



Destination Lebanon

Beirut Inviting for the Lebanese Arabian Horse Championships 2017 (ECAHO)

LEBANON looks back on a tumultuous past just like so many other countries of the Middle East. In Lebanon, taking up a small strip of the Mediterranean West Coast of the Arabian Peninsula, this past has shaped the country into a fascinating medley of history and modern times, of ancient cities and medieval souks as well as of modern cities populated by modern people – and a whole lot of Arabian horses.

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Beirut, the capital, is one of the oldest cities in the world with a history tailing back about 5,000 years. This city has always been a melting pot of cultures, and a place where people dared to experiment with political concepts and systems. During all those thousands of years of civilization, horses played a particularly important role in Lebanon. The most ancient horse race track of the world, built in Tyr 2000 years ago by the Romans, is still bearing witness to the passion that the population feels for race horses, for the thrill of speed, women with rampant hats, champagne, wiry short jockeys, fat managers – in all, for the world of the racetrack that is visited by so many who want to see the horses, and be seen in turn. However, that legendary Hippodrome of Beirut, the green heart of the city, is now living and struggling for its existence within the frame of a neo-liberal metropolitan economy, an economy that started speculating after the end of the 15-year civil war, keeping the glamour of the racecourse, re-established by the French a hundred years ago, from getting back on stage. For during the 1990ies, when the city was re-built, the revival of inner-city culture, of partying and politics, of money and doing business by offering eating and drinking out-of-doors – all of that blossoming inner-city economy was denied to the Hippodrome and re-located into various other quarters of the city.



Still, racing operations toiled along. The world of horses, of the people on the racetrack, of horse fans was not meant to die, as during the civil war, they had been the symbol of the multicultural and multi-religious coherence within the population, and even after the war, they had made history by opposing the monopolizing acted out by Capital and Business. Beirut’s population kept being faithful to the world of the racecourse: the weekly visit to the track, some betting, cheering the victors or discussing the losers with some friends -all of that means relaxation as well as passion to them. Three years ago, something new took place on the racetrack. Young Beirut horse breeder Danny Ghosn, raised in the USA but returned to the city of his family, had an idea: there was to be an Arabian horse show, the first ever in the Hippodrome. Supported by Judge Ziad Chebib, the mayor of Beirut, engineer Nabil Nasrallah, who has been the director of the ra-

cetrack for 40 years now, and by many friends, the first and successful show took place in 2015. When the second show was held in 2016, the 100-year-anniversary for the Beirut Hippodrome was celebrated at the same time. WAHO donated a trophy for the first WAHO Arabian horse race, and the breeders were offered a clinic featuring selection, show presentation, and the scoring systems used by judges. In 2017 now, the racecourse of Beirut saw its third show. Arabian horses are an in-thing in Lebanon by now. Many young breeders wish to attend the shows, which are ECAHO certified, and they want to win. By cooperating with Danny Ghosn, Nabil Nasrallah hopes to attract more public attention and more long-term support for improving the premises. Chances are not bad at all. The Arabian horses have returned to the country of their famous history.



Beirut is Great Fun

Our hotel is named „Palm Beach“. Well, it has neither palms nor a beach, but to make up for that, it is located in the inner city on the ocean, and from the pool on the roof you can overlook the Zaituna Bay yacht harbor that reminds you of the French Riviera area, even in terms of the prices in the Lebanese restaurants and Sushi bars on the pier. The lady judges Julie Maden and Renata Schibler decide to go for a stroll along the harbor with the press representatives. In the Yacht Club of the St. Georges hotel, they are just having a sound check, preparing for this night’s pool party with laser lights and a Techno DJ. Later on during the night, there is a Brazilian rhythm band drumming and carrying everybody along, the band is mostly women, not a problem here in Beirut. They are tolerant here, the city is just as secure and interesting as any major Western city while offering that special oriental mix, with muslims not chanceless migrants but an integral and also powerful part of this multicultural island and inviting us to have fun together with them.

Passing the noble shops of Downtown Solidaire featuring Giorgio Armani, Rolex, Mont Blanc etc in their windows, we make our way to the Beirut Souks. Even if that name sounds like Ancient Orient, it is a present-day souk and a wholly different world: a modern, glittering shopping mall filled with expensive boutiques, cafes, bars and cinemas, eyed not without criticism by the „normal“ population. But at least, Beirut is back on track – not yet the „Paris of the Orient“ it used to be during the 1950ies and 60ies, but at any rate, risen from the ashes of the civil war.

Right in front of the Beirut Souk, the Souk El Tayeb is an organic shop where you can eat preserves made from apricots and chocolate, or enjoy ostrich eggs, or caress freshly made Hummus paste with a piece of flatbread. We find Beirut demonstrating an unbridled and contagious enthusiasm for life, even if on our way to the Hippodrome – where the Ara-



bian horse show is going to take place – some monuments of fear from the civil war are still apparent, such as the skeletal remains of the former Holiday Inn hotel, where snipers lay hidden to keep people from crossing the „green line“ between the fighting city quarters. Today, the green line is back to being one of the lifelines of the city, constantly jammed with traffic and at the same time inviting numerous young artists to have their say by way of graffities along the street and its surroundings.

Economics are lively in Beirut. Large firms, many of them from the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, have pressed ahead the reconstruction of the old town, on a kind of colossal luxury level that is not exactly appreciated by many locals. As a contrast, there are a whole number of smaller-scale hotspots to be found in the surrounding quarters, with restaurants, ni-

ghtlife, art galleries, university buildings and bookshops making up another, new face of the city – and one that is constantly changing, at that. It’s just the racetrack that seems to have remained unchanged for a hundred years, with the grandstands restored to suboptimum level and many ideas for the future of the Hippodrome du Parc de Beyrouth not yet implemented. The city likes her Hippodrome, not only because her positive role during the civil war, but also because it has always been a microcosm of the presence, a tower of strength not only for the horse scene. The passion for horses permeates all of the cultures present in the city, after all.

Meanwhile, temperatures have risen, so we call a driver who brings us to the racetrack in a matter of minutes. Right on the corner between the National Museum and the racecourse, we meet Nabil Nasrallah, the director, for lunch in a small restaurant with a well-shaded patio. The owner and cook of „Mum & I“, Samia Massoud, just won a French prize for her traditional Beirut cuisine and is just as pleased about it as Nabil is about the Arabian horse show in the Hippodrome – for both, their respective events are a good chance to address a bigger target group. The greater the number of people from all over the world wanting to see the horses, Nabil says, the more difficult will it be for international investors to grab the green park. They live in the here and now in Beirut, however, and the show is due to begin. The Lebanese Minister of Agriculture has announced his plan to attend.



The Lebanese Arabian Horse Championships 2017

The show ring had been installed on the turf in the center of the Hippodrome just like always, surrounded by a great backdrop of inner-city multistory buildings – among them the National Museum on Abdallah Avenue and the French embassy. About 50 horses had been registered for the show, which was to be held according to ECAHO rules this time. Three experienced judges had come in order to score and judge the horses: Raouf Abbas (Egypt) and lady judges Julie Maden (GB) and Renata Schibler (Switzer-

land). Theirs was not an easy task, as the pool of participants was a potpourri of horses home-bred in Lebanon and more or less fresh imports from Europe, the USA, and the Gulf States, with the imports bred more for show criteria than the local horses. Finally, horses from both sub-groups took the top placings and won the champion titles. The audience was well contented, and the Minister of Agriculture had indeed come and handed over the prizes to the happy winners.





ECAHO Judge Mrs. Julie Maden





Ringmaster Dr. Mohamed Al Hammad
and ECAHO judge Mr. Raouf Abbas



The Lebanese Arabian Horse Championships 2017



JUNIOR FILLIES CHAMPIONSHIPS

Gold Champion: **AJ ADINA** (EKS Alihandro x AJ Ambers Ajman)
Breeder: Ajmad Stud, Owner: Samjad Stud

Silver Champion: **JOLENE** (Al Mardan x Felicja Galaa)
Breeder: Elisa Grassi, Owner: Mohammad Al Ouraibi

Bronze Champion: **AJ EJRESSA** (Vervaldee x Ejrene)
Breeder: Ajmad Stud, Owner: Adnan Mazloun



SENIOR MARES CHAMPIONSHIPS

Gold Champion: **MAHITY JOLLY** (WH Justice x Mahity El Jamaal)
Breeder: J. Mattens, Owner DG Arabians

Silver Champion: **LAGONDA ALFABIA** (Alfabia Sheib x ZT Fantlie)
Breeder: SP Domilano, Owner Samjad Stud

Bronze Champion: **ALFABIA KIYAMA** (Phaaros x April Control)
Breeder: P. Damilano, Owner: Samjad Stud



JUNIOR COLTS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Gold Champion: **RIYADH AM** (Abha Qatar x Dana Al Mohamadia)
Breeder: Al Mohamadia Stud, Owner: Samjad Stud

Silver Champion: **DG AMIRAL** (Fadi Al Shaqab x Alisha Bint bengali)
Breeder: Danny Ghosn, Owner: Danny Ghosn

Bronze Champion: **AJ MAROUGE** (Aj Mardan x Galinka Royal Rouge)
Breeder: Ajmad Stud, Owner: Samjad Stud



SENIOR STALLIONS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Gold Champion: **TM POKER** (TM Aikor x Passionata)
Breeder: G. Hammerer, Owner: Adnan Mazloun

Silver Champion: **FF FALCONS PSYGNATURE** (Falcon BHF x Bay Oaks
Psyrgnet) Breeder: R J Freeland, Owner: Mohammad Al Ouraibi

Bronze Champion: **MOATAZ** (DF Malik Jamil x Shahdira)
Breeder: M A Ali Al Gergawi, Owner: Khaled Zarour

ON THE FAST TRACK
BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

The racetrack in Beirut - the pearl and the green heart of the city

In the Beirut area, the racecourse of Tyr is the oldest in the world. In Beirut city herself, the foundations for a Hippodrome were laid in the pine forest in the middle of Beirut in 1916. And the purebred Arabian horse was introduced to Lebanon by Bedouin tribes out of the Syrian Hinterland and greater Arabia during their long journeys in quest of food and a better life in a more fertile environment, which they found here in Lebanon. Many prominent Lebanese families founded studs, started to breed with this bloodstock of Bedouin Arabian horses, and presented their prominent products on the racetrack in the city. During the long years of upheaval in Lebanon, a large number of these purebred Arabians, especially broodmares, was dispersed and exported to other countries. This is why when the first WAHO studbook in Lebanon was created, only 23 purebred Arabian horses gained entry there – after almost a hundred years of endeavors for their protection and natural selection through the racing activities. During the civil war, the racetrack obtained a special importance, as the engineer Nabil Nasrallah, who is the Director General of the Hippodrome, reports. He explains:“There was the famous Green Line, not to be crossed, dividing the city of Beirut into two parts. Right on this line was the location of the 20 hectares (99 acres) of the Racetrack and the Horse Park of Beirut where hundreds of horses were trained. The area formed a green oasis in the middle of the city. And the horses belonged to people of all religious affiliations, and the same was true for the trainers, the jockeys and grooms – in effect, the area was a multicultural melting pot. They would not let themselves be divided even by the war.”. The track was and still is a historic interface for the peace



between the cultures. Besides, it is the last green area today that gives Beirut some breathing space. The newly added Shows for Arabian horses featuring the „WAHO Arabians“ are just as popular as the races have always been. Even if right now and as far as structural conditions are concerned, the racecourse gives a somewhat neglected impression, according to experts’ opinions, the hippodrome has great development potential as an interface between the cultures of the West and the East. In the near future, Lebanon could well become a growth engine by organizing international races and Arabian horse shows, and this could be extended to providing ideal training facilities for horses from the Middle East and Europe. Nabil Nasrallah suggests, however, that at the moment there are not enough facilities there to train as many horses as would be necessary to be internationally competitive. He and the breeders from Lebanon are hoping that new sponsors from all cultures will find themselves motivated to invest in the racetrack. This pearl and green heart of the city of Beirut could, once more, be the platform that enables the Western and the Eastern worlds of Arabian horse enthusiasts to meet.



Engineer Nabil Nasrallah, General Direktor of the Beirut Hippodrome, on the former "greenline" alongside the racetrack



OPEN HOUSE AT DG ARABIANS

DG ARABIANS is one of those “small is the new mighty” studs where they are greatly committed to their horses and dare to challenge some of the set notions of their respective horse scenes. The well-kept premises are located on the hill above Beirut, the walls of natural stone blending with their environs, the buildings surrounded by fruit and palm trees, the beautiful view going out across the ocean and the city.

Owner Danny Ghosn is a key player for the new Arabian horse breeding scene in Lebanon. So a group of interested friends and breeders had come to meet him and spend an afternoon in his stud with him. Like many of the studs in the Middle East by now, Danny explained, DG Arabians maintains Straight Egyptians and at the same time, keeps a show section of horses such as, in DG's case, the mare Mahity Jolly by WH Justice, who left the show ring for the Mare Championships as the winner. Another one of his horses, his colt DG Amiral – a son of Fadi Al Shaqab out of Ghosn's mare Alisha Bint Bengali – made a great impression during the show and went home as Silver Champion.

Danny's Straight Egyptian mare TB Hilal (Nil Del Guado x TB Hasna) produced her first foal for him this year, a highly typey filly by his stallion Ammar Al Mohamadia (Farres x LF Starza Fire). Many of the Open House visitors made a mental note of this sire, who will make his appearance at European shows this year.



OPEN HOUSE AT SAMJAD STUD

SAMJAD STUD is located on the Eastern coast of Lebanon, high up on a hill and with a fabulous view of the Mediterranean sea which will provide a fresh breeze to cool off the horses in their pastures. In recent years, Samjad managed to acquire some selected mares and stallions as the foundation for their show breeding program. With some support from the Privilege SFQ Training Center in Belgium, they were able to add the outstanding sire ZT Magnofantasy out of an El Shaklan damline, a sire who has already left his mark in several major European studs such as Maria Salas' Ses Planes in Spain. His first European foal crop of this year displays top show quality and has made the stallion a celebrity even now. He is available for covering services for all mares at Privilege SFQ.

In Lebanon, this new stud has already acquired guidepost status for many and is a must on any Arabian fan's roadmap for a visit to Lebanon. The premises are well thought out and designed, and the more senior broodmares in particular are of top quality. There are, for example, a Thee Desperado daughter (FS Thee Cinderella), there is ZT Obsession, and a WH Justice daughter, AJ Ambers Ajman. The two-year-old filly AJ Adina by EKS Alihandro well earned her title of Gold Champion of the show in the Hippodrome. Her stablemate Joline by AJ Mardan took home the title of Silver Champion Filly. Samjad's colt Riayd AM, a son of Abha Qatar out of Dana Mohamadia, won the title of Junior Gold Champion and enchanted the audience on the occasion of the Open House in Samjad Stud as well. He is certain to become an outstanding sire for Lebanon.



With its roots reaching back to around 5,000 BC, Byblos is probably the most ancient city in the world still inhabited today. Going North from Beirut on the coast road along the Mediterranean, you reach it in about 30 minutes, traffic jams discounted. But in contrast to Beirut, Byblos was not destroyed during the civil war, as it is not politically important, being just a small pearl of human history, a UNESCO world cultural heritage and a favorite destination for tourists to go and eat fish along the idyllic harbor that has been existing for thousands of years. Byblos fascinates with its history which gives unique testimony of the waves upon waves of peoples, languages, religions, and cultures that dominated the area within the course of some 7,000 years. If you visit Beirut, go and see Byblos to understand how important the Mediterranean was in human history, and why refugees from the Mediterranean are, genetically speaking, not strangers in Europe (and the other way round).

The same is true for their horses, as horses have been, for thousands of years, the quickest and most elegant means of transportation available to humans – as well as the most favored one, as archeology tells us. The art of breaking young horses for riding and driving was a cultic sport for young men in Greece long before Christian times; the Roman racetrack of Tyr south of Beirut saw chariot races according to the Roman motto of “bread and circuses” more than 2000 years ago. Islamization (the Jihad) took place fighting from horseback, not from the minarets of mosques; the crusader knights from the West were riders by their very name (the German word for knight, *Ritter*, meaning *rider*). Sent by the pope to conquer Jerusalem with their horses, the crusaders also built a fortress in Byblos after they had taken this town.

So Byblos is an archeological hotspot that displays seven main layers of inhabitation with distinctly different cultural characteristics, and an interesting idiosyncrasy: obviously, every newly arrived civilization would order many of the existing buildings destroyed, using the debris as construction material for erecting their own structures – which is why many of the later buildings display a fascinating patchwork mix of material spanning several millennia.

But let’s view things in order, starting 7000 years ago in the **Neolithic**, when Byblos was a small agricultural

BYBLOS: TIMELESS HOTSPOT OF ATTRACTION AND MIRROR OF TIME



town and fishing port. When the Canaanites arrived, around 3000 BC, Byblos specialized in shipping cedar-wood from the Lebanon to Egypt, and prospered economically from that trade, attracting the envy of other tribes. The city was conquered by, to name a few, the Amorite tribe and 200 years later, the Hyksos tribe who introduced new tools of warfare such as horse-drawn chariots and the composite bow. The **Egyptians** finally succeeded in overcoming the conquerors and restoring the trade that was so profitable for both, also establishing a long period of cultural and religious exchange.

When the power of the Egyptians declined from around 1400 BC on, the cities along the Lebanese coast became more independent from each other. The era of the **Phoenicians**, as the coast people in their one-city-states collectively called themselves, dawned. It was them who developed the first 22-letter phonetic alphabet that is the foundation of

our modern alphabet. For the next 800 years, the Phoenicians had to pay tribute to various more powerful peoples, but this ended when by 539 BC, they formed a pragmatic alliance with the **Persians** who had use for the maritime skills of the coast people. 200 years later, Alexander the Great overthrew the Persians, and Byblos became a kind of **Greek** colony where Greek was spoken and Greek habits observed for almost 500 years. This era ended when the **Romans** occupied the Lebanon coast from 64 BC on. The town was subject to extensive Roman town planning and construction, including colonnaded streets, temples, and a theater.

When the Roman Empire split in 395 AD, Byblos fell to the Eastern/Byzantine/Christian part and was a bishop’s seat for a long time after – until the transition to **Islamic** rule at around 635 AD, when Byblos became known as Jbail. Religion and name switched again when the **Crusader** knights from

Europe arrived in 1104, renamed the town Gible, and proved to be great early recyclers, utilizing Phoenician, Greek, and Roman columns and stones to help build their great landmark, the fortress that still towers over the city. Byblos was a Christian town for almost 200 years, until the **Mamluks** forced the crusaders out in 1289. Consequentially, Byblos became part of the Ottoman empire when the **Ottomans** started to rule in 1516, the town carving out an undistinguished existence until the first World War.

Since then, archeology has provided the city with much-earned fame for its fascinatingly diverse history with its many changes of culture and religion. Don’t try to remember all of that history. Go and enjoy the sights, the fish, the buildings, the feeling of millennia kept alive, the scent of the sea, the experience of seeing cultures blending into one another, time after time after time.