

Behind the Gates of Al Shaqab



text by: Anna Stojanowska | photos by: Irina Filsinger

I remember my first trip to Qatar, some dozen years ago. The show organized within the hospitable walls of the Royal Equestrian Club and later a visit to several studs: Al Rayyan, Al Shaqab... At time it were the horses from Al Rayyan who were most often decorated at shows. The get of the stallion Safir was particularly successful. Up to a certain moment. The situation changed greatly when two epochal stallions entered the scene: **Al Adeed Al Shaqab** and **Gazal Al Shaqab**. Both foaled in 1995, they made their "social debut" almost simultaneously. The grey Al Adeed Al Shaqab, by Ansata Halim Shah out of Sundar Alisayyah by Ruminaja Ali is one of the most beautiful horses of the last decades. But it was the petite in size, dry, of almost unreal beauty, dark bay Gazal who changed the stud's image and placed it on completely new breeding tracks. Gazal Al Shaqab marked the beginning of a new era. Or rather this era began with the import of his dam **Kajora** from the US, a granddaughter of the Polish **Edessa**.

The stud was established in 1992 by Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, carrying the title of Emir. Some dozen years ago, looking at the broodmares accumulated in the stud, it was hard

to shake the impression of a certain randomness or a lack of vision of the future. The things you could find there! Egyptian, Russian, American and Polish bloodlines. Standing out in this genetic patchwork was **Kajora**. A real, correct mare, she was a "solid ground" among the tangle of pedigrees and champion-breeding concepts. Crossed with **Anaza El Farid** she produced the mentioned Gazal. After spectacular wins in the most significant world shows of first Al Adeed and then Gazal, the stud's position greatly changed. It became a serious breeding partner. Without a doubt the lease of Gazal to Poland and the successes of his get had a lot to do with the change of the stud's image. Gazal's bullet to fame was also his son, the phenomenal **Marwan Al Shaqab**. Al Shaqab Stud was talked about, whispered about and much discussed. The stud became the flagship of pureblood breeding in Qatar. After all, it produced three world champions within a short time period. And then for several years all went silent... There was a change of the stud's manager, the breeding plans were "hushed up" or reduced. Of course the name of the stud still surfaced in conversations, when talking about subsequent successes of Marwan or the lease of Gazal to the US, but since the beginning of the new millennium the activity of Al Shaqab was as if hibernated. It was not until several years ago that news on new, gigantic investments undertaken in the stud began to appear. In 2004 the board and





Pilar. Open Day at Al Shaqab Stud

status of the place changed. Al Shaqab became a member of the Qatar Foundation. A new breeding program was set in motion.

The greatest star of last year's Pride of Poland Sale was without a doubt the grey Janów Podlaski bred **Pilar**, by Fawor out of Pipi by Banat. Meritorious, highly decorated, well respected. A true celebrity and a genuine broodmatron, who has nothing left to prove. Wonderfully Polish in expression, leaving no doubt about her origins. Pilar, despite her 14 years of age, achieved the sale's highest price. For the amount of 240,000 Euro she was purchased by the new managers of Al Shaqab Stud. In August Pilar ended her mission in Poland and a new chapter in her life had begun.

In 2011 the Royal Equestrian Club celebrated the 20th edition of the international championships, held in the first months of the year. The show was to be special. And special it was, in part thanks to the participation of the world's best show horses.

After the end of the championship guests and participants were invited for an open day to Al Shaqab Stud. But those who were on the lookout for old, well-known corners and walls were greatly disappointed. Today's Al Shaqab is nothing like the Al Shaqab of the 90s.

A rather characteristic trait of the wealthy Arab countries, especially those where oil flows in an interrupted, rapid stream, are investments undertaken on a grand scale, even to a point of grandiosity. Large metropolises resemble a large construction site, housing estates grow like cities, new skyscrapers, mosques and hotels are built and all this happens on a macro scale. Moderation is an unknown term in these parts. Al Shaqab also did not steer clear of this generally adopted trend. The scale of investments done in the facility is unimaginable. The old part of the stud appears as a small backyard attached to a modern playground. The newly built infrastructure is created for horses and people. From the training grounds to race tracks, a clinic furnished in the newest hi-tech equipment, several in-door training arenas and finally a four-hectare, roofed riding arena and stable with large stalls and automated feeding and watering systems. Because in the countries of the Middle East water is extremely valuable. When in the summer the temperature rises to 60 degrees Celsius and the water flowing to the troughs heats up in the pipes instantly, even a several hour long break in hydrating may result in tragic consequences at these temperatures. Annual deaths of horses during the summer heat waves reach 20%. That's why at Al Shaqab a modern, hi-tech system monitoring the intake of water was installed. Each boarder has a trough with its own counter informing the staff





However the evening's true attraction was the appearance of Pilar. Led out at the end of a short breeding parade, announced as the stud's most valuable purchase, her entrance was worthy of any queen. And it did not matter that a long journey from Europe, a recent flight from Italy and a change of climate took a toll on her condition. The small, grassy paddock onto which she was let loose did not allow her to present her full moving abilities, but one still had the impression that it's not a

how much water was drunk. There's no fooling around. Held among these overwhelming buildings and facilities, gravel paths, fountains and waterworks was a breeding parade and the first auction of Al Shaqab horses.

flea-bitten mare, but a ball of dynamite that's moving over the ground. What unimaginable charisma! That was something that neither the hardships of the journey, the heat, nor the change of place could take away from Pilar. The gathered around people were of no importance to her; all that mattered was the sheer pleasure of movement on soft grass. When Janów Podlaski's director Marek Trela visited her a moment later in her stall and called Pilar by her name, she slowly turned her wonderful head, as though stunned. She seemed like a priceless firebird, placed in a golden cage by delighted people. The situation felt uneasy. The director of Al Shaqab immediately assured: "She is an absolute queen here. And nothing will change that. You will see, she will have a good life."

An elegantly published catalog invited to purchase each and every one of the 25 offered horses. From youngsters to breeding mares, performance horses, stallions, geldings – everyone could find something for themselves. High prices were achieved, the bidding was swift. The highest sold horse was a daughter of the Michalów bred Dębowiec, the 9 year old bay **Jassyra de Wiec**, out of Jysselle El Jamaal. Sold with a filly by Marwan Al Shaqab and in foal to Gazal, she achieved a price of 300,000 riyals (about 59 thousand Euro). In turn the great-granddaughter of Michalów's Emfaza, daughter of Efezja and Gazal, the very typey **Enshoda Al Shaqab** found a new owner for the price of 280,000 riyals (about 55.5 thousand Euro). The just 2 year old **Samar Al Shaqab** by Sinan Al Rayyan out of Jafla Al Shaqab was sold for 150,000 riyals (about 29.7 thousand Euro). Only a few horses did not find buyers. The first auction turned out to be not just a social event, but also quite a financial success, bringing in a total of 1,657,000 Qatari riyals – about 328 thousand Euro.

Perhaps Pilar, like once Kajora, will lead Al Shaqab in a new direction. 🐾

