



BLUEBELL ARABIANS TRAINING CENTRE

text by Talitha Bakker | photos by TuttoArabi archive

Hlayyil Ramadan



Earlier this summer I had the opportunity to speak with Josje Dorssers. Wife of Erik Dorssers with whom she is managing the well known trainingcenter Blue Bell Arabians in The Netherlands.

Born in 1965, Erik Dorssers was raised among horses. His father had some New Forest ponies at the farm, and as young boys, Erik and his brother engaged, quite successfully, to showjumping. In those days, Dr. Engels, later the owner of the famous Plakat, started to buy some horses, stabled them at the Dorssers-farm and made Erik's dad his manager. First warmbloods, but soon the first Arabian horses arrived, and it was with them that Erik found his destiny.

TA: How did Erik start with showing horses?

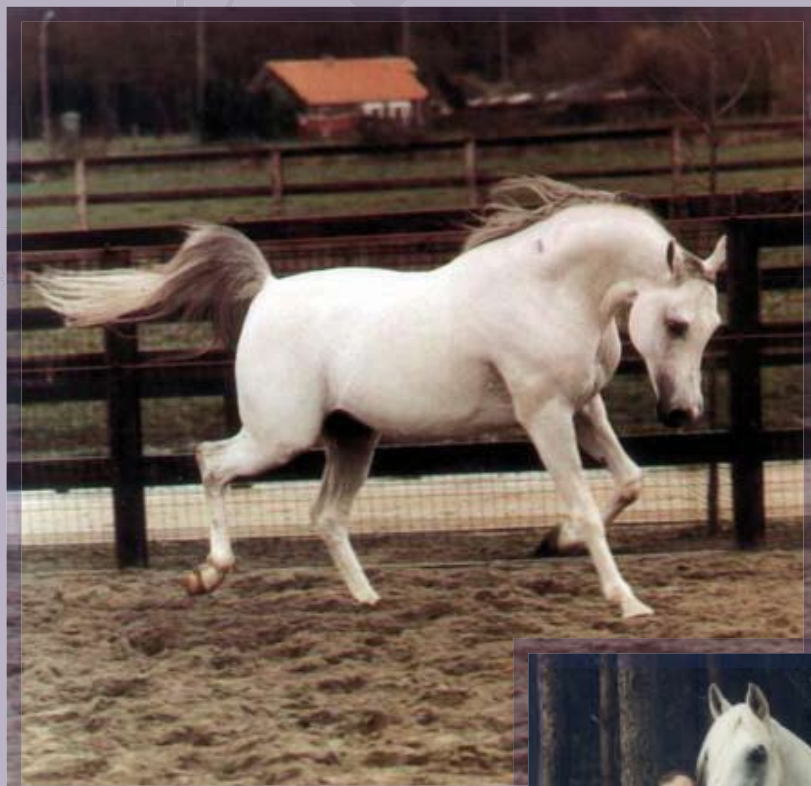
JD: He practically grew up in the stables, spending every free minute he had with the horses, while his mom was doing his homework for him. Erik helped his dad clean the stables and take care of the horses, learning all there is to know about them. Together with his dad, he trained and schooled the horses, preparing them for shows, which were in those days quite different from the shows we nowadays have. It was a lot of fun, everybody cheered on each others horse, brought chairs, drinks and food and had a great time.

One day, some horses were entered for a show, and Eriks dad had injured himself so couldn't show them. He asked Erik to take over for him and so Erik entered the showring as a handler for the first time. He was still a very young boy but knew what he was doing and he took the win! After that day, there was no turning back for him; working with Arabian horses, and taking them to shows became his life and the rest is history.

TA: What were the most memorable moments in the life of Erik?

Warandes Plakat

Erik and Plakat





Erik and Ekstern

Misha Apal and
Marwan Al Shaqab
Both Junior World
Champions!



JD: There are a lot of memories, but the most special one is the one of the stallion Plakat.

Plakat came into Erik's life at a very young age, and they were destined to be together. They shared highs and lows, happiness and heartache, teaching each other how to do – and how not to do things, and they became true soulmates. They had many victories in the showring, winning the European Championships many times, as well as other big shows like Towerlands and Aachen, and became Reserve Worldchampion in Paris. At the age of 22, after a long and well-deserved break, Plakat returned to the showring and won the championship titles in both Towerlands and Aachen, with the highest scores of the show.

When Dr. Engels retired from horses – by then Erik had taken over Bluebell Arabians from him –, he gave Plakat to Erik and they spend many more years together, until he passed away two days before Erik had to leave for Paris in 1999 with Plakat's son

Galba and the young and promising colt Eternity Ibn Navarrone D.

Plakat's passing broke Erik's heart and he didn't want to leave the farm, where he had buried his beloved four-legged friend, but he knew he had to. So he went and took Galba and Eternity to Paris. One of the most emotional moments in his life, besides Plakat's passing, was when Galba took the World Championship title that Sunday, as a tribute to his sire. To top it off, it was Eternity to take the Junior Champion title!

Besides Galba and Eternity, Erik showed a lot of other horses to big A-show titles – he won his first World Championship-title even before he was old enough to get his drivers licence –, like Warandes Plakat, Pasch Bianco, Focus Khemali, Marwan Al Shaqab, Misha Apal, Extern and Hlayyil Ramadan, just to name a few.



One other memorable moment was in 2001, when Erik won both Junior Championship titles in Paris, with Marwan al Shaqab and Misha Apal, both yearlings at the time. He wanted to take both horses into the ring at the same time, but the ring stewards tried to stop him. Erik wouldn't let this moment being stolen from him, so he had someone distract the stewards and he ran passed them with one horse in each hand and entered the ring with two champions and a big grin on his face.

One year later, in 2002, he took Triple Crown with Marwan Al Shaqab, winning Aachen, the European- and the Worldchampionships in the same year. Other Triple Crown winners in Erik's career were the famous Extern and Focus Khemali. Galba almost joined the club but had to settle for reserve European champion.

TA: Can you tell us something about the close cooperation Erik has with the Royal stables of Jordan?

JD: In 2000, a new chapter in Erik's life began when he got a phonecall from HRH Princess Alia Al Hussein from Jordan, asking him to come over and show her horses. He went and met what he now calls his second family. Over the past 10 years, Erik and Princess Alia and all the people working at the Royal Stables bonded and formed a special and valuable relationship.

In 2002, Erik went to Paris with the Jordanian bred Hlayyil Ramadan. He was rewarded with the Reserve Senior Champion-title, which later turned into the Championtitle, after Al Aadeed al Shaqab got disqualified. Funny thing was, that Erik got the blame for that, although he had nothing to do with the horse. He just shared a truck travelling to Paris, and that was it. During transport, Al Aadeed had to be given some sedation because he got very stressed out and it was the only way to keep the horse safe. This later sadly resulted in a positive dopingtest which led to disqualification of Al Aadeed and the 'promotion' of Hlayyil Ramadan to World Champion. Because of



Jordan Show

Erik and Galba





Almasa

Hhoor



this, some people came to the conclusion that it had to have been Erik who 'doped' the horse, which of course was very far from the truth.

Besides showing horses, Erik is also the coach of the Jordanian Endurance team, which he was asked for by HRH Princess Alia in 2006. At that time, the Jordanian team was in Aachen for the World Equestrian games and the horses were stabled at Bluebell's before leaving for Aachen. The team didn't have a real leader or coach, and didn't know what they were doing at all. Erik stepped in and helped where ever he could, and the riders were so pleased with him and his help, that they decided they wanted him to be their coach from then on. In the past few years, the Jordanian team has made big progress in endurance riding and they are ready to compete now at the highest level.

In December 2005, Princess Alia bought the young and promising Belgian bred Monarcos DD (Pstadel x Monogrammed Lady).

Monarcos was one year old at the time and had been Champion and Best in Show at the Tulip Cup in Deurne, and at the Lowland Cup in Exloo, both in the Netherlands. He became top 10 in Paris and Princess Alia was so charmed by him, that she decided to buy him for her breeding program in Jordan. His first foals hit the ground in 2008, and they look very promising ! Among them is the grey filly Hhoor, who was filly champion in Jordan and did some shows in Europe. Another gorgeous filly who by now everybody knows and loves, is Almasa.

TA: Can you tell us something more about Almasa? She came out of nowhere last year in Paris ...

JD: Almasa was showed as a yearling in Jordan, taking the national championship title. Last year, as a two year old, she repeated that, and went on to be unanimous junior champion at the Middle East Championships. Erik asked Princess Alia to send Almasa over to



Holland to compete at the World Championships in Paris. She arrived only 4 weeks before the show and took quite some time to adjust to the minus 10 degrees frost, coming from 20+ degrees in Jordan ! She wasn't eating well for 2 weeks and lost a lot of weight. Determined to take her to Paris, Erik and his team did whatever possible to keep her in condition, giving her all kinds of different foods, 3 kinds of hayledge and a lot of tender loving care. Slowly, she started to adjust and gaining a little weight again. Just a very short time later it was time to leave for Paris. Almasa went without being conditioned and hardly being schooled, still being too thin but feeling happy. In Paris, she was scared by the plastic boxes and every sound startled her; and she went off her food again. The whole team was worried, but when she entered the ring on Friday, she finally understood why she was there : it was showtime !!

Almasa doesn't like anything more than showing herself, and she trotted around the ring like she owned it, taking the win in her

class. After that, she returned to her stable, ate all her food and laid down to sleep ! By the time the finals started on Sunday, she was a completely different horse and she showed even better than she did on Friday, and the crowd cheered her on, she definitely was their favorite ! A completely unknown horse, in less than perfect condition, coming from out of nowhere, took the Bronze Medal, missing Silver by only 1 point ! What a buzz !! For the crowd, but especially for Erik, his team and for Jordan !!

Ever since Paris 2010, the phones at Bluebell haven't stopped ringing, everybody wants to talk about Almasa, and huge amounts of money were offered for this special filly. But there's not going to be a sale, Almasa is to stay with Erik for now, and will eventually return to her homecountry of Jordan.

TA: We also enjoyed her performance at the recent show in Menton. How did you experienced this show?

JD: Well, the story for Almasa indeed continued in Menton



Almasa

Hlayyil Ramadan and Princess Alia after his victory at the European Championships in 2004



Kuda

TM Valencia





Yusriyyah

Justilicious



2011, where she was everybody's favorite for the title. She looked fantastic and showed her socks off, giving a perfect performance, but with scores differing from 90 to 94,5 %, she ended up being third. Everyone agreed she should have won, but being bred and owned by a 'normal' person and without big sponsormoney to back her up, her obvious quality sadly was not enough to convince some of the judges on duty to do what's right. Being kicked down but not defeated, Almasa will return to the showring at the Elran Cup in Hasselt, Belgium in July, followed by Aachen and Paris.

TA: Can you tell me something about the future of Blue Bell Arabians?

JD: Having experienced a lot of ups and downs, victories and defeat, being praised and dismissed, Erik, now almost 46 years old, is still full of passion for what he does ; living and working with horses. He works, handles and schools them in a kind and

friendly manner, always putting the happiness and wellbeing of the horse first. By looking at his horses, you can tell they are happy and relaxed, enjoying what they do. They always do their best in the showring, wanting to please Erik and having fun doing their job.

Thank you Josje for giving the reader of Tutto Arabi some inside information on Erik!

After the interview we enjoyed our walk along the pastures and stables of Bluebell Training Center, looking at all the horses quietly standing in the box or relaxing in the paddock. Some are big showwinners, others aren't, but they all have one thing in common; they all enjoy their lives with Erik and his wife Josje!

