

Interview with TOM OBEN

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During the European championships in Moorsele, we had a chance to speak with the young handler Tom Oben. Being in the showscene for years with always great successes, it was time to sit down for an interview.

TA: When did you start with Arabian Horses?

TO: My parents owned horses before i was born, my father purchased his first half Arabian in the year 1986, it was a Nartan US daughter. Two years later he bought his first Arabian, the stallion Kings Court Tarab. This horse helped us to open the doors within the Arabian Horse community.

He was shown to numerous wins and four times a Top 5 title in Aachen, which, in those days, was a big achievement. In one of these occasions, in the year 1992, he even beat the stallion Kubinec in the class... Only a handful of horses could ever win from Kubinec, Kings Court Tarab was one of them...

My parents took me to almost every show in Belgium and

neighbouring countries. Since the year 1986 i have only missed at the most once or twice the All Nations Cup in Aachen, for me still the highlight of the year...

TA: When was the first time you showed a horse in hand?

TO: My first Arabian that i showed was TS Aphrodite, a half Arabian filly sired by my father's stallion Kings Court Tarab. We competed in the junior fillies class and became 3rd at this show, which was the Belgian Nationals, held at the Jadem Arabians facility in Balen.

Since then i caught the taste of showing Arabian horses...

TA: What was the most memorable moment for you as handler?

TO: It's hard to name one memorable moment as i have had quite a few of those special moments. For example; showing the stallion AS Natsir Apal to his

Belgian National Senior Champion title was quite a thrill.

For family reasons, the win with our homebred colt TS Gradadell by Psytadel US at the Belgian Nationals, has



Tom and Eline with the white stallion Al Khatab Al Thani in Deauville

always stayed with me; beating the at that time already Multi Champion colt Nijem Ibn Eternity.

Finding Al Khatab Al Thani four years ago in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia is still until today a very important moment to me. He was not at all in the perfect show condition during the Saudi Arabian National Championships but we managed to win the title of Junior Champion colt.

It took me quite some time to convince his proud owner, Sheikh Hesham Basha of Al Sawary Farm, to sent Al

stallion with tons of attitude and carriage which makes him an amazing horse to show.

TA: What is your all time favorite horse and how did he/she inspired you?

TO: I don't have a particular favorite but there are a few of them that deserve to be mentioned. AS Natsir Apal who had an amazing charisma and attitude. Hard to find showhorses like him, a show he could capture the audiences attention.



Tom schooling ShHab Al Hawajer

Khatab Al Thani over to Belgium so that the European breeders and audience could enjoy his beauty as well. Al Khatab has so much power, charisma and attitude that it is always a pleasure to show him on every occasion. Every show with him is a memorable moment to me and still today i'm very grateful to Sheikh Hesham Basha for entrusting his horse to me.

Last but not least; showing RFI Farid this year to his win a the prestigious Sharjah International Show was quite a thrill. It was a great moment when his owner Dr Ghanem Al Hajri and farm manager Rebecca Wenden entrusted this stallion in my hands. RFI Farid is a

Finn El Luval AT who i showed to a second place at the All Nations Cup in Aachen just behind Eternity Ibn Navaronne. Later that day we were awarded the title of "Top 5 Champion Stallion". He was quite an unknown horse before. A stallion who would try the most he could to please you.

Another stallion who inspired me is the US import and until now still a top leading sire, Psytadel US. He needs little introduction. During my 4 year stay at Swatam Arabians of James Swaenepoel i had the pleasure to work with him. Psytadel US learned me a lot of how to handle, how to respect and how to get respect from a stallion.

The stallion who maybe has the biggest spot in my heart somehow is our own Straight Egyptian Stallion Shahim Al Nakeeb. Not the tallest stallion but he has the spirit and charisma bigger than any stallion around him. The way he acts and behaves is a great thing to witness every time. Such a proud stallion on his own but with a lot of respect towards his care takers.

TA: *You are with your family one of the organizers of the Egyptian Event Europe. A show that is now known as one of the most prestigious shows concerning the Straight Egyptian horse. Does the Egyptian horse has your preference and how did you came up with the idea*

a higher standard. This is how we found the challenge to try it and to organize the EEE in Lanaken Belgium. 2012 has been the 6th edition of the EEE in Lanaken.

When organizing such an event i think it's very important to never be satisfied, always willing to make it better and improve certain things. To listen to the comments of the participants and spectators. It's by making mistakes that you can learn and can add that as a positive item for the next edition.

Trying to open the show scene with new ideas to make it more entertaining and amusing is very important to any



Tom judging the Egyptian Event UK in Malvern 2011

to organize an Egyptian Event in Europe? And what is the key to make it one of the most successful ones worldwide?

TO: *I have always been inspired by the Straight Egyptian horses for their refinement and expression which is so important to me in an Arabian horse. The idea of organizing the Egyptian Event Europe (EEE) actually comes from my father Gerard and our uncle Luc Bielen. They once had a long chat with the president of the Pyramid Society Europe (PSE), Mr. Ferdinand Schwestermann, that the PSE was looking for a new team to organize the EEE and to bring this show back to*

show. I think one of the keys to success for the EEE is that we have a board that is responsible for each their own division and that each of us tries to raise the bar to a higher level to make every edition an improvement. It can never be good enough, there will always be things to change or improve...

TA: *You are also a breeder, can you tell us more about your breeding programme and which lines have your specific interest?*

TO: *Together with my girlfriend Eline Raes we own the small stud "Anais El Arab" since the year 2005. Eline*

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first bought Shahim Al Nakeeb as a weanling in February of 2005. In the summer of 2005 we went for a visit to Dr. Nagel in Germany and found there the mare Rawaat Ezzain. After some negotiating we could purchase her. She was at that time in foal to NK Hafid Jamil. That resulting foal was exported to Egypt later on.

From the combination of Shahim Al Nakeeb and Rawaat Ezzain we were blessed to breed the filly Ra'jwa, who won quite some shows for us. Ra'jwa herself produced this year a filly foal by Authentic Dahman. This filly won this year at the EEE the title of Filly Foal Champion,

Just recently Eline and i purchased a filly foal by RFI Farid out of a Master Design GA daughter, bred by Rhodri and Kimberley Jones and Pam Smith of the UK. It was during my trip to the British Nationals this year that i found this filly in the stables of Rhodri Jones. She instantly captured my attention and fulfills certain criteria that i look for in a horse. I am really looking forward to see her in the 2013 showseason displaying her qualities!

TA: What are you plans for the future as breeder and trainer? Do you have ambitions to open your own training center?



Tom with the judges panel of the EEE

stepping in her mothers footsteps. In 2013 Ra'jwa will be bred to the new sensation, the Egyptian imported colt Kais Al Baydaa, owned by Mr Ahmed Al Thelawy and managed by good friend Raphael Curti.

For 2013 we have leased 2 mares together with 2 very close friends from us. An AS Natsir Apal daughter named SA Donna Karan, owned by Nicoals Frere and his mother Daniele Saelens, that is in foal to ZT Marwteyn and Mayana by the Triple Crown Champion Stallion BJ Thee Mustafa. Mayana is the mother of the 2011 Brazilian National Champion Stallion HDB Sihr Ibn Massai. We have leased Mayana together with our good friend Axel Somers.

TO: My future breeding plans or hopes are, in my believe, will be like most of the ambitious breeders around, to produce a foal that will end up at the highest level.

When it comes to open an own training center... Never say never!

I do have ambitions for something similar but i will speak about these kind of things when the moment approaches!

TA: You have been around in the Arabian Horse world since you where young, so obviously you know how to

recognize a good Arabian when you see one. Did you ever had/have ambitions to be a judge?

TO: I have definately the ambition to be a judge one day. Unfortunately the ECAHO doesn't allow handlers to judge.

Last year i was invited by Mr. Chris Lowe to judge the Egyptian Event in the UK. it was an amazing experience and it asked for more. I hope the ECAHO will open their minds a bit to have new and young people judging shows around!

showing, the details of preparation and the impact of internet with websites and email blasts.

It's a fact that organizing a show brings along a lot of costs for every show organizer. The VIP sections for every show are these days much more important as it brings in quite some finances. Although having a VIP section makes the arena's often much smaller, which then affects of course the space for the horse to display their full self.

I think that the main problem these days is that there are



Tom with Psytadel US

The standard of horses is changing every now and then and so i think the idea of having a newer dimension of judges would be very interesting for the Arabian Horse scene in general.

TA: What do you think about the nowadays showscene? Is it different than it used to be in the past and is there anything you would like to change?

TO: If i have to compare the showscene now with for example 10 years ago a lot of things have changed. Not only the quality of the horses but also the way of

just too many shows following eachother up, weekend after weekend. Which brings the number of participants down respectively.

The idea of having a separate championship for yearlings now is a great idea and it's positive effect was displayed at the recent European Championships for example.

I am a big fan of an open championship as well, in which all qualified horses have equal chances to get the "Gold Ribbon".

There are more things to create, add and/or to change

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but this can't be done over night but by taking it step by step. The competition of arabian horse shows is a "judge'sport". By nature it does not have strict objective measurable parameters to determine a winner. The risk of a judge'sport is that the system itself, or the persons used in the system to determine results are not credible. Transparency, a maximum level of it is paramount in a judge'sport as it is directly linked with credibility. To concretize this to our industry an substantial level of transparency can be beneficiary to owners, trainers, spectators,. Transparency also has a positive effect in the ones in control of determining the winner: the

than that I call for an analysis by the end of every year of the "behaviour" of every judge as to analyze whether there is no systematic push of certain owners. To implement measures as such I call for a separate non judging board of direction which oversees the activity of the judges. nowadays this is not the case. In a wider aspect that the judge aspect of our industry I believe it would be good to have a way created that knowledgeable, passionate people can filtrate their opinion for the good of the breed. I too often hear topics coming up again that frustrate many, however nothing is done to modify, to improve those aspects. A



Prize ceremony at the International Show in Sharjah UAE 2012 with RFI Farid winning the Silver Champion Stallion title

judges. They have to be truly standing by the choices they make. The idea to have to stand by your choice and face the consequences of it is a healthy principle. So my recommendations include: in the class showing improving it for a spectator to be easy to follow which judge is giving which score (this can be confusing at times with the switching of who judge a/B/C is at times, in the championships a judge having to face the crowd with its choice of winners, and even further having the speaker make an analysis of the choices of judges after every championship. In my opinion, one could be surprised of the effect such elements would have. Other

"referendum" on certain aspects could be of value. All those elements can seriously generate more entries at shows. A judge sport is based on personal opinions, and there will also be a level of "uncontrollable aspects" and elements of taste. Installing new guidelines aiming for transparency will at least show the intention to maximize for a competition where the best horse wins.