



WE STRIVE FOR PERFECTION

*An interview with **Marek Rzepka**, the owner and founder of **Klikowa Arabians**, who brought Pianissima's son, Prometeusz, to Poland.*

by Hanna Sztuka and Mateusz Jaworski
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Why do you have such great passion for Arabian horses?

My grandfather was a great animal lover. He served in the Austrian army, he did all his service with horses, he bred pigeons, fish and dogs. He died in 1950. Unfortunately, I was not able to meet him, but I feel that it is partly from him that I inherited a great passion for animals. My grandparents kept carrier pigeons. My grandma used to remind me not to scare them. These pigeons were something magical for me, something I always dreamed of. My father was not a fan of animal breeding, unlike my grandfather and uncle. He forbade me to get too involved in breeding. But the more inaccessible something is, the more we strive to own it. So, already in elementary school, I started breeding carrier pigeons. I kept them on the Sanguszko farm. Although I am a graduate of the AGH University of Science and Technology, pigeons have stayed with me to this day. This is my great passion.



Marek Rzepka with Prometeusz,
 photo by Mateusz Jaworski





Price giving ceremony of Gold Medal European Junior Champion Filly Efora KL, bred and owned by Klikowa Arabians, photo by Ewa Imielska-Hebda

How did the place of birth and upbringing, i.e. the former estate of the Sanguszko family in Gumniska, influence the development of this passion?

I was born in the vicinity of the palace in Gumniska. I dreamed of horses, but it seemed completely inaccessible to me; horses were something unattainable for me for many years. After working for two years in the Provincial Office in the environmental protection department, I realized that something bigger needs to be done in life. Having no idea then to what size my plan would grow, I decided to start my own business. Currently, my company, Polmark, produces all the electrical components needed at home. I started by

distributing the products of one of the factories that were in bankruptcy. After a year, I became its largest representative, and other significant companies on the market signed contracts with me for the sale of their products. I was able to buy a package of the company's bonds and gain the position of chairman of the supervisory board. Within one year, without firing a single person, I made the bankrupt company profitable. 320 people were employed. After two years, the company already employed 600 people.

Klikowa is a former state stallion depot, previously owned by the Sanguszko princes – how did it happen that it is in the name of your stud?

I wanted to buy the stud in Udórz, still having Arabian horses in my head. However Udórz, located 140 km from Tarnów, was not an attractive enough place on the map. My wife dissuaded me from this idea. At that time, I became one of the founders of the Klikowa Foundation, composed of 32 members – institutions and companies focused around horses. The members of the foundation are also Janów and Michałów studs. The purpose of the Foundation was to save the declining herd in Klikowa. Unfortunately, it was the worst period in the history of this place. At the moment I am the vice president of the board of the founders of the Foundation. Thanks to this, I entered the environment of horsemen and breeders. They were not breeders of Arabian horses, but mainly those of the Małopolska breed. My first horse was the Małopolska leopard-colored stallion Birkut, bought at an auction in Michałów. I wanted breeders to use him extensively; in this way, I intended to support the foundation. However, I knew that Arabian horses were my target. Quite by chance, while travelling, I ended up at the stud of Mr. Dariusz Konstancy in Trzyciąż, and there



Efora (QR Marc – Erigone) – Gold Medal Yearling Filly, European Championship 2020, photo by Ewa Imielska-Hebda





Laura KL during the Polish Nationals in Janów Podlaski 2020, photo by Ewa Imielska-Hebda



Laura KL (Wadee Al Shaqab – Lili PS) – Silver Medal Yearling Fillies, Junior Spring Show in Białka 2020, photo by Ewa Imielska-Hebda

I bought my first Arabian mare, Gamia 2007 by Ganges. I read with great interest all articles about Arabian horses on portals and in trade magazines. I was absorbing knowledge about them. The real adventure with breeding began with the purchase of a few mares from Przemysław Sawicki. It was then that I acquired a strong group of mares with solid, one could say, predictable pedigrees. Then I started to plan my own breeding. During the stallions parade in Klikowa, I met Monika Stefaniuk-Szmukier, a zootechnician working at the Agricultural University of Hugo Kollątaj in Krakow, strongly involved in the subject of Arabian horses. Monika successfully completed her doctorate and postdoctorate title in genetics of Arabian horses. She was positively crazy about Michałów. I like people for whom passion is of great importance and determines their lives. I bred Arabian horses in Klikowa for four years, before in March 2020, i.e. a year ago, they came to the newly built stud in Wola Rzędzińska, in the vicinity of my Polmark company and my home. Agnieszka Pustelnik worked in Klikowa and turned out to be a very committed and professional person. In the new stable in Wola Rzędzińska, she takes care of our horses and is the head of the stable. Monika and Agnieszka are in our team until this day.

I believe that knowledge should be constantly deepened, despite the fact that we gain experience in a given field over time. However, we learn all the time, as well as take in the humility that accompanies it.

What is the current breeding structure of your mare herd and in what direction are you planning its development?

The basis of my breeding remain four Ekstern daughters – Erigone (out of Eryka by Eukaliptus), Lili PS (out of Lenka by Piaff), Zazulka (out of Zuzelia by Werbum) and El Dorilla

(out of El Dorra by QR Marc). His daughters, especially from Milordka's dam line, are very valuable mothers. At the moment in Klikowa Arabians we are adding their daughters to our breeding herd, which is a great satisfaction for me and shows the value of the stud for the future. The second branch of breeding herd are daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters of Gazal Al Shaqab, so I tried to select and purchase good quality mares by Gazal, Marwan and Kahil. I placed my bets on the Michałów "E" line and Janów's "P" line. Unfortunately, I have never seen Pianissima with my own eyes. Perhaps that also contributed to my desire to collect her daughters so much. And now it turned out that



Klikowa Arabians Team. From the left: Marek Rzepka, Agnieszka Pustelnik, Małgorzata Rzepka, Monika Stefaniuk-Szmukier, European Championship 2020 in Prague, photo by Ewa Imielska-Hebda



Marek Rzepka with the stallion Prometeusz at the farm, photo by Mateusz Jaworski



Prometeusz during the show in Sharjah (UA), scored 92,5 points in the class of 7-9 years old stallions, photo by Ewa Imielska-Hebda

we had the chance to become the owners of her son, the exceptional stallion Prometeusz.

For me, it was extraordinary with what respect, artistry and fascination Pianissima was spoken of and written about all over the world. She was an absolutely outstanding horse, who set Janów's breeding at the highest level, leaving competitors far behind. This petit bay mare was admired on all continents, millions of euros were offered for her. Without worrying about what some said - that Pianissima is a freak of nature, from whom it will be difficult to breed good offspring – as soon as Pianissima's daughter Pianova (by Eden C) appeared at the auction in 2019, we decided to buy her, and then completely by chance I found out about another daughter of Pianissima, which was put up for auction in Ajman Stud, this time by El Nabila B, the grey AJ Penelope. She was bought for me by Frank Spoenle's wife – Elisa Grassi. In this way, we became the owners of two Pianissima daughters. Such wonderful horses as the European Gold Champion Efora KL or the granddaughter of Pianissima (out of Pianova by Eden C) – the filly Pianissa, were born still at Klikowa. The acceptance of the stable where we are now was not easy. A pandemic was already raging in Poland, and the newly built Klikowa Arabians is not only a stable, but also a banquet hall, conference room, guest rooms, and professional catering facilities. In the end, however, we succeeded and from March 19th, 2020, we have Arabian horses here.

What are your plans for the near future?

At the moment, we are starting to implement another project – an indoor arena and most likely more stalls and an indoor carousel. In my head I have a long list of Arabian horse projects and events that I would like to see here in the

future. We organize breeding inspections where, I hope, we will regularly host Polish and foreign breeders. We are trying to expand the acreage needed for horse breeding, and the local community is aware that we are a stud and will not be threatened by a developer or other speculations about the area in the neighbourhood. That is why everyone around me is very sympathetic and we are slowly succeeding in consolidating more and more areas. There are already 20 hectares, which is quite a good acreage for further development. I believe that in order to properly breed horses, you need to have full control of the feed you feed them. We have a very good agronomist in our team, who takes care of keeping meadows and pastures in the best condition.



Marek Rzepka with the mare Erskina, photo by Wiesława Bałut



Marek Rzepka with Prometeusz, photo by Mateusz Jaworski

We grow oats ourselves, we mow meadows, all our crops are subordinated to horse breeding. I naturally became a farmer thanks to it. As a farmer, I purchased a good-quality machine park. The first time I got in a Ferguson I thought it was an exceptionally pleasant thing; it is fascinating how highly developed mechanization in agriculture is. Sitting in the new tractor felt more comfortable than in the new Mercedes! Radio, air conditioning, air-cushioned seat, lots of joysticks - it's a great pleasure to be able to cultivate your own fields. It really is a fairy tale. 25 years ago I bought 50 hectares of meadows and forest near Krynica by accident. The area is currently under lease, kept in good condition and in an appropriate culture. Mountain streams, forest ... Who knows if it will not be useful in the future for the development of activities? I think I was very lucky in my life, thanks to so many coincidences. Sometimes certain elements come together. Every year in breeding, whether we like it or not, must bring progress. We have to follow fashion and maintain the right pace, be aware of current trends. If we miss important elements, it will be difficult to make up for it later.

An important moment was the purchase of the Michałow-bred mare Erigone 2003 by Ekstern, from Mrs. Helen Zaleski from Lutetia Arabians in France. We took two mares to Belgium, to Knocke Arabians, to breed to the stallion QR Marc. Porta KL was born out of Pegala, out of Erigone – Efora KL, last year's European Champion. It has been the greatest success of our breeding so far. We'll see what this season brings.

My son Marcin is extremely involved in breeding pigeons, dogs and horses. For years, we have been studying pedigrees, show results and offspring rankings together. Our best year in terms of shows is 2020: medals in Białka, Janów Podlaski

Marek Rzepka with the filly Ophrah, photo by Mateusz Jaworski



and at the European Championships in Prague. Last year I bought two daughters of the stallion Kahil Al Shaqab at the Monday auction in Janów Podlaski - Erskina and Pliwia. I believe that these are important mares that have enriched our breeding program. We are looking forward to adding to our herd the wonderful daughter of WH Justice – Ophrah, who will be presented this year at the Junior Spring Show in Białka.

What are your plans for the near future for Prometeusz?

The anticipation of his arrival was amazing. After his long delayed arrival in Amsterdam due to Ramadan, we waited for him at the farm. However, his arrival was delayed. Phones



Marek Rzepka – the owner of Klikowa Arabians, photo by Ewa Imielska-Hebda

rang, more explanations were given as to why the transport would be delayed for another and another day. It was a very difficult period. When Prometeusz finally arrived, I was captivated by his gaze, his expressiveness. When he starts moving in the paddock and is slightly agitated, he looks like the eighth wonder of the world. We will use him on our mares and maybe he will take part in the Polish National Show in Janów. We want Prometeusz to live in good, comfortable conditions that every stallion should have. He will be available to breeders in Poland and Europe, but with a limited number breedings, because we want to maintain the high quality of the semen. We dream that he will be used on such mares where his potential will be fully used. He is a stallion in his prime, the breeding future is ahead of him.

What stallions, apart from Prometeusz, will be used in your breeding?

This season, apart from Prometeusz, we use such stallions as D Seraj, El Jahez WH, EKS Farajj, RFI Unique, Naseem Al Rashediah. And the season is still going on, we will see what the next stallion selection decisions will bring. We try to ensure that the stallions we use have, even somewhere far back in their pedigree, Polish roots, Polish ancestors. This is an added value for us. Apart from Al Ayal AA, all the stallions we used had Polish ancestors. Of course, we cannot limit ourselves, we must go with progress and fashion. El Jahez, Dębowiec are also references to Polish ancestors, while maintaining high quality and breeding progress. We will absolutely adhere to it so as not to lose the positive aspects of our Polish lines, we should come back to it and make them unique and sought after all over the world. The Pure Polish horse is a beautiful and complete horse. It is not true that these horses are not modern. We have to be consistent in breeding. My son Marcin has been analyzing the horse show results for five years. This is very helpful when drawing conclusions as to which stallions are worth being interested in. Why make mistakes when there are horses that give a lot of champions?

For me, the greatest value in breeding are the mares who have Bey Shah in their pedigree, preferably several times. What I heard from you when we were walking in the pastures is inspiring, that the real challenge for the breeder is to breed a stallion, a sire that others will want to use in their breeding. You called it the highest art and true success. You are definitely right to say that the stallion breeder goes down in the history of breeding. We both know that breeding a good stallion is much more difficult than a good mare, also because the selection is much stricter, not every stallion is a good sire. We are lucky that Pianissima, FA El Shawan and hopefully Prometeusz are epochal horses that have an impact on breeding.

After last year's successes at the shows, is Klikowa Arabians still planning the performances of its charges in Poland and abroad? What are the preparations like?

Plans for this year: we entered six horses for the show in Białka. They are young horses, we will see how they develop, each month makes a difference for youngsters. Once a week we meet with my son for a breeding inspection. We assess the condition of the horses and, together with those responsible for training and nutrition, decide on the next steps. The facilitation is that I live very close to the stud, I come here almost every day, 5-6 times a day. We train horses at home, so far we do not send horses for training abroad. I believe that this is a good system and obviously needs improvement; we are learning and gaining experience all the time. But I don't like sending my horses to another stable, because even if I fully trust the trainer and his crew, I lose touch with my horse, I can't see how it's developing and I can't judge its quality as well as in everyday contact. I really like looking after the horses personally and taking care of details. I am a perfectionist in everything I do in my life. Our staff is in the process of training and gaining skills - they are young, ambitious, hard-working people, which makes our task easier. In addition, many trainers and presenters visit us frequently. They supplement the team that works here on a daily basis. We have three vets: for emergency, reproductive and orthopedic situations. We strive to ensure that horses are under professional care.

How do you evaluate, from the customer's point of view, the auction in Janów Podlaski, as well as the media hype around Arabian horses in Poland?

Little people, who do not understand the Arabian horse business, will write something there, scribble, and the majority of society buys it... And the auction, customers, transactions, money, all these elements like silence and harmony. If I was the manager of the Janów Podlaski auction, I would make sure that the free drinks were always delivered to the guests' tables during the auction. Together with my wife, we have fond memories of the excellently organized auction in 2018. It was an unforgettable spectacle at the highest level - and the auction should be heading in this direction. A unique event that will be remembered. □



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