

Breeding from your Mare

So, you want to breed from your mare?

An article by David & Serena Pincus

The decision to breed your own foal from your mare is not a simple decision. There are many factors that need to be considered carefully before 'jumping in with both feet' into this new venture. We wrote this article as an overview of the process of breeding a foal for the non professional breeder. We hope that we have been able to cover the main points that are important to those who may not have a vast experience and knowledge unlike the professional who breeds regularly. We advise that those who are not confident i.e. first time breeders should consult a person that has experience in stud matters.

The first aspect that you need to consider is your aim. You need to define what exactly you wish to breed whether it is a show jumper, dressage horse, eventer etc. When you are clear about the horse that you wish to breed you can consider the variables (mare's good and bad qualities, choice of stallion) that are necessary in order to produce an animal that will be successful in its chosen field.

In order to breed a good foal one must be quite scrupulous in evaluating the mare. You cannot afford for sentimentality to override common sense. The breeder needs to identify the mare's strong and weak points. For example, if your intention is to breed a jumper then the mare must show an aptitude for jumping. Likewise, if your intention is to breed a dressage horse then the mare must have attractive paces. However, through the right choice of stallion one can improve on the mares qualities or make up for her shortfalls. For example, if you want to breed a jumper but your mare lacks in some aspect e.g. shape or 'bascule' over the jump, then one needs to consider using a stallion that makes a good shape over jumps as one of his dominant traits. In short, the breeder needs to choose a stallion that will complement the qualities of their mare, and to some degree compensate for her weaknesses.

When choosing the stallion there are a number of factors that need to be considered. As mentioned, the stallion needs to complement the mare in his qualities and ability. You will also need to consider his pedigree, performance record, conformation and successful progeny results. The other factor is whether the stallion is local or overseas.

Most studs offer Artificial Insemination (AI) as this is the safest option especially when dealing with expensive and valuable competition horses. The procedure lessens the degree of risk for injury to both the mare and the stallion. In AI the semen can be chilled or frozen and this also needs to be considered in your choice of stallion. As a general rule, frozen semen is trickier to use and we have found that our mares are more difficult to get in foal with frozen semen as opposed to chilled and have a reduced level of conception. Therefore, if your mare is old or you know is difficult to get in foal then frozen semen may not be the best option, fresh or chilled semen would be more viable.

By using shipped semen from overseas you are ensuring that you have a wider choice of stallions and are more likely to select a very suitable stallion for your particular mare as the selection is wider. You may also be able to use exceptional continental stallions with international competition records. However, by using shipped semen you will be relying heavily on your vet especially when using frozen semen. This will mean that the cost of breeding a foal will be increased.

When you know what stallion you wish to use, one must decide whether the insemination will take place on your premises, the stud or an AI centre. Whichever venue is chosen there is a protocol that is followed the mare will be teased by a stallion to determine whether she is in season and therefore receptive to insemination. In the absence of the stallion there is a greater reliance on the vet to determine the best time for insemination. In the presence of a stallion, the mare will show stereotypic behaviour if she is in season such as lifting her tail in the presence of the stallion, urination and letting the stallion bite her. Mares not in season seem to resent the attentions of the stallion and can be aggressive. Some mares do not fit the rule and it is then necessary for the vet to determine whether she is in season via scanning. If the mare is close to ovulation (releasing the egg for possible fertilisation) then we can say that she is right for insemination according to veterinary advice. The vet is also needed in order to assess the mares ability to conceive and carry a foal.

The vet needs to take a swab of the uterine secretions in order to ensure that the environment is conducive to conception and carrying a foal to full term. If the mare is 'dirty' or has a low grade infection then her ability to conceive is reduced. The vet may decide the best course of action to take.

The mare may need to be examined several times during a season in order to determine the optimal period for insemination. When the mare is close to ovulation she needs to be inseminated and then monitored to ensure that ovulation and therefore concurrent fertilisation has occurred. If ovulation has not taken place then a second insemination is required. If the breeder is lucky and got the timing spot on for ovulation then the mare will be scanned in 14 to 15 days time for pregnancy. If after 14 days the scan is positive for a foal then the breeder can look forward to the birth of a lovely future champion!

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