



## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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### *Springtime and the Season of the Great Races!!!*

With the month of March and Springtime comes the start of the season of the great equine races in the United Arab Emirates, notably the **World Cup**, which was held in Dubai March 26, 2016, with a victory by **California Chrome**. There were 12 horses – all 3 years or more at the start, for a distance of 1 ¼ miles.

Well before the Dubai World Cup and after, attention was focused on the “**Al Marmoon Heritage Festival 2016**” which inaugurated this year the great camel races. Spread over a period of almost 2 weeks, these races combine to form an event rich in color and full of excitement as camels of all ages compete from the Gulf countries: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman and UAE.

It must be noted that the past decade has seen a remarkable evolution in camel racing. In less than 10 years, a traditional system of camel racing using as “jockeys” young males from countries such as Sudan and Yemen has morphed into a system relying now on robots. And that, chiefly under pressure from the United Nations, in order to combat the exploitation of children.

How does it work? The camel owners install a robot on each camel. As soon as the race begins, each owner follows his animal from a vehicle 4x4, equipped with a type of remote control to command and excite the camel to go faster. Camels tend to be placid, rather phlegmatic animals and it requires a lot of energy to

exhort the animal and succeed in getting it to accelerate.

There are several categories of races: races exclusively for speed, other races designed to reward endurance for the “older” camels. Of note is that camels under 2 years of age are not authorized to participate, chiefly because their bone structure is not yet fully developed. In the category of “young” camels, only those 3-4 years old, are eligible to race. The age of a camel is determined by the length of their teeth. Once the animal has been inspected for age, its neck is marked with a blue marker/tool. The rule for participation is simple: **No blue mark, no race.**

The neophytes will want to know that a camel can run an average speed of 40km/h. At the outset of the race, chaos seems to reign- and it is only after fifteen minutes that the leading camels will pull out and distinguish themselves.

Also of interest: the prizes for the winning camels range from a simple win/2,500 dirhams to substantial sums perhaps \$200,000 or more with bonuses such as luxury vehicles, type SUVs et Range Rover. For the bigger races, the first 10 to finish usually receive large prizes. Between the months of October and March, when the race season is at its height, one can only encourage the uninitiated to go see for oneself these unique races - which are both exciting, yet highly traditional -at the tracks of Al Marmoun, located some 30 minutes from Dubai on the road of Al Ain and near Al Lisalli Camel Market. Very few, if any, will be disappointed.

### *The Editor*

