



AN INTERVIEW WITH MILES BUCKLEY

by Kamila Kozłowska



Upon my arrival to Miles Buckley Training Centre, an amazing place in East Sussex well hidden from the rest of the world, a loud happy neighing that came from one of the barns made me feel most welcome. The feeling was enhanced by a warm welcome from Miles, who invited me to his office. The feeling of apprehension before the recently recommenced show season was in the air. All members of the team, including Miles, were busy making sure everything is buttoned up for the upcoming shows. While Miles was finishing a phone call, I had a bit of time to look around the office and admire numerous trophies as well as amazing large portraits of beautiful Arabian horses hanging on the office walls. I appreciated that during such a busy time, Miles not only found the time to satisfy the curiosity of our readers by answering all my questions but also made me very happy by showing me around the stables and introducing me to some of the beauties that he currently hosts at his training centre.

Kamila: How has your adventure with Arabians began?

Miles: I was lucky to grow up surrounded by horses. My family owned part bred Arabians and show ponies that were shown at various county events. At first, I observed my parents showing the horses, but when I grew up I decided to try it myself. During one of these local shows, a beautiful Arabian horse presented at the adjacent ring captured my attention. I wandered over for a closer look and that was it! It was so captivating that from this moment on, I have been simply... stuck!

Kamila: What makes Arabian horses so special that you have chosen to work with this particular breed?

Miles: Their personality is amazing! They immediately capture your attention. There is no doubt they are beautiful, but there is much more to them than meets the eye, which can be great but can also be a little challenging at times (laughs).

Kamila: Success would not taste the same without challenges! Let us talk about people who become our teachers and our inspiration to overcome all obstacles and to accomplish more than we ever thought we could. Who is your greatest inspiration and from whom you have learnt the most about horses?

Miles: The first person that comes to my mind is the late Ryan Jones. He was the one that introduced me to the world of Arabian horse showing and taught me a great deal about training and conditioning a horse. After a long cooperation with Ryan, I started working with his brother. Since then, I worked with many different people, so I cannot really say that I have learnt everything from one person. It was more of a combined effort, but surely Ryan was the one that ignited my passion for training and showing Arabians.



Kamila: His premature death was a great loss for the industry.

Miles: It was a tough time for us. We were all with him before the accident. Only a day later, I had to leave for Chantilly, which gave me no time to recover. I cannot believe it has been almost a year now...



Kamila: Ryan was definitely one of these trainers who have the ability to create a very special bond with the horse. What is the secret of your success in this area?

Miles: I am doing my best to keep all my horses happy and to understand their individual needs and preferences. They are all conditioned like athletes, but the methodology of training varies from one horse to another. It is really important to have consideration for their individual preferences. If a horse is more energetic by nature, I will make sure it gets as much physical activity as possible. Some horses require more training to stay focused, but once they get tired of schooling, I will give them more freedom and opportunity to just be who they are. In the end, they are horses not robots and they need to be treated accordingly. If you start treating them like machines, they will lose the attitude that is required for them to be successful in the showing. The old saying 'less is more' is very true about many horses I have worked with. Less training and more time spent to understand their needs and to make them happy will often produce much better results in the ring. This time that you think you might be losing by just spending time with a horse rather than schooling it is often the best thing that you can do to discover its full potential.

Kamila: How many horses have you got in training at the moment?

Miles: Around 40 in the show barn plus the breeding mares, which makes a total of 70 horses.

Kamila: I bet it keeps you busy to make them all happy! Taking into consideration that each one of them has its own individual personality, it sounds like a lot of hard work.

Miles: Oh yes! Especially nowadays, when it is quite common for a horse to be moved from one training centre to another or to change trainers in every show season. All handlers use their own training techniques, which may confuse the horse and strongly affect its performance. These horses perform at their best when you make them happy and relaxed by allowing them to just be horses. Overtraining often leads to the loss of attitude, as these horses already know it all and there is not much more that you can teach them. Surely, as with most things in life, you want to achieve a good balance between overtraining and not training at all. It is not that you can leave them completely unattended, but you need to be extra cautious not to lose the spark that keeps them performing at their best.



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Kamila: *It sounds like you spend a lot of time with each of your trainees and I am pretty sure that developing an emotional connection with them is inevitable. Unfortunately, after finishing their show career, most horses leave training centres to go back to their owners. How difficult are these farewells for you?*

Miles: Always tough! Especially with certain horses that become the special ones. However, it is even harder for the team than for myself, as the day-to-day routines related to taking care of the horses become an inseparable part of their lives.



Kamila: You have mentioned that there are some horses that become very special to you. Of all the Arabians that you have ever worked with, if you were to name the one that is particularly close to your heart, which one would that be?

Miles: It is always difficult to name just one. Some many of them have become an important part of my life. A few years ago, I used to show an Arabian gelding called AJA Adonis (WH Justice x Sanadina by Sanadik El Shaklan) owned by Charlotte Bowskill. He was very special to me as he was with me when my showing career began. During these four of five years that I trained and showed him, we had so many incredible moments together. I cannot remember him ever being beaten in a show and undoubtedly, his greatest achievement was to become Gold Champion Gelding at the All Nations Cup in Aachen. At the moment, he is enjoying his new home and his new career under saddle. It is always great to see the horses being well taken care of and loved after their show career is finished. A bay colt named Duke Santonio ME (Santorini x Amaliaa by Magic Magnifique), with whom I won my first World Championship, has also been very special to me. Actually, the story behind our success is pretty amazing. It all started at the Towerlands UKIAHS in 2014 where I first met Malik Morrison, who later became my best friend. He approached me in the barn where I was clipping a black filly foal Amaliaa (Magic Magnifique x Aziza by Arastin). At the same show, Amaliaa became Gold Champion Filly Foal. As Malik and his family showed strong interest in starting their own breeding programme, I suggested that with such an outstanding pedigree, Amaliaa has potential for becoming a great broodmare. The Morrisons followed my advice and purchased her a few years later. She was then bred to AJA Angelo (WH Justice x AJA Aaisha by Ruger AMW) and Santorini (Vervaldee x Lady Madonna by Psyche Spirit). Duchess Amaiyaa DMC, the grey filly by AJA Angelo, became Gold Champion Filly at Towerlands UKIAHS in 2018 with the highest score of the show - 92.90. At the same show, Duke Santonio was silver to Admiral (Emerald J x Haniyyah by Psytadel). A few weeks later, he won the yearling colts class in Aachen and was very close to becoming Bronze Champion Colt. After that, he was sold to Al Waad Stud in Kuwait just before the European Championships, where he was second in his class. When the World Championships came along, his astonishing performance amazed us all. I will never forget how proud and happy I was to win my first World Championship with the horse bred by my best friend's family. It is worth noting that Duke is also the first horse they have ever bred.

Kamila: *Looking at how successful AJA Adonis was, do you think some breeders make the decision to geld too early sometimes?*

Miles: Yes and no. Sometimes it may happen that they geld too early but, on many occasions, they do not geld when they should. In my opinion, there should always be a good reason not to geld. Especially now, when so many stallions from all over the world are available in the market. The wide-reaching availability of frozen semen gives breeders the opportunity to choose any stallion they like. In many cases, geldings have better opportunities for happier and more fulfilling life. While many colts are just standing and not really doing much, they could be some young kid's little dream to show or ride, which obviously becomes more complicated with a stallion.

Kamila: *Do you ride Arabians?*

Miles: Not as often as I would like to. With all the training and preparation for the shows, there is barely any spare time left for leisure. Until the outbreak of Coronavirus, championships were held almost every week all year round. There is never time to stop, but this is one of the things I love about it! I really look forward to the next show.

Kamila: *I cannot blame you! Do you remember the first show that you took part in?*

Miles: I do indeed. I did a few local shows before that, but my first proper show was with Ryan, where I helped him to take one of the fillies to the championships. Interestingly enough, she beat the filly that he showed. It was quite a surprise!



Kamila: *Are you nervous before the show? Does it become less stressful with time and experience?*

Miles: Most of the time I get excited rather than nervous. Obviously, there are moments when you think: this will be really interesting! However, challenging situations make me become more competitive rather than stressed, which to me is a good thing as it helps me to keep my composure throughout the show. It is all the preparation prior to the show that usually makes me nervous. When I am already there and competing, I enjoy it a lot!

Kamila: *Another competition: World Championships 2019. How did you feel when Adham Saqr (Imperial Madori x Ameera Saqr by Shaheen) was named Bronze World Champion Stallion and Best Egyptian Male?*

Miles: Amazing feeling! We were very happy with his performance in the showring. It is a gorgeous horse, but showing is not necessarily his favourite thing to do (laughs). It depends on whether he is in a mood for showing. Luckily, on that day everything went great.

Kamila: *Did you expect it?*

Miles: No, at least not until his performance in the class. With his great result of 92.50, I knew there was a chance.

Kamila: Does it make you even more competitive in the championships?

Miles: Always! If you were there, you probably saw me teasing Adham with Hariry Al Shaqab (Marwan Al Shaqab x White Silkk by Dakar El Jamaal) presented by Michael Byatt. When he gets teased, he is amazing to look at.

Kamila: For sure this was tough competition!

Miles: The fight for the bronze medal was really between him and EKS Mansour (EKS Alihandro x EKS Phateena by WN Star of Antigua). The judges voted the same for both, but Adham Saqr had a higher score in the class. Surely, it could have gone either way. It is not only hard work, sometimes you need a bit of luck.

Kamila: We have talked a lot about wins. Which of them would you consider your greatest professional achievement?

Miles: Definitely the first World Championship with Duke Santonio, due to the whole story behind it and the pressure to make it happen. I must admit that winning two World Championships two years in a row is quite an achievement to me.



Kamila: Apart from winning in the shows, have you got any other dreams in relation to horses?

Miles: Just to enjoy what I am doing! We are lucky to be here, in this amazing location. My priority now is to keep growing the business by building and maintaining good relationships with my clients. It is very important not to forget about the people that you started with, which may happen when you grow to this size. My motto is to keep all the horses and people around me happy and content. I am trying not to look million miles ahead and to enjoy what I already have. That is really all I need!

Kamila: In terms of the growth, where do you see yourself in 5 years in the Arabian horse industry?

Miles: At the moment, I am focusing on the breeding side of the business. I would like to take the growth in this direction so that we are not only a training centre, but also a breeding station. We have mares for breeding and foaling as well as embryos and recipient mares, so it is actually already happening.



Kamila: Have you ever thought of becoming a breeder yourself?

Miles: In the long term – yes, but right now I am so busy that I am not going to throw myself into it just yet. I already bred a few foals and they have done well in the championships, but if you breed something special, you rarely have time to show it as your clients' horses take priority.

Kamila: You were one of the contenders of the European edition of the Aljassimya Online Show. From a trainer's perspective, how online shows are different to the regular championships? Do you think it is the new way of showing horses going forward?

Miles: As a show, it is really difficult to judge a horse from a video and I do not think it will be the new way of showing horses going forward. I agreed to take part in it because I wanted to support Arabian Insider in this great initiative to make it possible for the people to enjoy horses while there is no possibility to attend a standard show. We were really pleased to support the show and grateful to the Arabian Insider team for all their effort.

Kamila: Apart from a high number of shows being cancelled, are you observing any other effects of the Covid-19 situation on the Arabian horse industry? Do you think that it may reshape the industry as we know it? In your opinion, are many breeders and horses going to be affected if the situation continues for longer than expected?

Miles: I can only speak for myself, but we sold more horses and more breedings this year than in previous years. We are also working on a very interesting and exciting project in Saudi Arabia. It is a good sign because the economic crisis is something we would prefer to avoid. Obviously, there is still a bit of uncertainty in the market and people tend to be more cautious about spending money, but it seems to be going in the right direction. It is probably more challenging for small breeders, but some training centres as well as large farms are trying to give them as much support as possible. A scheme aimed at promoting and supporting European breeders is part of the new Saudi project that I have mentioned. Less known breeders will be given a chance to bring selected horses to the Middle East, which could give the horse and its breeder some recognition.

Kamila: Can you please share more details on this exciting project with us?

Miles: Of course! We are very excited about it. The project is about establishing a new training centre in an amazing location; about 6 hours' drive from Abu Dhabi, 3 hours' drive from Kuwait and Doha, and about an hour drive from Bahrain. The idea comes from one of our Saudi Arabian clients, Salayel Stud, who leased Bebars El Farida (Imperial Baarez x Salma by Royal Colours) and Saeid El Farida (Madeen Al Nakeeb x Imella) from El Farida Stud. Both stallions were shown in the Asharqia Gulf Straight Egyptian Arabian Cup this year, where Bebars and Saeid become Gold and Silver Champion Stallion respectively. After the show, I went to have a look at the farm, which is an amazing place with its own breeding clinic and veterinary. I have not seen a facility like that anywhere else. We are having a new barn built right now and this exciting venture should be ready to go for the upcoming Middle East show season.

Kamila: What are your impressions after Menton, which was the first major show to be held after Covid-19 shut the entire world down?

Miles: First of all, it is great to be back in the showing. I am extremely proud and happy with the results of all our horses. Silver Champion Stallion for Roe Lateef (Gazal Al Shaqab x ZT Ludjbroasiaa by Ludjin El Jamaal) was a truly special moment as it was my first medal won in Menton. I am eternally grateful to my team for all the effort during the show as well as back at the farm. These special moments would not happen without their hard work and dedication.

While visiting the stables, I could not help but notice that the motto to keep everyone around happy and content, Miles puts into practice. The members of his team were all working with a smile on their faces. A happy neighing was an irresistible invitation for me to cuddle all the gorgeous horses that at present call this beautiful farm their home. I lingered for a moment in front of the amazing Adham Saqr, the 2019 Bronze World Champion, whose fashionable hairstyle made me a bit jealous! The feeling of jealousy was quickly replaced with love and admiration, as his kind and sweet disposition immediately melted my heart. On my way home, I was thinking about Miles's recipe for success and I arrived at a conclusion that his urge to make everyone around him happy pays off well. When horses are happy, they are more likely to win, which in turn makes their owners happy. These good vibes make Miles's farm a place that people are drawn to. I personally cannot wait for the next visit. I just need to make sure I visit a hairdresser first!

