

OPEN DAY IN EL ZAHRAA STATE STUD

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THE GREEN OASIS OF EGYPTIAN ARABIANS IN CAIRO



„A day in paradise cannot be more pleasant than a day in El Zahraa, this island of peace, of beauty, grace, and dapperness. Wherever you look, from the magnificent stallions, enchanting mares and spirited foals, to the smallest of flowers and blossoms, everything fairly emanates noblesse and high-level breeding.“

ERIKA SCHIELE, 1972

Everything was ready once more on April 14. El Zahraa state stud, this historic breeding ground for Egyptian Arabian horses in Cairo, opened their doors wide for interested visitors, celebrating the 2nd OPEN DAY in the history of the stud. Since its founding in 1920, El Zahraa is the highlight for every lover of Egyptian Arabians in the world. Egypt is not a part of Arabia proper, despite the Arabic language spoken there, and nature as well as climate in the Nile delta are different from the dry desert climate of the Arabian Peninsula. Still, the stud has always succeeded in preserving and even developing the noble, chiselled “desert Arabian” from the Nejd area, the type the Egyptian pashas cherished and imported

to Cairo during the 19th and 20th centuries, using all the means available to them. All over the world, this type has been the embodiment of the ideal Arabian horse for centuries.

Lots of interested breeders, many of them from Europe, had come to see for themselves. There was the offspring of the legendary Arabian horses of El Zahraa to be scrutinized, and they were keen on making sure that after the political upheavals of 2012, the stud continues flourishing, true to the flower it is named for. One item on the agenda was to honour the president of WAHO, the World Arabian Horse Organisation. The Egyptian Minister of Agriculture, Mr Salah Abdel Moemen, was present in person to award Dr. Hans Nagel from

Germany, a frequent visitor in El Zahraa, with a prize in acknowledgement of his achievements as a leading famous breeder of straight Egyptian horses.

Improved public relations, facilitating their task of keeping the stud smoothly running, was what the stud staff expected from this day. One of the things they hoped for in particular was to be able to make people aware of several important structural improvements that have been carefully planned for a long time: an animal hospital to be opened on the premises of the stud, as well as an education centre for grooms and trainers. Several useful improvements for day-to-day work with the 400 animals of El Zahraa should be made. It's these constant honing and improving efforts that made possible that legendary reputation of El Zahraa being a green oasis, with eucalyptus and banana trees shading the sandy ground, right in the middle of a much-trafficked residential district of Cairo.

As political representatives, El Zahraa felt honoured to welcome the Minister of Agriculture Mr Salah Abdel Mo'men, and the President of EAO (the Egyptian Agricultural Organisation) Mr.Hamdi Assi. Of course, the new Director of El Zahraa state stud was present, and a hundred breeders from Cairo and abroad were enthusiastic about attending the well-organised stock show of the stud's most cherished breeding horses. The majority of the locals were curious young breeders wishing to discover more about the celebrated Straight Egyptian breed and the original Egyptian heritage that is handed down to them here. The Egyptian Government has granted this occasion great importance, intending it to encourage breeders of Straight Egyptians to go ahead and continue with their breeding programmes, which has been a difficult task indeed during the recent times of upheaval.

The Breeding Department of the stud, consisting of Mr. Ali Shaarawi as Breeding Advisor, Dr. Nerhan Moutawakkel as Head of the Breeding Department, and of the veterinarian Dr. Ayman Saad, had carefully selected 45 horses and prepared them for the presentation. Just a few years ago, there were different occasions when you could hear it said that there were hardly any typey horses of the „Nejd style“ left in El Zahraa, but today, the horses present themselves quite differently, which is readily apparent even for somebody just passing the spacious sand paddocks of the stud. Most of the horses have re-gained a certain refinement and an exotic look reminding us of the influence of the EAO Chief Sire Nazeer during the 1950ies and 1960ies, when studs in the USA and in Germany were established, such as Gleannloch and



Dr. Hans Nagel (WAHO President), Dr. Salah Abd El Mo'men (Minister of Agriculture) and Eng. Hamdi Assi (Chairman of E.A.O.)



Eng. Hamdi Assi, Dr. Hans Nagel, Mr. Ali Shaarawi and Dr. Mohamed Y. Maastock



Mrs. Dany Barbary and Dr. Hans Nagel



Mr. Soufian Taha and Mrs. Fatma Hamza



Mrs. Mila Khamis



Mr. Mohamed Z. Omas, Mr. Akmed Abd El Razek, Mr Ahmed Abo Bakr and Mr. Mohsen El Gabry



Mr. Tarek Hamza, Eng. Hamdi Assi, Dr. Nagel and Dr. Salah Abel El Mo'men



Mr. Frank Boetto, Dr. Nagel and Mr. Tarek Hamza

Ansata, Knyphausen and Marbach, Bentwood, Imperial stud, Nagel's Katharinenhof and others. These were studs which gained their reputations by buying or using, in their breeding, Nazeer offspring such as Morafic, Ansata Ibn Halima, Hadban Enzahi, or Ghazal. The Breeding Department has obviously done an admirable job in recent years. El Zahraa's noble "stallion of the century", Nazeer himself, was most fittingly represented by stud-bred offspring of the 5th and 6th generations: his great-great-grandsons Gabbour (El Ragel x Gobraana) and Mogaser (Gabbour x Sawary) presented themselves in top form.

The audience was more than impressed by their refined type, accompanied by enormous movements. There were also two Gad Allah sons, Tagweed out of the famous mare Tee and Baydoun out of noble Bint Ibtsam, who thrilled their audience into storms of enthusiasm.

The presentation started with the mainstays of the stud, the valuable mares that form the foundation of any breeding work. Some of El Zahraa's mares even enjoy world-wide fame: there were Rashadah, Azmeralda, Nadraa, Darwishah, Raghdanah, Rashdanah and Mangoomah, almost all of them most convincingly beautiful, just what their tail families are known for. Of the fillies, the particularly impressive ones were the three daughters of Rawwah: Ahrar (Rawwah x Hamass), Raheemah (Rawwah x Wegdan), and Rawhana (Rawwah x Sarhana). All of them displayed choice show quality. While even 10 years back, the somewhat short croup of many El Zahraa horses was something to find fault with, and the topline did not always live up to expectations, this appears to be yesterday's problem which is no longer a recent topic. Consistently, all the horses displayed good legs, beautiful and harmonious bodies, type, elegance, a good tail carriage, and, particularly striking, unbelievably good impulsive gaits.



Rashadah (Rashdan x Enad)



Mangoomah (Gad Allah x Wadha)



Azmeraldah. (Rahal x Zoak)



Nadraa (Rashdan x Saaba)



Raghdanah (Rashdan x Zoak)



Day El Kammar (Defaf x Maya)



Darweeshah (Ibn Akhtal x Dahshah)



Rashdanah (Rashdan x Shoalah)



Raheema (Rawah x Wegdan)



Rawhana (Rawah x Sarhana)



Malayka (Baydoun x Fekrah)



Fou'ada (by Serag El Din, out of Dafayer)



Badarah (by Baydoun, out of Daab)



Baseer (by Al Badr, out of Masanah)



Farouz (Taif x Fakherah)



Naqawet Einy (by Gabour, out of Naqawah)



Farhety (by Rabah, out of Falak)



Ikhteyar (by Kheir El Din, out of Zadah)



Nour El Fagr (by Defaf, out of Juhana)



A Ahmad (by Wassaf, out of Hodnah)



Waneyyah (Baydoun x Naqeyah)



Nagwat (Gandoul x Teyam)



Rabhana (Rabah x Sena)



Kariman (Baydoun x Qabsah)



Mougaser (Gabour x Sawary)



Gabbour (El Ragel x Gobranah)



Monadel (Adl x Mangomah) change to number (7740)



Wassaf (Rawah x Wagfah)



Halim El Zahraa (Gada Allah x Wadha)



Shafea (Tagweed x Shafaat)



Rabah (Baroody x Rawan)



Defaf (Ouf x Sarhanah)



Bahdoun (Gad Allah x Bint Ibissam)



Tagweed (Gad Allah x Tee)



INTERVIEW



The Breeding Department: Dr. Nerhan Moutawakkel, Mr. Ali Shaarawi and Dr. Ayman Saad.

Ali Shaarawi, an international ECAHO judge and official advisor for the Breeding Programme Team of El Zahraa, agreed to answer some questions I had.

Savier: These wonderful time-honoured stable buildings here, the spacious mare houses where a whole band of mares can quietly eat their hay, and the extensive paddocks where the youngsters can let off steam as much as they want – all of this appears to me to be unique for Egypt and far beyond. The touch of history is unmistakable. What is going to be the direction for the future of the stud, are you going to continue working with a closed breeding programme, using only your own horses for breeding?

Shaarawi: *El Zahraa is where we still have most of those time-honoured lines of straight Egyptians. We don't see the need for using horses from outside. On the contrary: with El Zahraa being the main source of straight Egyptians, this is where every breeder can go to obtain the horses they need to cross with their own programmes. Right from the beginning, El Zahraa was meant to preserve the gene pool of the Egyptian bloodlines, the Egyptian horses. That's what we are still doing: we are breeding these horses, trying to preserve all the families, and to breed for correct conformation and good type so our horses can be used in breeding around the world.*

Savier: How far do the international markets influence you? Do you breed for certain areas your customers are interested in, such as shows, endurance, or race track, or are you more concerned about maintaining the gene pool?

Shaarawi: *We breed for all kinds of horse lovers. Arabian horses come in different types, so the families that have the potential for endurance are bred for that. When we breed, we don't try to change the families, we try to get the most from each family: with families that are good for showing, we go for showing, with families that are good for endurance, we go for endurance. There are some lines that are good for races, so we go for races with them. I think that's the way: understand your stock and breed them accordingly. If you try to change endurance stock into show stock, that's very difficult - you will get neither an endurance nor a show horse.*

Savier: In Egypt, breeding noble horses was not in the hands of the Bedouin tribes, but in the hands of the rulers and pashas, who bred their Arabian horses for beauty's sake. El Zahraa has inherited these horses – can you compete against international show horses today?

Shaarawi: *I judge at a lot of shows, and I cannot but state that here we don't have the faults that abound there, such as too much white in the eyes, pigmentation problems, toeing out, and inferior movements.*

Savier: You continue to discern between the 5 ancient strains: Hadban, Saklawi, Dahman, Kohailan, and Obeyan. After all the generations that part today's horses from their origin, which is Bedouin breeding, do you still see differences between the horses of the different strains?

Shaarawi: *The strains have been mixed up in our modern days, so I believe more in families and characteristics of families that I can recall, but let me tell you: it's really amazing. I took pictures of all these horses, I divided them all into families, and I looked at some families - at the old pictures of the old Hadban mares, for instance. I found that all the characteristics are still there. That's amazing.*

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Once more, this day in El Zahraa made it abundantly clear: noble Egyptian Arabian horses can do without show criteria, they are impressive just as they are. They are pleasing in themselves, announcing the fascination of their origins in their expressive faces and their impulsive gaits. It's not only the gene pool, however, that is impressive. There is the way horses are kept in El Zahraa, being allowed to grow up outdoors in big foal herds, the mare houses, living under the sun, feeding as of a hundred years ago, hardly any stress – all of that serves to cultivate the graceful, unruffled movements of the horses we were shown. And it makes visitors hope that this stud and the horses it cares for are going to be preserved for a long time to come, for all of us to enjoy.

FIRST HANDLERS' CLINIC AT EL ZAHRAA FARM

Presenting Arabian horses to an audience – of course, this is a dream for many young men in Egypt, a dream they so much want to come true. However, it's never easy to find a stud where professional guidance is provided for introducing newcomers to this quite complex area of horse training. On the occasion of shows in Egypt, it's usually international trainers and handlers who are first choice, as for a horse breeder, there is no such thing as a somewhat irrelevant show that might be used for letting a young trainee gain some experience in the show ring. Which is also a reason why systematic training is quite rare in Egyptian studs, as the trainers come in from abroad and usually have no more than a few days for the show preparations. Maybe that's what gave rise to the impression that horses can be made to perform a stand-up in a quick procedure with a whip as the main instrument of training.

At any rate, methodical and humane training that takes the nature of horses into account is absolutely important: for the horses themselves, but also for young horse enthusiasts who are willing to take the time and effort to undergo professional training. With a proper qualification and a certificate in their pocket, their chances of finding qualified employment in an Arabian stud are strongly increased. This is why the idea to provide show trainings for grooms and owners of Arabian horses originated in El Zahraa state stud.

First choice as an instructor was French show trainer and handler Franck Boetto. He is not only a successful and experienced trainer and handler who has been active and celebrated for all important shows in Europe, and partly in the Middle East, since the 1980ies. He is also a good rider himself, a horseman with a soft hand, and with lots of experience in training young horses. He also underwent training for classic dressage riding with famous Portuguese riding master Nuno Oliveira, and worked in Canada with Triple Crown winner and All Around Western trainer Diane Leduck.

So after careful preparation, this first handlers' clinic took place at El Zahraa stud farm. It was a very successful event arranged by El Zahraa Stud Farm and the Turath Breeders Association on April 19-20, 2013. There was a great number of participants enrolled, and the clinic was a big success with everybody.

The agenda for the clinic was 16 hours of work in the course of two days. The theoretical part considered, in particular, the ECAHO rules for presenting horses in shows, as well as the prevention of cruelty against animals during preparative training, and the function of the Disciplinary Committee and the Ringmaster. However, techniques for presenting horses, such as stand-up and walking and trotting in-hand, were also first discussed in theory, as they will have an impact on the score a horse is



likely to get. In addition, the participants learned to select the right horse for a show, ruling out unsuitable ones, in order to get set up for show success. There was also a section on "beauty" where washing, clipping and applying make-up to horses were practised. The most exciting part was, quite certainly, a simulated show presentation that was scored and finally discussed by the other trainees.

Finally, certificates were handed out for successful participants. In three months, a follow-up clinic for polishing and reviewing the techniques is scheduled.

The training course has enabled the participants to improve their basic knowledge of horsemanship and learn basic rules of handling, grooming and training horses for halter shows.

El Zahraa plans to increase their efforts for offering clinics for ongoing education. Topics are projected to include genetics and criteria for breeding, as well as horse nutrition under different circumstances, so as to prevent colic and laminitis. The clinics are to be held under the umbrella of the El Zahraa Educational Programme, which is considered an important element of Egypt's efforts to make their young people fit for the future. ■