

Al Zahir Wins With Class for Second Year Abu Dhabi G1 The President Cup

10 February 2019, Abu Dhabi, UAE ~ Sunday, 19 February 2019 at the Abu Dhabi Equestrian Club saw one of the biggest race days of the season in the Capital, and was highlighted by the 2200m AED 2,500,000 Group 1 HH The President Cup for Purebred Arabians. The Ali Rashid Al Rayhi-trained Dubai-based Al Zahir was able to become the fourth horse to win the race more than once, defending the crown he first wore 12 months ago and defeating France's Al Shamoos, winner of November's rich Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan Jew Crown (G1). Retained by owner His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Jim Crowley was in the saddle on the winner once again as he made the winning move with 750m remaining and ultimately outstayed the aforementioned mare.

"It was fantastic to see him bounce back like that because, as we know, he won this last year and the other big race, but this season had been disappointing. We put the blinkers on for the first time today and they have really helped. I was happy to go for home a long way out, because he stays very well and the French filly was unproven over this far, but she has run a very good race behind us."

The only Thoroughbred race on the card was their equivalent, the 1400m Listed HH The President Cup and when Zainhom, trained by Musabbeh Al Mheiri, hit the front with less than 200m to run it appeared, briefly, as though owner and jockey would complete a memorable double. However, Harry Bentley had been making relentless smooth progress aboard Legendary Lunch since the 14 runners had left the back straight and, challenging widest of all, struck the front 100m from home to snatch the spoils. Wasim, never far off the pace, denied Zainhom second close home.

Restricted to 4-year-olds, the 1600m Listed Arabian Triple Crown R1, was turned into a procession by RB Lam Tara, who proved a class above 11 rivals. Owned by Sheikha Alyazia bint Sultan Al Nahyan and saddled by Eric Lemartinel, she won a course and distance maiden in similar fashion on debut in November before finishing a close fourth when taking on her elders in an Abu Dhabi handicap four weeks ago.

Veron said: *"She is a very nice filly as she showed when winning on her debut, whereas last time she found it harder taking on older horses. Back in her own age group, she has won that very stylishly. She was always travelling very easily behind the leader and when I asked her, she really quickened nicely. She could be very useful and will stay further."*

Tadhg O'Shea was positive aboard **AF La'Asae** in the opening 1400m handicap, the pair going straight to the front and able to shoot clear just past the halfway point after which they never looked in any danger. A course and distance winner as a 3-year-old in the 2015 Abu Dhabi Colts Classic, he had also won on his previous start, his debut, a 1600m maiden and this was career victory number four having landed a 2200m conditions contest in December 2016. Trained by Ernst Oertel, as was runner-up **AF Motagahtres**, the 7-year-old horse then missed the whole of last season and was having just his second outing of the current campaign.

Both are homebred by Khalid Khalifa Al Nabooda, whose retained jockey **O'Shea** said: *"My original mount was a non-runner, but I was happy to ride this fellow because we know he is a good horse. I was able to get to the front, on the rail, where there is a lovely, fresh strip of ground, which has not been raced on recently. He broke very well and likes to be ridden positively, so with his proven stamina, I was happy to go to the front and commit for home a long way out. He just kept on galloping and did it nicely."*

Fourteen may have gone to post for the 1200m maiden but very few were ever able to get competitive with O'Shea and debutante **AF Hoboub** stalked by **SS Rabe**h with that pair locked in a real battle throughout the straight. The latter finally managed to get past **AF Hoboub**, but as they were dueling on the rail, **Dohaa** swept past them both down the middle of the track, leading about 200m to win comfortably under Richard Mullen for Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan and trainer Mohamed Ali.

"She had only had one run before, at Al Ain, where she did not really enjoy the kickback on the dirt surface," Mullen said. *"She is a filly we have always thought quite a bit of, so well done to the trainer and his team for bringing her here and hopefully she has more to offer going forward."*

The 1200m handicap for horses in private ownership went to **Hawafez**, produced to lead close home by Connor Beasley and sporting the colours of Salem Ali Murshed Al Marar for trainer Ridha ben Attia.

"I won over 1400m here at Abu Dhabi on this horse in December," Beasley said. *"He was then third and caught in the final strides, both over 1400m. This drop in trip has suited him."*

Race Results