

An **Arabian** horse and **Spanish** riding school?

Interview with Anna Izdebska

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Gniady, Arabic gelding ElBasim (Wachlarz - Elgda / Ganges) and its owner Anna Izdebska were one of the few couples in Poland representing the Dom Vaquera la garrocha Spanish riding style. Their shows graced numerous equestrian competitions. They also performed in a theatre and for the Prince of Bahrain himself!

Doma Vaquera la garrocha is a Spanish riding style which was born on rough terrain. Vaquero means a horse shepherd for whom the ability to work calmly with cattle matters. Such work, however, required a highly trained horse that would follow rider's instructions without any hesitation so that it can avoid the horns of a charging bull. Today, doma vaquera primarily stands for exciting shows.



JG: *Ania, in hindsight, taking into account all the put effort and made sacrifices, would you choose this style of riding again?*

AI: *Definitely yes! Doma vaquera means finesse and harmony in working with a horse. It requires countless hours of training but also teaches the rider to feel the horse so that the aids given are as subtle as possible. In addition, there is a garrocha, a pole the rider holds in their hand, which in the very beginning is heavy and very uncomfortable to ride with. I still remember the pain in my sore wrists after the first training sessions.*

JG: *The riding style you chose is quite unusual, but even more surprising is the fact that you trained on an Arabian horse. Where does this connection come from?*

AI: *When ElBasim appeared in my life, I knew that our common path would be unusual. I wanted to do something no one had ever done before. I started doing some research*



and came across doma vaquero and gave myself up to it. It was not easy. I often heard that it is impossible to achieve with an Arabian horse. Nevertheless, I decided to prove that it was possible, and Arabian horses, thanks to their delicacy, are great in this style. The strong foundations of doma vaquera are dressage, and I started training with Elbasim from it together with working with it on the ground.

JG: Let's go back for a moment to the beginning of your story, can you tell me how it happened that Elbasim got into your hands?

AI: It's a very simple story because it was exactly as they describe it in the books, i.e. it was love at first sight (laughs). I was visiting my friends at the stud farm in Kielnarowa. As I was walking around the pastures with many horses, suddenly large and sharp eyes appeared from behind a thick and dark mane, keeping a close eye on me. After a while, ElBasim proudly raised his head, tearing himself away from the grass, and his inward curved ears gave him an even more

oriental look. I immediately knew it would be mine. It was the beginning of our common but not always rose-coloured path. A journey during which this inconspicuous horse would prove to me how much I still had to learn.

JG: What did your training sessions look like?

AI: I could talk about it for hours because it was actually a time of my life. As I have already mentioned, in doma vaquera, a well-worn and well-drained horse is a must. Nothing can be neglected in this regard and shortcuts are not an option. Moreover, there is a pole, i.e. a garrocha, to which I had to desensitize Basim and learn to ride with it myself. Every time it slipped out of my hands, I had to get off my horse and pick it up hundreds of times. In doma vaquera, you ride with one hand. The reins are usually in the left hand and the right hand is on a pole or hip. Additionally, I had to learn how to ride using a bocado. It is a type of a bit similar to a curb bit. You work only with your fingers using the principle of micro-vibrations, and the rest is all about the mounting.

JG: *You mentioned that ElBasim was not an easy horse, did you have moments of doubt?*

AI: *Doubts rather not, but I often felt tired, but it gave way to joy after another successful show. Everyone who has worked with an Arabian horse knows that they are peculiar. Their extraordinary intelligence and delicacy, on the one hand, help when working with them, but on the other, you can very quickly find out that you have just made a mistake. When working with an Arabian horse, intuition and the so-called timing are crucial, you need to know when to let go. Basim was a difficult horse, but he forgave a lot. In addition, during the shows he was 100% focused, I could trust him, even though things were different at home (laughs).*

JG: *The shows were your second nature. I know there were two particularly special shows. Tell me about them.*

AI: *It's true, Basim and I both loved the shows. Basim always knew what he was there for and what to do. How? I have no idea. This is probably what makes Arabian horses unique. One of our most beautiful shows was definitely a theatre performance. The place itself was magical, and the lights, the audience and the music made us move back in time. However, I have to admit that the preparation for*

this show cost us a lot of time. After all, I had to get Basim used to walking on boards! The second show, which, in turn, was surprising for us, took place during the International Competition in Horse Rallying in Zakrzów. It turned out to be a show for the Prince of Bahrain! I hadn't heard anything about it before, but everything went according to plan, and ElBasim once again proved that I can rely on him.

JG: *What are your plans for the future now?*

AI: *Do we have enough time? (laughs) Right now I am preparing my another horse for the shows. It is an Iberian horse - Duende, for whom I have high hopes. Duende surprises me positively at every turn. Doma vaquera is of course a part of my life, but I'm also starting my adventure with horse archery. There are still many plans to implement. I just wonder if maybe it would be possible to extend day time by a few hours?*

JG: *Thank you very much for the conversation and sharing your story with us. I wish you more success while working with horses.*

AI: *Thank you so much for the conversation and kind words. □*

