

What an experience... Cseri Dávid, the Director of the Hungarian Lipizzaner Stud Farm in Szilvásvár, tells us about an exciting journey to Morocco with Lipizzaners, riders, and drivers.

In the past weeks, a world-class opportunity has opened up for the riders and drivers of State Stud Farm Szilvásvár, the Mounted Police and the Count Nádasdy Ferenc Hussar Unit. They have been invited to two world-defining events in international equestrian life in Morocco; to the cities of El Jadida and Rabat. During their one-month stay, promoted the already existing well known reputation of the Lipizzaner and Nonius breeds, as well as our country's equestrian culture, to the entire Arab world, highlighting the carriage driving and hussar traditions.

Not only did we travel 8,000 kms, but we also have had a long way to go with the preparations, so I dare to start my report much earlier than the horses' departure.

I was fortunate enough to connect with Moroccan equestrian culture for the first time in 2018. At that time, I was still working as a government advisor in the animal husbandry department of the Ministry of Agriculture. At that time, the management of SOREC, the country's most significant equestrian organization, which directly under the patronage of the royal family, visited our country. In addition to coordinating breeding duties, they are also responsible for the significant horse racing sector of the entire country, including equestrian sports and numerous research and educational areas. The main purpose of their trip was to get to know the equestrian culture, horse breeds, stud farms and veterinary university of our country. I was given the honorable task of guiding them. In addition to the unforgettable experiences, the friendly relationship also remained, but we had to wait four years until our next meeting.

In December 2022, already as the leader of the State Stud Farm in Szilvásvár, I was able to travel to Rabat to complete the work that Andor Dallos had started years earlier. This was nothing more than the inclusion of the Lipizzan breed and its breeding culture on the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage list. This year, the organization announced its general assembly in the capital of Morocco. We now know that the trip was crowned with success, and the Lipizzan was recognized as the first horse breed in the world. To be honest, the acceptance procedure of the general assemblies takes place over long and sometimes boring days, and the given topic is barely on the agenda for a quarter of an hour of a single day. Taking advantage of this interim time, I visited Ambassador Miklós Tromler, whom I had known well since the previous events, and my Moroccan friends whom I had met earlier. My goal was of course to redeem the invitation I had received years earlier to the Berber, Arab and thoroughbred stud farms, for which they were willing and happy to oblige. On the Hungarian side, the Ambassador sent his foreign attaché János Jozskin to help me, who, as an internationally renowned equestrian, envisioned many further cooperation opportunities between our countries.

It was then that we defined the area of our future cooperation with our Moroccan colleagues, which is primarily focused on breeding and joint work within equestrian sports, including carriage driving and its culture with high emphasis. Carriage driving is yet almost unknown in terms of sports in the Maghreb countries as well.

In addition, we already started negotiations to participate in one of the largest equestrian festivals in Morocco and the world, which is held every year in El Jadida called Salon du Cheval. The event, in addition to the show jumping competition, is the largest equestrian exhibition in Africa, but it also has an outstanding reputation in European terms as well. Many years ago, our horse archery team of Lajos Kassai and our „Csikós” team could already represent our country at the previous location of the event.

Negotiations on the terms and conditions of participation continued for nearly three more years, including mutual visits.

During the planning, I was given „the reins” to coordinate the elements of the program, but the final program had to be approved by the salon supervisor, Dr. Habib Marzak, as well as the event chairman, Charif Moulay Abdallah Alaoui, who, as the king's cousin, actively followed the events throughout. The patronage of King Mohammed VI specifically indicated the special importance of the event.

When composing the program elements, I wanted to give an opportunity to our two most important professional cooperating partners, the Mounted Police and the cavalry of the Count Ferenc Nádasdy Hussar Unit, in addition to our beloved Lipizzan breed and our Stud Farm. For this reason, on the 21st of September, in addition to the Lipizzan horses, nonius horses also set off to conquer Africa.

After four days, sailing through the Strait of Gibraltar, following stops in Italy and Spain, our 10 Lipizzaner and 6 Nonius horses arrived with a police escort in the former center of the French colonial cavalry, the city of El Jadida, with a crew of 21 persons.

Our delegation was welcomed by the event's professional equestrian director, Fabien Galle from France, who is also known as an expert on Spanish-Neapolitan type horses.

In addition to the rehearsals for the shows, SOREC also provided us the opportunity to create a Hungarian stand at the expo, which allowed us to present our equestrian culture, horse breeds, uniforms and, above all, our carriage heritage on the highest level. To dress up our stand, just like to last year's Driving World Championship Four-in Hand, I invited my world-famous sculptor friend Miklós Szőke-Gábor to help, who created something spectacular this time as well. The stand of Hungary, the Hungarian Embassy and Szilvásvárad became a favorite of hundreds of thousands of visitors.

The most significant of our long-awaited presentations was in front of the Crown Prince Moulay Hassan. The future king visited our exhibition before the event began and I had the opportunity of a lifetime to engage in dialogue, further weaving the equestrian ties of our country. As true representatives of two ancient equestrian nations, we understood each other in a few words and could even talk about future collaborations.

Our 15-minute presentation ended with great success, which was repeated every other day during the one-and-a-half-hour program, in which world-famous French and Italian artists participated in addition to the Moroccan formations. Our performance consisted of the following three scenes. The Roman chariot race, well known from the shows in Szilvásvárad, was presented by János Galló and Andor Dallos Jr., a feat that has not been seen in Africa since ancient times. The world-famous stuntman was replaced by our friend Péter Kovács in the last performance in Rabat. The joining of the driver was honorable and fateful in my opinion, because of my predecessor, former director of State Stud Farm Szilvásvárad: Andor Dallos.

With the following scene, Szilvásvárad made history again. Under the direction of our riding master Zoltán Deák and with the participation of Gábor Péntes and his son Levente, we were able to present the art of the high school to an international audience. This outstanding creation of our equestrian culture had been far from our goals since the Second World War.

As a final scene, we have presented the dressage carousel which was dreamed by Gyula Dallos with 8 horses, presenting the Lipizzaner and Nonius breeds in equal proportions, ridden by Tamás Mikó, István Marschal, Zsófia Rácz and Livia Lázár, as well as Tamás Rauch, Tibor Sziráczki, György Gáspár and Daniella Kálló. The first four riders in the uniform of the stud farm, and the latter in the already well-known Coburg hussar uniform, dazzled the expert audience.

Besides the highly successful performances, we also had the opportunity to get to know the Berber and Arab culture (which is present in Morocco with a special fusion), naturally placing the equestrian culture in the foreground here too. In addition to the stud farm visit, we were able to get a glimpse of the finals of the ancient tradition of Tbourida, Morocco's most popular sport, as a time travel. In this competition, which has now developed into a sport, the tribes representing their own regions preserve the millennial equestrian knowledge of their ancestors, during which they have to maneuver and shoot with their weapons as precisely as possible, forming a line. After the games, viewing the Berber and Arab-Berber horses, we were invited to the tent of one of the teams as an honor, which, wearing uniforms, gave a feeling of a real time travel.

In addition, the opportunity to ride our beloved horses on the beach became an unforgettable experience, allowing Lipizzaner and Nonius horses to canter on the Atlantic coast for the first time.

As guests of honor at the Salon du Cheval, the organizers also gave us the opportunity to organize a Hungarian day, during which I was able to present the work of the Szilvásvárad stud farm and our goals with the Lipizzaner breed. The relationship between the Lipizzaner and the Barbary horses is also an extremely interesting area of research, as their similarity is not accidental. Thanks to the conquests of the Iberian Peninsula by the Arab tribes, they share common genetics.

Before starting my presentation, I have signed two cooperation agreements, which were reported with great media interest by the press of the entire Arab world from North Africa to the Middle East. The first one was signed with the head of the before mentioned organization; SOREC represented by Mr. Omar Skalli, in which we confirmed our intentions, among other elements, in breeding, genetic research, and participation in each other's events, in addition to equestrian sports. I was also able to sign an agreement with General Marzak, the event supervisor, regarding our participation in the Salon du Cheval for the years 2026 and 2027, thus ensuring us of their great satisfaction.

After our successful participation in El Jadida, only one final show remained to be presented in the Moroccan capital, Rabat. The westernmost country in North Africa was able to join the Longines Global Champions Tour, the Formula 1 of equestrian sports, for the second time. The invitation was also of historical significance, as it was the first time that a Hungarian contingent could participate in the series' show programs in front of the world's equestrian elite, broadcasted on every continent.

After the highly successful closing scene, the Hungarian team was able to set off towards the fortress of Gibraltar a month later. Many experts have already called this journey a historic success. Morocco is a special country with extremely deep-rooted equestrian traditions, which, not by chance, show similarities to the equestrian culture of our country in many ways. In addition to performing in front of members of the royal family, it is at least as significant for me that we were able to present our beloved breeds, the Lipizzaner and the Nonius, to hundreds of thousands of people. Thousands of children will certainly remember our performances for many years. A similar event still defines my life to this day, so if just one Arab child walks in similar shoes, every kilometer of the journey was worth it.

I would like to thank the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and their joint institutions for their support, highlighting the role of the Mounted Police in the success of our trip. The Hungarian Embassy in Rabat and János Jozskin's role proved to be the most important help in the Kingdom of Morocco.

Finally, over the past decade or so, I have ended many of my writings with the name of Tibor Pettkó-Szandtner. I would naturally like to dedicate our journey through the Arab world to his memory, thanking him for watching over our horses from up there, and trusting that we have presented Hungarian Carriage Driving and Horse Breeding in a manner worthy of his memory.

To be continued in Europe, on the world-famous stage of the London International Horse Show in December of this year.



More information about the Hungarian National Stud Farm in Szilvásvár

WEBSITE