

750 THOUSAND EURO IN ONE RACE!



by Monika Luft ■ photos by Monika Luft

A race meeting with the most important stakes for The Emir's Sword, with a purse of 3 million Qatari riyals, was a part of the eight day gala in Qatar's capital city of Doha, by the name of The Emir 24th International Equestrian Sword Festival, under the patronage of the Emir of Qatar, Prince Tamim Bin Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani.

The culmination of the three day race meeting (February 24th-26th), attended by the world racing elite, mainly from France and the UK, was a race for 4 year old and older Arabian horses – H.H. The Emir's Sword (Gr 1 PA) over a distance of 2,400 m. The race was held for the first time in 1989 and in 2012 it was pushed to February so that it could be part of the Festival. It was in this race that the largest amount of prize money was to be given out – as much as 3 million riyals (about 750 thousand Euro)! A victory in this race is the dream of every trainer, jockey and horse owner in Qatar.

However before the most important moment, there were 9 races for Arabians and Thoroughbreds during the first two days, as well as a dinner gala in the banquet hall of the luxury Saint Regis hotel, attended by, among others, world renown French tennis player, winner of the 2013 Wimbledon, Marion Bartoli, who has been riding since youth and an ambassador of the Qatar Festival since last year.

The facility where the meeting took place, the track on the premises of the Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club, which plays a major role on the international racing scene today, is a recognizable brand. Celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, with HE Sheikh Mohamed Bin Faleh Al Thani as the head of the Board of Directors, was the pioneer of racing organization in the entire region, as well as in establishing the rules for racing sports in Qatar. Today the facility hosts 60 racing days per season (between October and May) on



Julien Augé atop Al Mourtazez, the winner of the Emir's Gold Sword (Al Shaqab Racing)



Emir's Gold Sword



H.H. Sh. Abdullah bin Khalifa Al Thani



H.H. Sh. Abdullah bin Khalifa Al Thani with trainer Jassim Al Ghazali (on the right) and Khalifa Al Kuwari (with the Silver Sword)



Trainer Jassim Al Ghazali

a modernized in 2001 Al Rayyan Racecourse, which has at its disposal a grass track (1,600 m in length and 27 m wide) and – built in 2011 – a sand track (1,590 in length and 17 m wide). In the 2014/2015 season 272 Arabian horses participated in the races, among them 175 bred in Qatar. The best of them, after ending the season in the Middle East, will continue their career on foreign tracks, also European ones. On a regular racing day there is about 2,000 people, but as Director General Sami Jassim Al Boenain told us, the race on the last day of the Festival could've been witnessed by even 10 thousand people! It's true, the tribunes were bursting at the seams.

The triumph of this great race, winner of the Golden Sword and 1,710 thousand riyals for Al Shaqab Racing was the experienced jockey Julien Augé atop the trained by Thomas Fourcy horse Al Mourtazez (Dahess – Arwa/Nuits St Geor-

ges). In turn the Silver Sword (and the prize of 570 thousand riyals from a prize pool of one million riyals) from the hands of Prince Abdullah bin Khalif Al Tani, the uncle of the Emir of Qatar, went to the 14 year old Khalifa Al Kuwari, the owner of the equine winner of the sixth race – H.H. The Emir's Silver Sword (Gr 1) for 4 year old Arabian horses of Qatar ownership over a distance of 1,850 m. This horse is the unbeaten so far Al Murabitoon (AF Albahar – Opale du Croate/Dormane). He is trained by Jassim Al Ghazali, the top trainer in Qatar, who has almost 200 horses under his care. Al Ghazali, who began his career 19 years ago, is associated today with Al Shaqab Racing, among others. During the last season he won 140 races. Murabitoon was led by the West Sussex native, 24 year old Harry Bentley, a revelation of the past season, winner of the December Qatar Derby (atop Dabday) and 31 other races. "You are only ever as good as the horses you are riding", he said in one of his



H.H. Sh. Abdullah bin Khalifa Al Thani with the winner of the Silver Spear, Mr. Hamad Bin Ali Al Attiya (on the left)



H.H. Sh. Abdullah bin Khalifa Al Thani with Khalifa Al Kuwari (with the Silver Sword)



interviews. "I am lucky that I ride for Jassim Al Ghazali, who has a lot of good horses."

The races were accompanied by not only sports emotions. French millionaire Laurence Bossion once again took up the task of singling out the most elegant women from among the audience and convincing them to participate in the "Competition of Elegance" contest. Here we must add that during the main events of the entire Festival a dress code was obligatory – men were asked to come in national attires or in suit and tie and the women were advised to wear dresses at least knee-length and to resign from wearing shoulder strap tops.

For sure the guests left the comfortable tribunes of the Racing & Equestrian Club with a strong belief that the last week of February in Doha is the place to be. Definitely the hospitality and thoughtfulness of the organizers were a huge asset of the entire event. □

