

January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Disaster in Bouthieb (UAE): Empty clinic, result of the new parameters enforced.

Thursday, December 31 was a historic day in Bouthieb (UAE): During the CEN 1\* 90 km for Ladies with 59 competitors, the clinic remained desperately empty, which, according to officials, had never happened since the beginning of endurance in the UAE. Sheikh Sultan, the organizing committee, the officials, the participants, etc. everyone felt authorized to say, with undisguised pleasure and black humor, that this was a true disaster ... for the employment of treating veterinarians, who were overwhelmed with joy having spent a very boring day.



It's clean, it's all ready, it's empty. In the background, a "desperate" veterinarian is waiting.

The second day of competition was similar with 2 events (CEI 1\* 80 km in 3 phases and 89 competitors, plus a CEN 1\* 100 km in 4 phases for privately owned horses with 39 competitors) accumulating a total of 128 horses on the track. The day passed with a single mild metabolic case receiving only a treatment of 5 liters of fluid without any additives, a sort of comfort treatment. And nothing else.

The third day there was a CEIJY 2\* 120 km in 5 phases with 55 starters on the track. 3 horses were presented, they had lost their riders who had fallen down on the first phase in the light sandstorm with reduced visibility and which were caught and taken to the clinic, then immediately released as nothing justified their presence. On the third day there were 3 metabolic cases, 2 without any treatment and 1 receiving 10 liters of fluid without any additives, plus 3 lamenesses of which one only was treated with a small dose of anti-inflammatory. And that's all.

So, in 3 days of racing, 4 competitions, 242 horses, only 3 horses received a light medical treatment mainly out of caution.

This was a remarkable way to end 2015 and start 2016 in Bouthieb. The new competition parameters, implemented regularly for the first time (including 10 minutes of recovery time, even for the finish with a maximum heart rate of 56 bpm) produced more effect than we all hoped and there reigned an unprecedented atmosphere of surprise, satisfaction, analysis and research, intellectual ferment mixed with a previously unknown joy. For the first time Sheikh Sultan, who usually did no

more than pay one or two visits per season, remained permanently on the site during the three days and even chaired the Wednesday briefing of the first competition.

The new president of the national federation – a show jumping rider - came many times, to visit the clinic, going around the venue, to go on the tracks, unlike its predecessor who had never been seen there.

There will always be some grumpy ones to say that this is probably a provisional gesticulation, that "it will not last you'll see", etc. but this would be really stupid and caused by slander and prejudices as much as by ignorance as always. The less you know, the more you say. Yet one had only to be there to realize and see the obvious: this is in fact a revolution taking place in Bouthieb under the leadership of Sheikh Sultan, who can now act as he had wished to for many years, namely return to sport and to the true spirit of endurance, preserve the horses and win with honor. He even says in private that if the revolution had not taken place in Bouthieb as it has done in the rides of the past weekend, he would simply have stopped and closed the venue rather than continue under the previous conditions.

The new rules introduced kill the speed which is the main cause of the excesses they meant to fight. It was obviously impossible to go over 23 km/h if one would successfully pass the inspection. Two riders risked it on the first phase of CEIYJ with 26 km/h and found themselves unable to recover under the conditions newly established. There remains to educate and let people understand the spirit of the new rules to have them adopted 100% by everyone. This will be the aim of the upcoming events and it is probably in this context that an additional weekend was added to the Bouthieb calendar for the current season.

We had the impression that for some the shackles of performance by speed (speed world record and other nonsense) had exploded and that finally they became free again to think and act thanks to what had just happened. Some have even said they had regain a taste for competition thanks to this new framework. 30% of the prizes were given for the speed classification and 70% for the permanent "Top Condition", recorded in the form of points "redirecting" mentalities in a concerted educational purpose.

It is also remarkable to know that among the participants a lot of talking were done and that there were many people who wished the success of the project. They even admitted that some changes in the calculation methods for ranking of the Top Condition made during the first day to refine the system in contact with real life, were acceptable – though they changed the recipients of the prizes -.

On the semantic level, we have noticed the spontaneously appearance of the phrase "killer rides" to describe what was happening before. Popular common sense would indeed find something to name the break with practices that had led to the suspension of the Federation of UAE, facing the major event which was taking place. History shows that when words appear in the language, it means that the change has been printed in the minds.

The conditions being harder, the game becomes more subtle as it is more difficult. The horses come out winners, sport and the discipline too.