

Lady in the saddle

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THE NEW
OPPORTUNITY
FOR
ARABIAN HORSE

by Urszula Leczycka – Arabhorsepromotion.com
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Most of the current Arabian horse industry is undoubtedly focused on halter horses, especially throughout Europe and the Middle East, however there are some great Arabian horse creatures that could be found in almost every stud farm that despite their lack of show extremes can make a great career bringing a joy to their owners. The impressive story of the young lady from Poland who became one of the most popular European sport riders in Arabian horse community in only few years shows how much joy and satisfaction the Arabian horse can bring as a sport horse. On her example we would like to introduce you to the pleasure you can find on the back of your Arabian horse.

TUTTO ARABI: Can you tell us briefly how your story with the horses and equestrian has begun?

DANA KONOŃCZUK: Since the earliest years of my life I have been fascinated with horses. As I was born and lived in the capital city of Warsaw and horse riding was not an easily accessible sport, I only could look through the albums of Kossaks, Michałowski or Nowak-Zempliński (the best Polish horse painters) to see horses at all. I dreamt of the possibility to touch a real horse and my Daddy took me to a riding school near Warsaw. At first it was rather difficult for me as I was exceptionally short, tiny and slim and my riding instructors didn't place their hopes on me. However, I soon got to know that my character is much stronger and bigger than my body and I was given the smallest Thoroughbred mare. Of course she took me wherever she wanted and how fast she wanted, sometimes very fast... In some time I got another, again, the smallest horse – this time it was a grey pure-bred Arabian gelding. At the beginning I rode there where my Arab wanted, but apart from his temperament he had quick wits and good, sincere heart soon after I was able to get control over my horse...

I rode in various clubs near Warsaw taking part in some show jumping competitions and dressage as a junior on half-blood horses. However, my true adventure with ri-

Dana Konończuk

Cytra 2009 @Piotr Jasiak



ding began when in 2000 I met a famous trainer Wanda Wsowska called the First Lady of Polish equitation (the Olympic finalist from Moscow, medalist of Polish National Dressage Championships and trainer of many Polish competitors). She was the one who taught me all the solid foundations of classical horseback riding and sent me on a course for sport instructors, told me to take part in competitions and gave me hope and faith in myself. I understood what a horse is and that riding is a great art, which is worth sacrificing one's life for. Later when my children were born, I came back to riding mainly in side saddle. It soon appeared that it was my discipline and then I won my first medals...

TA: Amongst many professional horse riders there is a common belief that Arabian horse is not the one good for equestrian disciplines because of its small size and hard temper. You, as one of the first such experienced professional riders in Poland decided to introduce pure bred Arabians into your professional career to promote the breed. Why?

DK: Firstly, I always liked Arabian horses, secondly I didn't grow too tall so the short height of Arabian horses suited me perfectly and I don't mind their hot-blooded temperament. The most important aspect is the accessibility of fantastic horses in Poland, a great choice of horses useful for training. The popularity of riding sports on Arabian horses is small but is growing dynamically. I think it is a great chance to show how versatile horse an Arab can be, what a great potential is hidden in this breed that in Poland is mainly admired during the halter shows.

TA: What, where and when did you meet Arabian horses for the first time?

DK: In Poland in the early 1980's when I was beginning my adventure with horse riding you could have only seen some ponies in a circus or a zoo. One of the very first horses I used to learn to ride on was a grey Arabian Bandos-son Ren, an exceptionally patient horse but with strong temperament of a true Arabian horse. As he was the smallest horse at the club and he was given to me – as the smallest rider there. Later for many years I rode mainly Anglo-Arab or half-blood horses. In 1997 I started my studies at Warsaw Agricultural University and I was employed at Stuzewiec Racetrack in Warsaw as an amateur rider where I met a lot of Arabian horses. During my first year there my favourite was grey Kordelas (Monogramm-Kabata). He was sold later to the UK, and then went to the USA where he became a sports champion in Western competitions. My first true Arabian love was grey Michałow bred Werbum (Wojstaw-Werda), a gorgeous, dynamic, naughty and he neighed the loudest of all, I was terrified when my instructor had decided that I would be riding on him. He turned out to be as

Dzirynt 2009 @ Urszula Sawicka



Dzirynt 2009 @Piotr Jasiak



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calm as a child, and he really liked showing off. I wanted to buy him to make my dreams of having my own horse come true. But it was impossible as he became one of the chief sires in Michałow State Stud.

TA: In what kind of sport competitions have you already competed on Arabian horses? In which of them the breed is doing especially well and the competitions become a real pleasure – also for the professional experienced rider as you are?

DK: I took part in various competitions such as dressage, Classic Pleasure, traditional Arabian riding, Pleasure in historical Polish costumes, Freestyle Pleasure, Side Saddle Pleasure, and other sidesaddle classes. I like pleasure classes the most – with an extended trot – and there is no such trot in any dressage! It is really strong and it is the main advantage of Arabian horses. I also like sidesaddle classes; exceptional beauty and presence of an Arabian horse make it ideal for subtle ladies. English says that sidesaddle lady mounted on a horse is a picture and on an Arabian horse this picture is the most beautiful.

TA: Was your way to the top with Arabian horses longer and more difficult in training – or maybe it was easier to reach the goals comparing to the other sport breeds of horses that you competed on?

DK: First of all, in 2007 I was lucky to be trained by a good, famous coach Mr Józef Zagor (Olympic team from Moscow, multiple medalist and finalist of Polish Nationals in dressage and show jumping as well as an outstanding instructor of many Polish national team riders and medalists). Already in the first training season with Mr Zagor we were successful in the side saddle competitions. Mr Zagor was the one who convinced me to start on Arabian horses. He introduced me to Mr. Marek Trela, the director of Janów Podlaski Stud where we got the first horses to work with – grey stallion Eskulap (Primo – Esparceta) and young Salero (Metropolis NA – Salina) later on. When we scheduled the first starts in the Arabian Horse European Sport Championship, I asked Mr Marek Trela for the possibility to choose the horse by myself. We got a great opportunity when I could mount all the chief sires of Janów Stud. An unforgettable experience! I wish it could happen in my life once more... We chose two stallions: Album (Europejczyk – Alejka) and Metropolis NA (Consensus – NDL Martinique).

Our success came very soon. It gave me a great joy and satisfaction, especially the gold medal of European Championship and the European Champion title in Classic Pleasure on Metropolis, I beat significant competitors such as Stefan Hirnbock on Pardon's Khen Saabi, a multiple sports champion from Austria, the winner of WAHO Trophy for a 2008 sports horse and Linda Carisson on Chocco, a fivefold champion in the Swedish Championship. Additionally, soon afterwards the fourth place was taken by Artur Bienkowski mounting Album, which I trained myself. We also competed in the Traditional Arabian Riding, and there another suc-

cess came – a silver medal and the title of European Reserve Champion for me with Metropolis NA, and a bronze medal for Artur Bienkowski with Album. As sidesaddle class is for women only, I was able to mount my second horse – Album personally and took yet another second place in the class. I think that the competition can be perceived as very successful not only for me, but of the entire Polish team (see Tutto Arabi 6/2008, p. 289). I was glad to be a member of the winning team. A year later I participated in European Sport Championships in Stadl Paura on a young stallion Eol (by Gazal al Shaqab) from Janów Podlaski Stud. I didn't hope to win anything – Eol was young and I haven't ridden him for long. I wanted to win but also knew what competition I had to face. I decided to count mainly on sidesaddle and it appeared to be the right choice. Eol was wonderful horse and we won gold medal and the European Champion Sidesaddle title. Additionally, we managed to win another bronze medal in Traditional Arabian Riding and Top Five Classic Pleasure and Type & Confirmation twice. I believe it was also a huge success.

TA: How the work with pure bred Arabians differs from the work with the other breeds regarding the saddle training? What in your opinion are the biggest advantages of Arabian horse as a sport horse then?

DK: Arabian horses are intelligent and sensitive. Good cooperation with people is a pleasurable for them, this is the reason why they learn much faster. They build up a relationship with a man resulting in mutual trust. Very rarely one can meet a difficult horse and not eager to cooperate and these are only horses reluctant towards people due to improper treatment (similarly to other horse breeds). One advantage of these sport horses is their versatility. I try to choose horses with the correct conformation, wide, elegant movements and gentle character.

TA: What are the main characteristics of good pure bred Arabian sport prospect?

DK: As mentioned above – the most important are: beauty, tenderness and good movements. I personally like horses which have natural desire to show off. Such a horse knows its strengths and proper training gives him faith in its own abilities. A horse like this wants to win – it can help you in many unexpected situations.

TA: You have started your first professional experience with Arabian horses in Janów Podlaski State Stud. Who was your favorite horse there and why?

DK: I liked all horses from Janów Podlaski. If I don't like someone I don't work with him no matter whether it's a person or a horse! My favourite was Metropolis NA – we were an exceptionally good pair. It happens rather rarely, I just knew from the very beginning that we would be winning together because we both wanted to. Apart from that he overwhelmed me with his hard work and desire to be my first and the most important, and of course he wanted me to like him more than any other horses. I am still very

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fond of him.

TA: *Currently you chose your way as a freelance trainer of your own horses and the horses of your clients. What kind of services do you offer now?*

DK: *I offer professional sport training of Arabian horses. My aim is to prepare them for participation in sport competitions. I believe that it is a great promotion for both the studs and the breeders. In Poland the market is still developing, we don't have so many important sport events. Luckily, there are many international competitions and championships for Arabian horses in Europe where Polish horses can and should be shown.*

TA: *Do you think that this offer of professional sport training for Arabian horses can become a separate big industry – just like halter training?*

DK: *I hope that performance competitions will soon appear to be much more spectacular than halter classes, they will attract the media, sponsors and the “industry” will develop.*

TA: *In your opinion, can this sport training and sport horses also be a „Polish specialty” just like the great breeding and halter horses being sold at the annual auctions in Janów Podlaski every year?*

DK: *I count on it a lot. In Poland we have many excellent performance horses that are as beautiful and brave as foreign competitors or even more – that has already been proven by numerous successful participations of Polish team in European Championship for Arabian horses in Stadl Paura in 2008 and 2009.*

TA: *How would you wish to plan your future with Arabian horses? Do you have any certain plan of their promotion already that would bring you the biggest satisfaction?*

DK: *I wish the use of Arabian horses for riding would develop in Poland dynamically. We have marvellous Arabians, interesting history and horse riding traditions. I believe it's unnecessary for all leisure riders or pseudo sportsmen should buy Holsteiners or KWPN horses (just because of the current fashion trends). I think they would find a Polish Arab prepared for Arabian competitions more joyful and satisfying. It's the fundamental idea that develops at the level of regional competitions.*

TA: *Could you briefly mention your current horses for the nearest season?*

DK: *Currently I have three Arabian horses in my stable: the mare Cytra 2005 (Elpacino – Cykata). Cytra is my own horse. She has got wide and elegant movement. I like her very sensitive but unusually peaceful and patient character best. She is a tall typical riding horse – beautiful hack type one. Our first success was at the Polish National Sport Show for Arabian Horses in 2009 in Janów Podlaski, we won silver*

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Metropolis NA 2008 © Piotr Jasiak



Metropolis NA 2008 © Urszula Sawicka

medal in traditional Arabian riding, and bronze medal in Pleasure in historical Polish costumes. We also had Top Five in Classic Pleasure. It was Cytra's the first appearance, so I hope this year we would have a chance to win more.

The second horse is Ekier – young son of Metropolis NA who is a sire of great presence, great movements with many titles on his account: Junior Champion Yearling Colt – Region XIV, Top Ten US Nationals Yearling Colt, Scottsdale English Pleasure Junior Reserve Champion, Stadl Paura – European Champion Classic Pleasure and European Reserve Champion Traditional Arabian Riding. Metropolis' offspring has been very successful in junior classes in the US. The dam of Ekier is Emika – Polish National Reserve Jr Champion Mare, Senior Champion, Reserve and Best in Show of Warsaw Summer Show and Reserve Senior Champion of Autumn show at Janów Podlaski. It was surely one of the best Biatka broodmares, famous for wonderful movement. Beautiful shape of her small head with big, deep eyes, neck of the swan and also a very good type and conformation, always brought her best notes from the judges. She was sold at Pride of Poland sale 2009 for 120 000 Eur. Ekier is her best son, the representative of the first Metropolis foal crop at Bialka. After 1 season of race training he debuted as a sire at Biatka Stud in 2009 and in 2010 is offered by my own club KJ Damadana. Ekier has a special movement, very expressive, full of energy, but also free, balanced and very elegant. He is a horse "flying in the air" and my best hope for the future. He is currently being prepared to take part in national competitions in 2010. We are cooperating also with Petronius Arabians Stud, a breeder of very successful race and endurance horses. Their stallion Ghemir (Pamir – Ghaza) won the Italian Championship in Endurance in Gubbio (160 km) last season. I had a pleasure to work with their stallion Dekstern 2006 (Ekstern – Dalilah) which currently is a sire at the maternal farm.

At the moment I also have a pure bred mare Dejanira (Wieczór – Dijala) in training. She is a representative of a brave dam line Semrie (the same as the stallion Druid – one of the most famous Polish racing horses in post war history). Dejanira is very calm but also strong and brave. She is being prepared for national starts in 2010 season to take part in jumping competitions. We will both debut in this class, I hope to succeed.

I also have some half-blood horses in training, there are always some in my stable. Two side saddle champions have a permanent place in my barns. One of them is Anglo-Arab gelding Dzirynt 1995 (Eltan – Dziewanna) – a winner of three gold medals of international sidesaddle competitions in Poland in 2007, 2008 and 2009, the second place at the International Sidesaddle Ladies Championship in 2008 in Poland and a bronze medal at the International Czech Republic Sidesaddle Championship in 2007. The second is Thoroughbred gelding Escudo 1994 (Freedom's Choice – Escalante) bred by Jaroszkówka Stud in Poland – a winner of two bronze medal at International Sidesaddle Championship in Poland in 2007 and 2009 and a two

gold medals at the International Sidesaddle Championship in 2008 in Poland and the International Czech Republic Sidesaddle Championship in 2007. Additionally, my barn is a home to two friendly ponies belonging to my children (Śnieżynek and Junona).

In the near future the main goals are the starts in national events as I mostly have young inexperienced horses that I don't think I will take for any international championships.

TA: Taking a chance to talk to the wide group of Tutto Arabi readers – the Arabian horse breeders and owners – would you like to pass any advice to them regarding their future work with Arabian horses?

DK: I hope that my adventure and in consequence – my career with Arabian horses can be wonderful example how many joy and satisfaction one could have from working with this beautiful horses. □

Dana Konończuk' sport career

(Pure bred horse competitions bolded):

2007 International Sidesaddle Championship in Czech Republic – Dressage Competition Bronze medal – on Dzirynt (halfbred)

2007 International Sidesaddle Championship in Poland: Dressage: gold medal – on Dzirynt (halfbred)

Jumping: bronze medal – on Escudo (Thoroughbred)

Historical costume class: second place – on Escudo (Thoroughbred)

2008 International Sidesaddle Championship in Poland

Dressage: second place – on Dzirynt (halfbred)

Competition of Elegance: second place – on Dzirynt (halfbred)

2008 International Sidesaddle Championship in Poland:

Dressage: gold medal – on Dzirynt (halfbred)

Jumping: gold medal – on Escudo (Thoroughbred)

Feestyle Class: first place – on Dzirynt (halfbred)

Competition of Elegance: third place – on Dzirynt (halfbred)

2008 European Championship for Arabian Horses Stadl Paura

European Champion Classic Pleasure – gold medal on stallion Metropolis NA

Reserve Champion Traditional Arabian Riding-silver medal on stallion

Metropolis NA

Sidesaddle class – second place on Stallion Album

European Champion Sidesaddle Pleasure – gold medal on stallion Eol

Traditional Arabian Riding-bronze medal on stallion Eol

Classic pleasure – Top Five on stallion Eol

Type and Conformation - Top Five Stallion Eol

2009 Polish National Sport Championships for Arabian Horses

Reserve Champion Traditional Arabian Riding-silver medal on mare Cytra

Pleasure Traditional Polish Riding - third Place – on mare Cytra

Classic pleasure – fourth place - Top Five on mare Cytra

2009 International Sidesaddle Championship in Poland:

Dressage: gold medal – on Dzirynt (halfbred)

Jumping: bronze medal – on Escudo (Thoroughbred)

Historical costume class: first place – on Album (Pure bred)

Feestyle class: second place – on Escudo (Thoroughbred)

2010 Dana Konończuk was awarded with Polish Arabian Horse Breeders

Society Award for her sport results in 2009 at Polish National Sport

Championship for Arabian Horses with mare Cytra and 2009 European

Championship for Arabian Horses in Stadl Paura with the stallion Eol