



*“Experience shows that champions not necessarily reproduce champions and this is what makes breeding horses challenging and unique”.*

*Tarek Hamza*

# Al Tarek Stud Egypt

## Breeding Based on Tradition and Passion An interview with Egyptian breeder and judge Tarek Hamza

by Monika Savier ■ photos by Joanna Jonientz, Monika Savier, Ahmed Nashaat, Ahmed Taha

It must have been 15 years ago, at least, when after talking to the director of El Zahraa State Stud in Cairo, we left his office and were addressed by a young man speaking fluent English and asking if we would like to see his mares. We were pleased to accept his offer - El Zahraa stud features a boarding area where private breeders of Straight Egyptians can stable their horses. Tarek Hamza, as the young man introduced himself, was familiar with all the horses of the stud and had a precise vision. He had come back home after having successfully studied law at the Sorbonne University in Paris, and during an auction in the state stud, had purchased two of the few remaining Hadban Enzahi fillies. He intended to establish a small breeding operation of his own with them. It was important to him to exchange opinions with other breeders, so our encounter developed into a fascinating discussion of breeding experiences with certain sire and dam lines. Again and again, the topic was also the influence of the rich Gulf states whose breeders would frequent Cairo to shop for horses. Tarek feared for the important foundation

horses of El Zahraa and wished, as far as he was able to, to help maintain ancient lines in Cairo.

In the course of the years, a wonderful friendship developed, with the connection maintained not only by exchanging opinions on horses, on the situation in Cairo and in Europe, and on shows and breeding experiences; but also, with joint projects planned and executed. Today, Tarek Hamza is an international Lawyer specializing in International Business Law and working at the Cabinet level under H.E. the Prime Minister. His small breeding operation, however, is not a business model, but just on the contrary: it's his passion. His family has been breeding Straight Egyptians for generations, and with all this know-how in his surroundings, maintaining and further improving the family tradition went without saying for him. His small stud might be called "Small is Beautiful", as every single horse takes an important role in his overall breeding concept and nothing is left to chance. He also made a name for himself as a competent and fair judge for ECAHO shows.

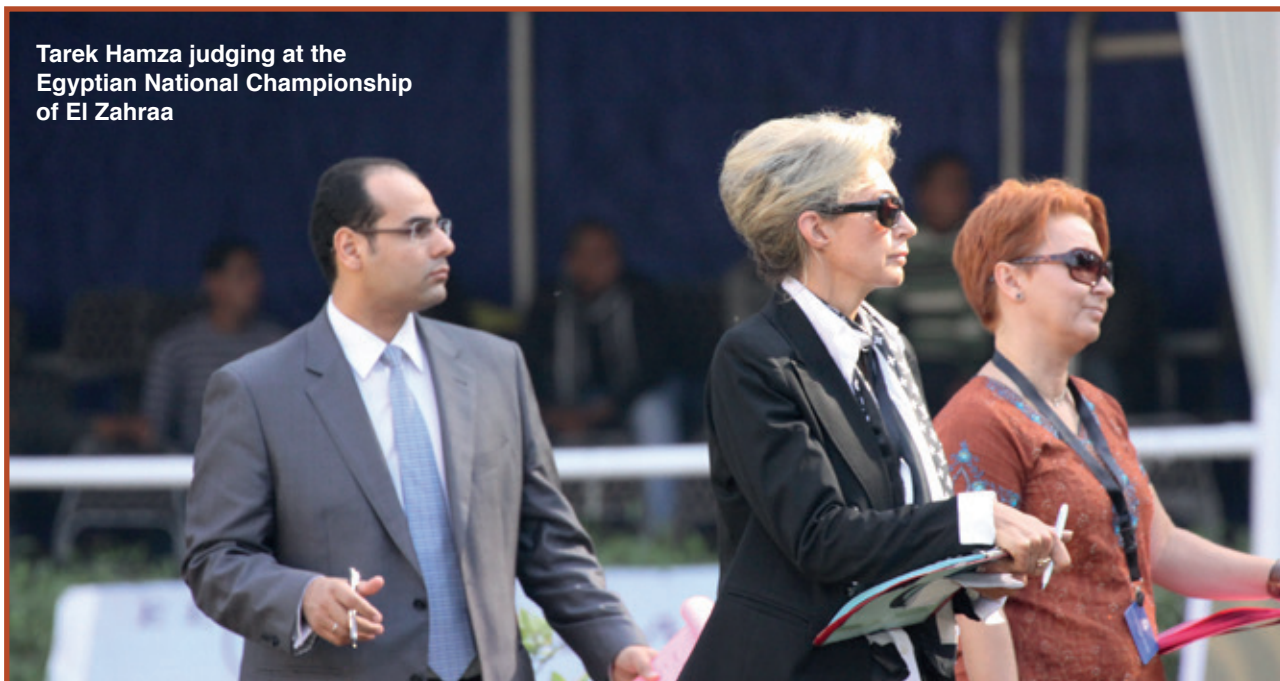
Here is the interview we conducted.

**Monika Savier:** *Where does your passion for breeding straight Egyptians come from? Is it the history of your family that motivated you to do so?*

**Tarek Hamza:** My passion for breeding straight Egyptians is connected to my childhood. I grew up in a family that was breeding Arabian horses. My father raised and bred several horses in our farm in the countryside of Egypt in the village of Tahanoub located 28 Kilometres north of Cairo. In this respect, he always encouraged me to continue the family's legacy that had been established by my late grandfather Ahmed Hamza Pasha. Hence, I decided to start my own breeding program in 2005, a few years after my graduation from Paris 1- Sorbonne University Law school. I acquired my first mare Al Shareka Hamdan, a Koheilan Rodan mare tracing back to the Nazeera family, from my aunt Fatma Hamza, the owner of the famous Hamdan stables, who is a cousin of my father. Later, I became more interested in this breeding world of Arabian horses and I decided to move the mare I

owned from the Hamdan stables in the countryside to the boarding stables of El Zahraa state stud, which is nearer to where I live. Immediately, another chapter began in shaping my ideas and breeding concepts. It must be said that I was very lucky and fortunate to be able to follow quite closely the horses bred annually at El Zahraa state stud, and to observe their development, since I used to visit the farm at least on a weekly basis and sometimes even more often. After almost four years of monitoring and carefully studying these horses and bloodlines, I was so intrigued that I selected certain horses and families bred by El Zahraa state stud to include them in my private breeding program. During that time, it must be said, I was not limited to El Zahraa bloodstock only. Actually, I was looking around in many private farms in Egypt for other horses to include in my program, but unfortunately sometimes I felt disappointed and confused with the development of certain horses' progeny and bloodlines that can produce extremely beautiful offspring, however, they may end up looking differently when they mature. Additionally, I didn't

Tarek Hamza judging at the Egyptian National Championship of El Zahraa





**Rebat Al Tarek**

want to be bound by preconceived ideas imposed by other breeders, and wished to live my own breeding experience. Therefore, I decided to shape my own path, to implement my own vision, and to select among the bloodstock of El Zahraa state stud what suits my breeding goals. I succeeded to acquire three fillies from various auctions there, two Hadban Enzahi fillies tracing back to Bint Kamla and Lateefa families - both descending from Bint Hadba El Saghira - and a Dahman Shahwan filly tracing back to the Bukra family.

**Monika Savier:** *3 years ago, your successful stallion Rebat Al Tarek died at only 4 years of age. That was not only sad, but also a bitter setback for your breeding. But now you bring his beautiful half-brother Fadeel Al Tarek into the breeding business. Is this a stroke of luck*

*or is the mother of the two such an outstanding mother of sires? Tell us more about this mare.*

**Tarek Hamza:** Actually, the death of Rebat Al Tarek was indeed a big loss for my breeding program. However, I managed through a cooperation with Mr. Ali Shaarawi, the owner of Shaarawi Arabians, to exchange and to buy two of his daughters since he had covered a lot of broodmares and has some very special offspring in his stud. Currently, I strongly believe in his half-brother Fadeel Al Tarek who is now 3 years of age and by Al Farabi Mennatallah, a grandson of Ruminaja Ali and out of my foundation Hadban Enzahi mare Al Gazyah, a mare I acquired from the EAO who traces back to the Lateefa family. One can notice a great resemblance between the two half-brothers Rebat Al Tarek and Fadeel Al Tarek, which reflects the remarkable positive influence of



**Al Gazyah EAO (El Ragel x Zebeebah)**

the dam line on both stallions. This Hadban Enzahi mare illustrates that she is truly a dam of stallions since she constantly transmits her strong traits to her offspring. Hence, I can assert today that my initial herd selection was not a mistake.

**Monika Savier:** *El Zahraa State Stud in Cairo has many horses and some of them are very beautiful, but this gene pool is not necessarily known to be a direct model for breeding show horses. What is different about your mare? Or does the type of the two sons primarily derive from the sires you have chosen?*

**Tarek Hamza:** In today's horse breeding, many horse breeders place strong emphasis on the dam and the dam lines. Historically, this is very much the right thing to do since the Bedouins used to attach a lot of weight on the dam lines. Upgrading a dam line is usually a

very difficult job. Therefore, a good choice would save many generations of breeding work. Concerning El Zahraa state stud, we can still find some good quality horses there. However, one of the main challenges is the large number of horses available in the farm nowadays, which counts more than 500 horses, and the fact that many of these horses have to be bred annually. So, we are talking about at least 200 mares, approximately, who need to be covered - compared to what took place in the period of between 1950 and 1960, when the total number of broodmares in the farm never exceeded 50 or 60 horses. In my opinion, El Zahraa bred horses are still very important horses and have to be maintained as a reservoir to the breed. Also, the stud can produce some good quality horses that can take part in shows provided they are carefully selected and given the right and appropriate care. I



must say that I was very lucky to be able to buy one of those good quality mares from El Zahraa state farm. Later on, I tried to go back and acquire some other horses from the auctions held annually, but I never succeeded to find a similar quality.

What makes Al Gazyah really special is the fact that she is an easy to breed mare in the sense that she usually reproduces maintaining her solid conformation and prevailing spirit and type, while leaving room for the stallion to add his strong points. Therefore, I would argue as well that the sire can never be neglected in

any breeding decision. Some stallions are known, for example, to produce gray offspring only. Some other stallions may provide better necks, a longer shoulder scapula or exquisite heads.

Actually, certain bloodlines have prevailed as valuable sire lines among the straight Egyptian horses. Dr. Hans Nagel often highlighted this fact and constantly emphasized, in this respect, the role and superiority of Nazeer as a sire line in Egyptian history. Definitely, this can be noticed in many of his sons and grandsons, among them of course one can mention the legendary



**Tarek Hamza and Dr. Nagel at El Zahraa state stud in Cairo**



**Badreya Shaarawi (Rebat Al Tarek x Baraka Shaarawi) owned by Al Tarek stud**

Ruminaja Ali who conquered the show ring and produced many champions and who remains highly influential as an Egyptian sire until today. Thus, I believe that one always needs to consider the sire line when taking a breeding decision.

Moreover, another important element in horse breeding is what is often called by certain experts the perfect match or nickability between the sire and dam. I am happy to say that my young stallion Fadeel AL Tarek is a result of such a formula. One can recognize that this young stallion inherited a lot from his dam and still carries the strong points his sire line is known for.

**Monika Savier:** *There are many stallions in Cairo. What chances does a beautiful young stallion have to make a good name for himself? Does he have to be successful at shows? Or does the pedigree have to impress? Which career will you choose for Fadeel Al Tarek?*

**Tarek Hamza:** Shows are very important for many horse breeders and are often considered, for certain breeders at any rate, to be among the criteria to choose and select for when breeding a stallion. However, experience shows that champions do not necessarily

reproduce champions and this is what makes breeding horses challenging and unique. Every breeder has to do his own homework and find his own formula. In my opinion, the most important factor for a breeding stallion is to be a proven sire. In other words, the stallion has to have the capability to pass on his strong points



**Mansoura Shaarawi (Rebat Al Tarek x Guna (EAO))**

and good traits. One recalls what is often said that “the mare is there to maintain and the stallion is there to improve”. A stallion’s pedigree is of great importance, too - once it is reflected in his individual phenotype. A horse must resemble his pedigree which means that he has to carry the strong elements for which his genotype is known. This pedigree idea becomes meaningless once these strong points are recessive. In case of my young stallion Fadeel, I believe that he can have a show career as well as being a breeding stallion, since as I mentioned earlier, he carries the strong points known for both his dam line and his sire line. I’m really curious to see his offspring very soon.

**Monika Savier:** *What role do the social media play in Egypt today? Do they have an influence on the career of a stallion?*

**Tarek Hamza:** Generally speaking, social media plays a role not only in Egypt but worldwide. It can influence

many breeders in positive as well as negative ways. However, I believe a lot in the education aspect of social media which can help many breeders to develop their own ideas and enrich their breeding knowledge tremendously. Personally, I follow the social media somewhat in order to understand what is happening in the Arabian horse world and to stay connected. Social media can introduce and promote a stallion for the horse public. However, in case the stallion is not of a good quality and does not prove himself, people will unfollow him and he will vanish quickly. Therefore, I believe that social media could be a double-edged weapon for the career of a stallion.

**Monika Savier:** *Do you also think about the possibility to lease the stallion to Europe or the Gulf States? After all, he is an El Zabraa grandson with an original gene pool and an impressive phenotype.*

**Tarek Hamza:** Nowadays, it is not very easy to find



Shaarawi Arabians in Egypt





Fadeel Al Tarek

a good quality stallion. As you have noticed, he is an outcross stallion with a good phenotype and a strong relation to El Zahraa state stud - though the limited genetic pool of Straight Egyptian horses makes him really special and different from many other stallions that are usually quite similar and have almost the same faults. Therefore, I am not interested to offer him for lease since I need him for my breeding program now - later on I might re-consider my decision.

**Monika Savier:** *What other horses do you have and where is Al Tarek farm located?*

**Tarek Hamza:** Al Tarek stud is located at Ali Shaarawi's farm and stud west of Cairo on the desert road from Cairo to Alexandria. I have four main families in my breeding program, of which I have



already mentioned the Lateefa family. I have three other fillies, all three of which are by the same stallion Rebat Al Tarek. The first one is a chestnut filly named Badreya Shaarawi, a Koheilan Krush in strain tracing back to El Shahbaa by Hamdan via the famous mare Bint Azziza Princess. The second is a bay filly named Badaweya Shaarawi, a Dahman Shahwan tracing back to Bint Maysa El Saghira via SF Moon Maiden and Nefertiti. The third is a gray filly named Asrar Al Amin, also a Dahman Shahwan in strain and a daughter of the famous Ahlam Al Amin tracing back to the Halima family.

**Monika Savier:** *You are also an ECAHO Show Judge, how do you judge the show scene today? What influence do the horses of the Gulf States have on the development of breeding in Egypt? Are the Egyptian breeders still proud of El Zahraa, the cradle of Straight Egyptian breeding?*

**Tarek Hamza:** The Show scene has developed a lot nowadays. Usually, there is a strong competition between exhibitors. We see a lot of good quality horses in the show ring. The judges' task has become more difficult. The current point system is not always of help for many judges since the point scale used is very narrow. A comparative judging system or an English system appears to be better sometimes, since it permits to judge a horse as whole and not to cut it into pieces. However, this system even if it appears more appropriate in judging a horse, may lack sufficient interaction with the audience. As you may know, show organizers can choose among both systems depending on the category of the show and the requirements of ECAHO for each show, provided this is mentioned in detail on the schedule and in the show catalog. Concerning the influence of horses of the Gulf States on the development of breeding in Egypt, one can notice a strong effect on a lot of breeding farms in Egypt since many breeders



Fadeel Al Tarek

have imported horses during the last decade from the Gulf countries. Unfortunately, some breeding programs became quite similar and identity has been lost. Nevertheless, we still believe in our own edge and specificity due to the wider genetic pool and variety of horse families in Egypt, and in addition, we believe in the possibility of using good outcross stallions in our programs. Indeed, most Egyptian Arabian breeders are proud of El Zahraa state stud in light of its important role in preserving our straight Egyptian horses as well as with regard to its potential contribution to maintain a certain diversity within the limited genetic pool of straight Egyptian horses.

**Dear Tarek Hamza, thank you very much for this interesting discussion!**

**Al TarekStud**

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