

Listening to the Horses

17 April 2019, UAE ~ Ernst Oertel is fresh off his winner circle triumphs for the 2018-2019 UAE racing season. Dedicated, determined and goal oriented, this year it all came together for Oertel as he won the ultimate Arabian race, the coveted \$1million Dubai Kahayla Classic, the opener for the World Cup, and achieved Champion UAE Trainer title for the third time (also in 2012 and 2013), by wins and prize money earned.

Training horses is not easy, but the 54-year-old South African has had his share of career challenges. Much like the man he has worked for during the past four years, top UAE breeder-owner, Khalid Al Nabooda, he runs through the challenges like a winning horse to the finish line.

Oertel was racing in Newmarket, UK, where he met and worked with Paul Kellaway in the 1980s, and to whom the plain speaking Oertel gives the high praise of “Kellaway was a very good trainer”.

Kellaway, a jump jockey and flat race trainer who retired from training in 1997 and died from pancreatic cancer in 1997, was known for his shrewd eye for yearlings ‘bought well’, and for making the best of any horse he was charged with. Ernst credits Kellaway with teaching him ‘how to listen to the horses’.

A three-year chapter training for the President of the UAE’s Abu Dhabi racing stable came to an end when two of his horses tested positive for Ibuprofen, and although he maintained with a lie detector that this was an incorrect testing, he lost his job after the 2013/2014 season. Not giving up, he worked for private owners until he was picked up by Al Nabooda, who set him up with a training track at the Desert Stables.

It goes without saying, if you are racing Arabians in the UAE, one of your top goals would be to win the coveted Dubai Kahayla Classic. To win the race with a horse that was also bred and raised in the UAE and is from your race training program has to be a matter of great personal pride. This win comes with credit and some fame both in the UAE and throughout the rest of the world of racing.

But whoa, rein back a bit. There was the day in 2013 when Oertel suffered a bad leg break after being thrown from a horse he was training. An infection set in and after many operations, he ultimately lost his left leg above the knee.

Not altering stride, Oertel has not let this life-changing injury keep him from the horses, and he is agile on his prosthetic leg but opts many times for the crutches that often get in his way. The 2017 documentary video *LEG UP* by Amanda Roxborough about his ongoing work and success after the injury won the Inspirational Documentary Award at the 2017 Equus Film Festival in New York.

Oertel's goals seem to keep pace nicely with Al Nabooda's. "My philosophy is to keep the horses sound and happy and Khalid believes the same," said Oertel. "Khaled has been doing this for about 30 years with many ups and downs, but he believes that with hard work and determination you can reach your goals."

Oertel breaks down his training into one sentence. "If we have a slow horse, I try putting speed on him; if we have a fast horse I will work on his stamina so he can stay."

Al Nabooda has spent over 20 years developing his UAE-bred stock so that they will be competitive with the foreign-bred racing horses. His success as 2019 Champion UAE Owner proves that he has done just that.

When asked why they chose the six-year-old AF Mayer (AF AL BURQA (AE) x AF Raad (AE) by MADOUR (FR)) to enter into the Kahyala Classic, Oertel said. "He has always been a consistent horse and has been improving. After he ran against the Khalediah horses at Sharjah, finishing third 45 days before the Kahyala Classic, we were confident he could compete against the best.

In the last few weeks before the Classic, Oertel said. "We did normal training and just kept him healthy and sound for the race.

AF Mayer was an easy horse to work with, according to Oertel, and as a three-year old, he broke his maiden on his first race at the Sharjah track under Richard Mullen. The young horse performed well for a few other rotation jockeys, but Tadhg O'Shea seems to have found a good rhythm with him, bringing him home first four times in the last season. Oertel's directions to O'Shea for the Kahyala Classic were to keep to the same game plan as the Group 1 Maktoum Challenge Round 3 they had won at Meydan 30 days earlier over the same course and distance.

For the near future, Oertel will visit family in Europe and have another operation on his leg.

"For me the horses come first and we have a great passion for them. I have so many nice horses to go see that I am happy to get up in the morning."

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The 2019 Dubai Kahayla Classic winning team of Al Nabooda, Oertel and O'Shea won the Championship Owner, Trainer and Jockey titles for the 2018/2019 UAE Racing Season.

~ Pamela Burton