the group the day before the race. The UAE horses were for the most part European and Australian horses that had been bred, trained and raced in their original countries prior to coming to Egypt. The Qatari horses had been at Sakkara Country Club for a couple of weeks prior to the race on their way home from a summer of racing in France.

Most of the day saw a strong competition among the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia for the top spots, with all but the UAE and Qatar falling victim to the trail, so that at the end of the day the UAE took team gold and Qatar took the silver. The race for the bronze took place at a slower pace but with no less intensity as the Syrian and the Egyptian teams rode a conservative race designed to keep their horses in the competition rather than to attempt to match the burning pace of the UAE. The final loops were, in fact, ridden at much the same rate by the front runners (who had by now eliminated most of their competitors) as by the more conservative teams. The bronze was finally awarded to the Egyptians and the Syrians jointly as both teams had the same number of finishers.



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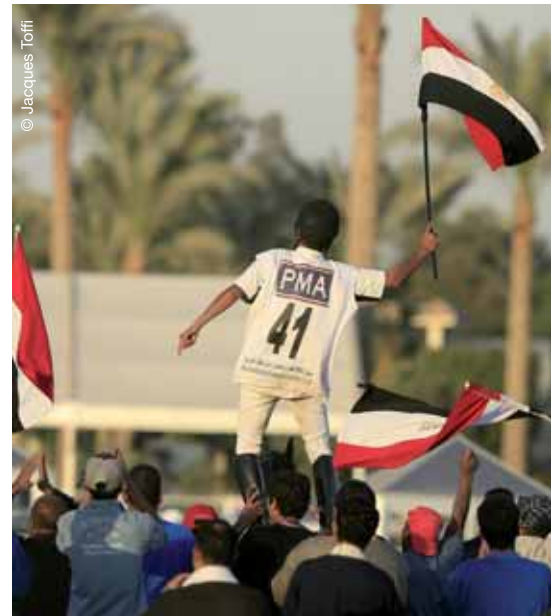
▲ HRH Princess Alia bint Al Hussein,
President of the Jordanian
Equestrian Federation



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THE RACE FOR THE BRONZE TOOK PLACE AT A SLOWER PACE BUT WITH NO LESS INTENSITY AS THE SYRIAN AND THE EGYPTIAN TEAMS RODE A CONSERVATIVE RACE DESIGNED TO KEEP THEIR HORSES IN THE COMPETITION RATHER THAN TO ATTEMPT TO MATCH THE BURNING PACE OF THE UAE.

ONE OF THE INTERESTING ASPECTS OF THIS COMPETITION WAS THE HIGHER PROFILE OF WOMEN RIDERS, WITH INDIVIDUALS ON THE JORDANIAN AND BAHRAINI TEAM AND A MAJORITY OF WOMEN RIDERS ON THE SYRIAN TEAM.

Manal Jadan ▼



The Jordanian team had an unfortunate share of bad luck when one of their horses got cut by a rock on the coronary band in the first loop and another pulled for lameness at the first vet check, bringing the number of competitors down to three. Later in the race, another horse was pulled by the rider who felt that the horse would have been at risk to continue.

The Libyans had never participated in an international endurance competition before and had trucked their horses over 3 thousand km to join this one. Having been isolated for so long from the rest of the equestrian world by the air embargo, their learning curve was extremely steep and their horses, of which only three started, were eliminated in the first loop. Hopefully, this will not deter them from further involvement.

One of the interesting aspects of this competition was the higher profile of women riders, with individuals on the Jordanian and Bahraini team and a majority of women riders on the Syrian

team. This is something that is welcome as worldwide women in endurance are equal in numbers or outnumbering the men.

The venue for the race attracted a relatively small crowd of spectators, but then endurance racing isn't exactly a riveting spectator sport. Most of the action occurs out on the trail. Spectators see a horse and rider arrive, move to a cooling area where the horse's pulse is brought down to 60 to 64 beats per minute for the vet check, and then to the vet check area where veterinarians look at whether the horse is dehydrated, whether it is lame, or whether the digestive system is impaired (lack of gut sounds). If all of these are all right, a happy horse and rider go back to the rest area where they relax for a time and then go out to repeat the entire process once again. As one woman spectator was overheard saying, "I've never spent so much time watching horses being bathed."



Nawaf Al Otaibi



◀ ▼ The UAE Gold medallists

