

AF Maher Remains Unbeaten in Sharjah Saturday Feature

17 November 2018, Sharjah, UAE ~ Sharjah Equestrian and Racing Club hosted the second of their six meetings scheduled for the season on Saturday, 17 November 2018, a six-race card highlighted by the second edition of the HE Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Khalifa Al Nahyan Cup, a 1700m Prestige Handicap AED100,000.

When Tadhg O'Shea sent **AF Maher** (AF Al Buraq) clear on the home turn, the feature race looked all over, but his mount appeared to have other ideas as he looked to be waiting for company entering the straight. **Da'Areen** under Royston Ffrench looked to take advantage, leading briefly, before O'Shea was able to motivate his mount again, seeing off that challenge. Clear again, AF Maher was either tiring or again seeking something to race with in the final 100m, allowing **Mahfouz** and Jesus Rosales to close to within half a length at the wire.

With this win, AF Maher maintained his unbeaten Sharjah record after three visits and was snagging a second valuable course Prestige prize having fortuitously won the HH Ruler Of Sharjah Cup in February. It was a third winner on the card for trainer Ernst Oertel and owner Khalid Khalifa Al Nabooda.

"I am glad to have won this one again at least," said O'Shea, who had landed the inaugural edition of the contest last year aboard Mawahib. "I cannot get it right every time, especially with this team who have multiple strong chances in many races. At least I have won the big race and completed a treble for a very supportive owner and trainer."

The opening 1200m maiden, restricted to 3-year-olds, was won fairly comfortably by **AF Hajej** (AF Alsalaam). Never far off the pace with Antonio Fresu riding for trainer Oertel and owner-breeder Al Nabooda, the sophomore drove clear and the race was soon in safe keeping with **JAP Malawih** under George Buckell closing to take second.

Al Nabooda said: *"Ernst trains most of my horses and is very good with these Purebred Arabians foaled in the UAE, which the vast majority of my string are. The trainer was fairly hopeful although, perhaps, we thought AF Mot Hefa had a better chance which is why Tadhg O'Shea rode her. At least we had the winner and Antonio Fresu, who was on several winners for us last season, has given him a great ride."*

An hour later, the same connections were celebrating a double after the easy victory of **AF Tareh Al Thahab** (AF Al Buraq). Quickly away under Fresu, he was never headed in the 1000m maiden, shedding her maiden tag on this fifth attempt after four outings last season. Another Al Nabooda homebred, the 4-year-old filly displayed good early speed then quickened clear more than 400m from home, after which Fresu never had a moment of worry.

Fresu said: *"You always know riding for these connections that you have a good chance and I am*

very grateful for these opportunities.”

Oertel added: *“Antonio is a very good jockey, but Tadhg O’Shea is our main one. Here he picked the third, **AF Lewaa**, also running well. It is obviously nice to have a double on the board after just three races.”*

Al Nabooda and Oertel were only involved in four of the six races and for the majority of the concluding 1700m handicap, it appeared a clean sweep was on the cards with O’Shea out in front aboard **AF Eshaar**. However, they proved powerless to deny Jean de Roualle-trained **Musanad**(Mahabb), with Richard Mullen winning in the colours of Yas Horse Racing Management.

The 1200m handicap was a thriller with Sam Hitchcott producing 6-year-old mare **ES Almas** (Big Easy) to lead in the final strides, denying the gallant **AF Almajhaz**. The winner is trained by Ibrahim Aseel for Sheikh Abdulla bin Majid Al Qassemi, who also bred her.

“Never worried,” Hitchcott quipped. “I actually won a maiden on her here in March last year and we landed that in virtually identical fashion, leading near the line. She has a willing attitude, which is always a big help and, having been off since January, that was a good return to racecourse action for her.”

Sent straight to the front by Fernando Jara, Skygazer never relinquished in the only Thoroughbred race, a 2000m handicap continuing the good early starts to the season of the jockey and his main employer, trainer Ali Rashid Al Rayhi.

~ end supplied report