

# AKBAR ZEPHIRA

By Lizet Kotze

## The story of an Arab mare who determined her own destiny



*When I met my dear friend Lienta Roelofse for the first time at an endurance ride, there was an immediate connection as I own Sastel Nebuccu, a horse she had raised and for which she had a great affection.*

Lienta introduced me to her favourite endurance horse at that time, Akbar Zephira, a stunning white Arab mare with an exceptional spirit and character. Lienta and Zephira competed for several years in endurance and shared a great companionship and understanding. I soon learnt more about Zephira and her history.

Lienta had bought the beautiful mare for endurance purposes when Zephira was nine years old and was hardly trained and under saddle. As the horse was well mannered and Lienta had three young children who'd potentially ride her, she thought it was a good, multi-purposed deal.

While on a joyful outride one afternoon with her newly bought Arab, Lienta felt a rocking shuffle like a bag of cats between her legs and decided to turn back and head home. To everyone's surprise, Zephira

gave birth to a beautiful foal two weeks later. This was Lienta's first experience of Zephira's nature ... a horse with more tricks and stunts than one could imagine!

When Zephira returned to the endurance course, she became hasty and impatient and the next four years were a pug mill – either they went for gold or stayed at home! Her life as an endurance horse was always extreme; she became very competitive, she grinned at other horses at the water points, kicked at her competition, and the vets were impatiently urged with a head blow in the vet gates.

At first, Lienta and Zephira finished all their rides in the top five and Lienta had to come up with very good brakes to control Zephira. However, during her extreme times she either performed tops or was eliminated due to lameness. Whenever Zephira was prepared for a ride and was

put in a stable to protect her from injuries, she started to kick the walls. As soon as she realised she was nominated to participate in a ride, she became inexplicably lame. When she had to travel to endurance rides out of town, she was a reluctant traveller and used to lie down in the horse box.

Lienta soon realised there was no way of getting her children to ride the inspired Zephira. When her eldest daughter and experienced rider, Cara, was thrown off by Zephira, she decided not to take any more chances with this highly spirited Arab.

Lienta became more and more worried about Zephira's career as an endurance horse, but also realised that, at 14, it might be a better idea to retire her and put her in a breeding programme. As friends do (especially people who understand horses and their owner's concerns), I made a proposal to Lienta for Zephira to join my



stables in Belfast on a lease agreement where we could both have a foal from her every consecutive year. Zephira joined my stud and we were eagerly looking forward to her first foal from Lizar Arab Stud.

However, Zephira had other plans. She showed a dislike towards our stud stallion, Vogelvlei Rahdja, and he almost lost his prized assets in the process! I sent her back to Lienta in Pretoria to find another stallion and this time Cupid's arrows hit the right spot. We were sure this time she'd become pregnant and, four weeks later, a scan produced the results – she was pregnant with twins! Zephira once again taught us that she was in control of her own destiny and we were merely role players. Unfortunately the twins had to be aborted and the whole process of getting Zephira to breed began all over.

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When she became pregnant again in Pretoria, Zephira was sent back to my stables in Belfast to enjoy a stress-free 11 months. Eight months into her pregnancy, I found a perfectly aborted stallion in her stable. She seemed untouched by this incident and continued to go about her daily routine.

After all this effort, it was clear that Zephira had other purposes in her life which had yet to be revealed to us. Feeling rather dejected, we started to look for a suitable buyer for Zephira.

A wonderful and loving family was interested in the Arab and made arrangements to come and visit her in Belfast. But as always, she had other plans – she caught herself up in her camp's wires the night before the prospective buyers arrived, so when they first met her she was full of stitches and wounds! Needless to say, they were discouraged from buying her. No matter what we tried, Zephira sabotaged our plans.



A month later, she was sent back to Pretoria to Lienta, who fell in love with her again and started to train her. For Lienta, it was like putting on her oldest and most comfortable pair of boots – a perfect fit. She hoped desperately to put Zephira back on the endurance track. Aged 16 and with some swollen parts on her legs, she took her to Onderstepoort for a scan. The prognosis wasn't good and the vets confirmed Lienta's fears – Zephira's best days as an endurance horse were over.

That same evening Zephira was introduced to a new stallion in order to conceive and she accepted him well. Still, Zephira's destiny was undecided. We all wanted a home for her where she could be taken care of with unconditional love and affection.

Lienta then remembered that one of her colleagues, Zelda Groenewald, and her children had recently started riding lessons and she also knew about Zelda's concerns regarding her son Nòann's medical condition. Nòann experienced increasing muscle and brain dysfunctions and Lienta was certain Zephira would sense his disabilities and shortcomings and wouldn't hurt him in any way.

A meeting was arranged for the Groenewald family to meet Zephira and it was love at first sight for both parties. So that is how Zephira retired as an endurance horse and became Nòann's best four-legged friend.

In the end, Zephira got her way and determined her own destiny. With hindsight there was a reason for her thwarting our plans. She must have known that a special boy called Nòann needed her more than anyone else.

