

# From **STONE** to **DYNAMITE**

text by: Ewa Baglaj

„It is not worthwhile imitating me”, hear students, applicants for the post of show presenter, of **MARIUSZ LIŚKIEWICZ**, the manager of Michałów Stud’s training stable, trainer and handler of Arabian horses, who returned with the title of “Best” from domestic and foreign championships many times. He received the prestigious Presenters Trophy awarded during the All Nations Cup in Aachen (Germany) in 2002, he won the World Championships with **Kwestura** in 2007 and the All Nations Cup Gold Medal (Senior Mares) with **Emandoria** this year.

Liked by all, he endears with modesty and warmth, willingly sharing his knowledge and experience.

„I say to the young people: listen, do you like what I do? Does it make sense? Then take that from me. But don’t copy my every move. Because training horses is a combination of sign language and body language.”

Anna Stojanowska, an international judge, says: „Mariusz has this saying, which is disarming: I don’t do anything, I just hold the end of the rope!”

Other handlers speak about Mariusz Liśkiewicz with admiration: „I would like to be in a position to be able to enter the arena as many times as Mr. Mariusz Liśkiewicz”, says Marek Demczuk. “He is a true authority for me. He impresses me with his work, the engagement in what he does. He is also great as a friend, not keeping his phenomenal knowledge to himself, but sharing advice when needed”.

„Positioning a horse is done by the language of my body, my hand, leg, chest, the raising of the whip, lowering the whip, raising the whip, lowering it down”, explains Mariusz Liśkiewicz. “Signals by which I communicate with the horse. And not all of my signals must mean the same thing with a different trainer. Consistency is the only important factor – that every signal is identical every time and means only one command. People have many problems with that. For example they pull the horse forward, wanting him to



photo: Urszula Sawicka

Mariusz Liśkiewicz with Kwestura  
World Championships, Paris 2007





photo: Sylwia Ilenda

Mariusz Liškiewicz, The Best Handler  
Polish Nationals,  
Janów Podlaski 2010



photo: Krzysztof Durzyński

Mariusz Liškiewicz with Emadoria

On the left: the director of the Michałów State Stud Jerzy Białobok  
All Nations Cup, Aachen 2010

follow them. They back up, facing the animal. But afterwards they make this mistake. They stop him and pull him forward again, so that he would stand wider in the front. And he doesn't want to do that. It's because the same signal means two things: "follow me" and "wider in the front". It is not understandable for the horse. I do it this way: I pull forward, meaning "follow me". But when I want him to move the front, I pull him both forward and to the left or right – he then knows that the hind stays where it is and only the front moves. Because that is a bit of a different signal. Or "give me some neck". This can't be just pulling the horse by the rope again, because it will confuse the animal. It has to be combined with the raising of the whip, my approach, to have the horse go up. And again you have to be consistent: if you raise both hands, then always do it that way. If you don't want to do it that way, then let that command be associated with the raising of one hand. The horse will do whatever he is taught. Most importantly do not give him two commands with the same signal".

#### From Ekstern to El Dorada

Mariusz Liškiewicz had no idea about training nuances when he scored his first success on the arena in the mid 90s. **Ekstern**, dark grey at the time, an undersized yearling, unexpectedly won the Polish Junior Championships.

"We were showing more than a dozen colts", he reminisces. "The competition was strong, the best Monogramm get: **Ganges**, **Emanor**. **Edeon** was also considered a sure winner. The inconspicuous Ekstern, considered first to get the axe, was given to me at random. I

did not train him for the shows and prior to Bialka I had him perhaps five times in my hand. We ran onto the arena. He stopped somehow. How I accomplished that, I don't remember. He moved remarkably, I tried not to interfere and all the judges gave him 20s for movement. That's when something hit me: maybe I will be doing this!".

Later a long road led Mariusz Liškiewicz from that first win to the world successes of his favorite **El Dorada**, which he calls "the horse of his life". Just as long was the earlier road of a boy from Krasnystaw until the day he took a liking to this discipline thanks to Ekstern.

As he admits, the love for horses is in his genes, inherited from his mother. She was an Animal Husbandry graduate and worked as a teacher at the local agricultural technical college. As part of the animal breeding program she went with each class to the nearby Bialka, so that the students could see for themselves how a depot looks like and functions. Those were the first contacts with real breeding, not accessible at that time to regular people.

„I liked it so much that I began going to Bialka as a volunteer. At that time there was no riding school, you didn't pay for riding. But if someone wanted to learn, then from seven to nine in the morning were riding lessons, which you "paid for" later cleaning the stallions. That way I managed to get myself in".

The trend at the time was show jumping. In 1984 Liškiewicz competed in regional events and got into the Polish National Student Team. The representation went to



Mariusz Liškiewicz with Jerzy Białobok (Michałów Stud)  
Pistoria's decoration  
European Championships, Verona 2007



photo: Mateusz Jaworski

*Lundt in Sweden for the unofficial student championships. Individually he placed second. It was his first sport achievement.*

*„And when Arabian horses appeared in Białka, we started doing endurance”, he recounts. “We did pretty well in the beginning, because we even had some titles of Polish Champion pop in. I was always just close. For example at the first official Polish Championships in Endurance Racing in 1990 I rode atop the stallion **Borysław**. Two days at 100 km each. After the first day I had an advantage of about 20 minutes. All I had to do was to ride past the finish line the next day with the other horses (not later than that contestant who finished that part at second place) to win. And the horse went lame 30 km before the finish line. I was disqualified. The stallion returned to the stable and... he was not lame anymore. We competed a lot at that time, with Jerzy Urbański, Wojciech Kowalik among others. We went to the World Endurance Championships in Spain, European Championships in England, Switzerland”.*

*He met with the training of horses for shows for the first time in Janów Podlaski, where he worked for two years at the beginning of the 90s. He accepted the job offer of Michałów State Stud in 1994. He still rode endurance horses. Even after the unexpected success of Ekstern the situation did not change radically for another couple of years. He trains Arabian horses for shows professionally since 2000. That's when the “Monogramms” trained and shown by him surfaced at the international arenas. He stopped doing endurance.*

*„I stumbled across a group of really good horses”, he admits. „They began competing already five years earlier, but then the Polish Championships were the limit. Young horses seldom journeyed abroad. They started being noticeable in the world only just from 1999”.*

*From that moment Michałów's brand became enriched with a new, recognizable asset – a trainer, who today is a brand all by himself.*

#### **Training in the USA**

*The breakthrough year of 2000 came right after the first of the three trips to the States for training purposes. At the Feature Farm in Washington Jerzy “George” Zbyszewski taught him the basics of American training.*

*„The entire conditioning and training was done by Jerzy Zbyszewski with his assistants”, reminisces Liškiewicz. “After the end of my chores I observed from the side what they do and why. Then I asked why this way and not differently, because I was used to the European style”.*

*The second meeting with training in American style came a couple of years later at Greg Gallun's farm in Santa Ynez. A different climate, different conditions, a swimming pool for horses, training strictly for showing in hand (halter classes).*

*„The style of training was different, stronger. Greg is a professional of the highest league and I very much liked what he did, how the horses positioned for him. We could speak a long time about his methods, but regardless to what*





Mariusz Liśkiewicz with Padova  
All Nations Cup, Aachen 2009

many think they are not so drastic. It is a hard school, more German than American. But he will never hit a horse, no matter what."

The third visit to the US, second at Greg's, was of a completely different nature.

"The previous one had some feeling of reserve around it, because I was a stranger in the barn and in the house. But when he won the US Championships with Kwestura, he became more open about cooperating with Michalów. We grew fond of each other, as I lived at his place, which is also something that creates favorable conditions to get to know one another better. From my previous stay I also knew his horses, barns, work cycle, the employed Mexicans. This time all ice was broken, so to speak. And it was that fantastic year: El Dorada, **Pianissima**... My visits in the States made me realize among others the difference about how a horse works on the lunge – where he can't relax his neck, move his head, because I'm constantly holding him and he must bend to the inside. There the horse runs freely inside the pen, without a lunge. Though also non-stop bent to the inside – but he has freedom of the head, he can go up or down with it, he can bend to the right when running left. He has more freedom than on a traditional lunge. These are nuances, which correctly applied give effects later on."

What he doesn't like in the American system is the lack of separate points for movement. Horses trained in such a way, if they give their 100% in the pose, they lose about 30% of their moving abilities. In other words a horse "done" in American style, which normally would move for a 20 point

mark, in this case would receive a 19. Because incomparably more time is spent there on perfecting that ideal "pose" and also because of the respect which the Americans implement in the horses, more so than you would see in Europe.

"Here lies the entire secret of cooperating with the horse. Does that horse fear me, does he respect me, or perhaps he pays me too little attention", gives away Liśkiewicz. "Acquiring this is just a matter of experience. In Michalów each year I start working from scratch with about 25 yearlings! If I am able to develop that golden mean with the horse, then he will pose correctly and after that moment of maximum concentration and tension, which is required to keep that statue pose, at the applause of the audience he will be able to blast like a dynamite with the first beat."

Jerzy Białobok, director of Michalów Stud, sums it all up: "Mariusz's success is the result of the fortunate meeting of a skillful, hard-working and responsible man and superb Michalów horses. At the show he literally blends in with the horse, like a good rider with his steed. For this work you need to have a gift from God and be stronger mentally than the horse – to impose on him your will with the force of your actions, which has nothing to do with the strength of the whip. Mariusz has that talent and keeps on honing it. At the stud we dealt with tens of people who wanted this job, but few have such inner willpower as him."

