



SYCAMORE STABLES INTERVIEW WITH JOANNE SLOAN ALLEN

By Nada H. Abdelmoniem

SET IN THE SERENE AND QUIET HILLS OF COUNTRY ANTRIM IN NORTHERN IRELAND, SYCAMORE STABLES IS A BUSY HIVE OF ACTION, DYNAMISM, PREPARATION, PLANNING, AND DISCIPLINE. IT IS HERE THAT JOANNE SLOAN ALLEN AND THE WKD HORSES AND RIDERS WORK AND TRAIN. HT HAD A CHANCE TO CATCH UP WITH JOANNE FOR HER VIEWS ON HER FACILITY, HER TRAINING PROGRAMME AND THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE WORLD EQUESTRIAN GAMES IN NORMANDY NEXT SUMMER.

When were Sycamore Stables established?

Sycamore Stables were established by me in 2000 - after I came back from being based in England with David Broome; I was very lucky to train with David, Peter Charles and Graham Fletcher early in my career and I took the valuable lessons I learnt in these top yards and decided to extend my home yard in the green hills of Co Antrim, Northern Ireland, at Sycamore Stables.

The idea behind Sycamore was to try and establish a place where we would aim to breed, produce and eventually sell horses to the top level in our sport, but following the concept of the horses coming first - i.e. the horses would take as long as

they needed to develop, not forcing them to a level before they were ready. Having mostly worked with Irish horses throughout my jumping career I saw how these horses got better and better as they matured and, indeed, were at their best between ten and thirteen years of age - a theory we still hold here at Sycamore with all our young horses being very lightly jumped until seven years when we put "the pedal to the metal" so to speak!

As time has gone on we have gradually expanded our yard to what it is today - three farms with guest and groom accommodation, over twenty permanent boxes, breeding barns, gallop, two fibre menages, grass jumping arena and large horse walker. I am very proud of Sycamore Stables and it is constantly evolving and growing as our business expands!

Please tell us about some of the horses kept at the stables?

Gosh - we have nearly seventy horses at Sycamore! But the main horses we are jumping this year and hopefully we will have competing at the Vilamoura Atlantic tour will be Wkd Pepperpot, 2002 grey mare, Fortunus x Diamonds are trumps, Irish sport horse - our fantastic Pepper! What more can be said about this amazing little mare with the huge heart and the allergy to wood! She has been mostly responsible for taking Sameh El Dahan to the next level in this sport - with their unforgettable rounds at the 2012 World Cup Finals. Winner of many classes, including the ranking class in Morocco in October 2013, Pepper will jump the "big stuff" this year with her main rider Sameh, the ranking classes and Grand Prix in Vilamoura, and hopefully some five star Grand Prix this year, unless she is sold.

Sumas Zorro, 2004, chestnut mare, Wdl Douglas x Horos, Irish sports horse - our feisty Zorro - the chunky mare with the huge jump!! Sameh and I share the ride on Zorro, with me competing her last summer when Sameh broke his arm - however I think since Morocco he has pinched the ride off me so we'll have to toss

a coin this year to see who rides her where!! This mare is seldom out of the placings and has won many classes for both Sameh and me - But for Vilamoura he will retain the ride - the main aim for Zorro this year is the World Equestrian Games in Normandy for which she has gained her certificate of capability.

Limelight de Breve, 1999, brown mare, French bred - nothing really needs to be said about this incredible speed horse! Fifteen years young, having won nearly most of all the prestigious titles with her former rider, Laura Renwick, including the Queen Elisabeth cup, she is still winning, having just recently been placed fourth with Sameh at the MET in Oliva. Super speedy and fast "Loulou" just wants to win! She was originally bought for me to compete in the global classes in her twilight years, from top rider Laura, but she is, to be honest, a bit strong for me, and although I had some nice placings with her I always felt she was the boss and not me! She and Sameh have now formed an incredible partnership with them securing many wins last season - she is his main speed horse.

Championnes, bay mare, 2003, Come On x Kenwood - my main horse, "Coco" has been with me since an eight year old, and is fantastic to ride - she has a beautiful technique, scopey and careful, and I had a lot of fun with her at the 2013 Morocco Royal Tour, jumping in the World Cup qualifiers with her. She will be my main ride for the ranking classes this year - although Sameh might "borrow" her for the occasional big event!

Vera, 2002, Chestnut mare by Faldo, owned by Sherif El Barway, a long-time supporter of Sameh. Sherif sent Vera over to Sycamore last year from Egypt she has settled in super and has had lots of results with both Sameh and me! - winning second place with me during the Morocco Royal tour 140 class, and third with Sameh in Vilamoura two star ranking classes in October 2013. At the moment the plan is for me to have the ride on her in Vilamoura, but Sameh and I swap amongst all the horses so he will probably do a few



The view at Sycamore Stables

shows with her after that tour.

Lady's Queen, 2004, brown mare by For Pleasure. An exciting new addition to our string "Lady" joined us in the summer 2013 and has mostly been ridden by me. She is an extremely careful and athletic mare whom we have moved up the heights slowly, and we think an awful lot of her - she is so simple to ride and I think she will jump a big track - I will compete her in Vilamoura - although I think after that Sam has his eye on her and she is another we will have to toss a coin for!!

Elegance Casablanca, 2004, Grey mare by Clinton. "Casa" is another Egyptian-owned horse, owned by Sameh's good friend and loyal supporter, Karim Abdel Fattah. She was formerly ridden by Karim, but was sent to Sameh after the World Cup qualifier in Jordan in 2012. Sam is her main rider and has already had some super results with this exuberant mare, with her trademark flick of her back legs, winning just recently the one star Grand Prix in St. Lo. Sameh thinks a lot of her and plans to ride her in more Grand Prix this year and will alternate her

amongst his other top string this season in Vilamoura.

These horses will be our main ones in Vilamoura for the big classes, and they will be backed up by our other younger ones such as Wkd California and Wkd Tokyo.

We also will have horses competing in the CSI Young Horses in Vilamoura, among whom we have some really exciting potential stars including Wkd Diva, a seven-year-old by Balourada x Hors La Loi, a really elastic mare who has had an incredible run of clear rounds so far, being placed every day at the January Cliva show; Wkd Hullabaloo, our home-bred seven-year-old by Balou du Rouet x Fleurie du Manoir, is our oldest progeny of Sycamore's breeding programme and we are really proud of this big jumping scopey mare. We also have six-year-olds in Wkd Milano, or "Bart" by warrant. This big baby is another consistent horse, jumping super at the recent Oliva Tour, he is big, scopey and careful - very easy and a real playful character. "Bart" is a big favourite with our grooms! Our other six-year-old is the home-bred son

of Lupicor, Wkd Mojito, his mother jumped the Puissance of over seven foot at Olympia in 2000, and "Jake" has definitely inherited her scope, but his super technique makes him our one to watch!

With fourteen horses going to Vilamoura it's impossible to mention them all, but we hope they will all go well, and hopefully some of them will find their future "forever riders" and this show will just be the stepping stone to their future careers in other stables.

Tell us about your training programme at the stables?

As I previously mentioned, our ethos at Sycamore is to treat each horse individually and we try to tailor their training programmes to them. The young horses are all started from three and then turned away to the grass again. From four they are lightly campaigned on the flat and maybe some training shows, five years to seven they will go to one or two of the big spring tours and then come home to again have a break over the summer. Then from seven on usually we feel they are strong



Joanne & Chmpiones, Rabat 2013

enough to move up a gear and we will travel them to do young horse classes and CSI one and two star shows.

At home our main aim is fitness and rideability. Our horses alternate between flatwork in the arena, lunging "long and low", roadwork, and going for trips around the gallop - all interspersed with time out in our grass paddocks. We also will school the younger ones over poles and small grids as required during the week - the older horses seldom jump at home unless we are having a session with our trainer John Ledingham who regularly comes to the yard to put us through our paces!! They also all go on the walker twice a day - so as you can imagine they are very fit and seldom bored!!

You are a sponsor for Egyptian rider Sameh El Dahan and together you make a winning team for the stables; when did this partnership start and what are your goals?

In 2010 I was unlucky enough to break my leg badly resulting in several operations and pins and plates, as a result of this and the

burgeoning number of young horses Sycamore had ready to compete I was desperate for another rider to come on board and help take the stables to the next level which I knew I was not capable of doing alone. Sameh and I had a mutual friend with Cian O'Connor and he recommended Sameh to me for the Spanish Sunshine Tour - and so Sameh was thrown to the lions so to speak, arriving in Spain to eight horses, mostly very green and somehow we muddled through, and what initially started out as a temporary arrangement somehow grew into our partnership and the creation of the Wkd Show Jumping Team!! We started to buy more horses together and Sameh worked his magic on the youngsters producing Pepperpot and Zorro to the levels I knew they could reach. For a small yard I am proud to say that our horses are now competing at the top shows and Sameh has not only been to a World Cup Final, but is now recognised by his peers in Europe for the exceptional talent that he is, his rise up the World Rankings has been exciting to watch and hopefully this season he will get to represent Egypt at the World

Equestrian Games in Normandy.

Our goals as a team are to produce horses for sale that we are proud of - our main aim is to earn enough to keep competing at the best shows, and the most important thing for us is that our customers are happy and go on to be successful at their chosen level. Past horses such as Wkd Monaco, Taekwondo and Wkd Lexington to name a few have gone on from us to great success with their new partners, and this means so much to us as a team. Sameh and I have an amazing partnership of trust and respect for each other which I think makes us such a strong team - we both have the same attitude of the horse must always come first, and we both have an extreme thirst for success - as a team we swap the horses between us to hopefully make the best use of our individual strengths, and to show that the horses are adaptable and easy regardless of the rider strength or size. Our main goal is to have a home-bred Sycamore horse representing Egypt at a championship event - we are both dedicated and focused on making this happen and hopefully through my management of the



Joanne & Sameh with Championes, El Jadida 2013

team, Sameh's natural talent, the support from our amazing sponsors at Wkd and our loyal owners, this dream can become a reality. We have already achieved so much in a short span of time and our belief is if we can dream it, we can do it!!!

How many shows do you usually participate in annually and what is your calendar for 2014?

It would be easier to count the weekends we don't jump!! We are constantly on the road as a team - we are lucky now to have built up several strings of horses which we can rotate according to our end goal for that particular period of time. I think we must compete at more shows than most riders - in fact when you consider we are on first name terms with most of the airline staff and know the schedule to most major airports in the world that gives you an idea of how hectic it is to be part of an international show jumping team! It's now all about ranking points, and being at the best shows possible so our horses can be seen by potential clients - it involves a lot of road and air miles and a

very dedicated support crew - in fact there were times last summer that it looked like the circus was arriving in town when the Wkd team rocked up to the shows in some sleepy village mid-Europe with our entourage of grooms, dogs and family members in tow - not to mention the various trucks and trailers to carry us all!

This season 2014 we are already well underway with fourteen horses on their way to Vilamoura Atlantic tour for a month, via a quick show in Oliva! We will be based in Portugal until mid March and then we will head to the south of France and Italy to do several two and three stars. If Sameh is qualified for the World Cup Final then we will work towards that in April in Lyons. May and June are usually worked around the global tours for me - taking in St. Tropez, Cannes and Monte Carlo this year - after that we hope to make a trip to Spruce Meadows for several weeks with some of the horses - which will be really exciting for us - with at least four five star shows. However, the main focus of this year is Sameh and the World Equestrian Games. All roads for us will focus on Normandy

in August! Then it will be back to the World Cup trail again September/October chasing the Arab League qualifiers and then some indoor shows with the young horses at the end of the year!!! Like every year it will go quickly, I'm sure!!

El Dahan has been qualified for the WEG; tell us about your preparations and expectations?

As I have mentioned our main aim for this season is to get Sam to the WEG - he has never had such a fantastic string of horses, and Zorro, who will be his main ride there, is the perfect age and has been produced by us specifically for this event. I honestly believe that with the talented riders that Egypt has now they really have a chance of fielding a strong team which will go to the WEG with a realistic chance - with experienced riders such as Nael Nasser, Abdel Said, and Karim Zoghby to mention only a few, this year's WEG should be very interesting - and Sam hopefully will be there as ready and prepared as we can be! 🐾



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