

I would like to discuss the mare side of the breeding process and what she introduces to a foal. How to assess your mare and choose a stallion to compliment her. This is a process I use on all our mares and is my own personal opinion, however everyone has different ideas which works for them.

I personally feel the mares add a huge amount to their offspring, in both conformation and temperament so I am very careful to select the best possible mare to breed from.

Firstly look critically at your mare and, if need be, ask another experienced person's opinion. When a mare is a personal friend it is often difficult to assess and look for weaker points, which is very important for the selection of a stallion for improvement.

The easiest way, I have found, is to break her up into sections and be realistic in what you can see.

- 1) HEAD AND NECK: Does she have a beautiful head or a little plain? Does she have a supple poll and head/neck connection with a good clean throat latch? Does she have a good length of rein with a nicely muscled top line?
- 2) SHOULDER AND BARREL: Does she have a good sloping shoulder? Is her wither well defined and sloping gradually away to a strongly built back and loin? Has she a good saddle position?
- 3) QUARTERS: Does she have good strong muscled quarters with a good tail set?
- 4) LIMBS AND FEET: Does she have good clean flat bone? Are her limbs straight and true with no weak hocks or deviations? Are her feet good, not flat, boxy and in good balance?
- 5) MOVEMENT: Does she have straight movement with freedom through the shoulder and elbow, with a good engaged hock movement. Is she light of the forehand giving elasticity, suppleness and length of stride? Is she athletic with engaged hind quarters with balance and impulsion, being also able to lengthen and shorten without loss of balance?
- 6) TEMPERAMENT: Is she confident? Outgoing? A nice person? Easy to handle? Suitable for her chosen discipline?
- 7) BLOODLINES: I feel one of the most important things to look at is bloodlines, always especially following the Dam lines in both the mare and chosen stallion to make certain they are not closely related or have conformational problems or temperament problems coming through the breeding programmes previously used, I also feel old purebred bloodlines are so much stronger than new crosses or part bred's and will stamp the stock well.
- 8) OTHER POINTS: I would consider would be - is she fit and able to conceive, carry and safely foal down. Age is not a great consideration knowing many mares who have continued breeding successfully into their 20's, but an older mare can be more difficult to get in foal. I would look at breeding soundness with a vet check so I knew she was cycling properly, there were no uterine

problems and any cysts can be noted, which on scanning for a pregnancy can be misleading to even the most experienced vets. I would also consider any diseases which could be hereditary such as sweet itch, ring bone, side bone, cataracts, navicular, side bone, stringhalt, bone spavin. However lameness through injury would not need to be considered. I would take a vets advise for any diseases which could be considered to be passed on. It is not unusual for a mare at some point to lose a foal sometimes even when scanned with a heart beat the foal is lost over the gestation period even without knowledge of her owner. However disappointing this may be it can happen and is usually not due to management, just nature. This does not mean she will not successfully breed the following year, I personally would put my mare back in foal checking with the vet if there was any addition treatment she may need.

Having broken your mare into sections , it brings me on to talk about choosing the stallion to suit her. After critically observing your mare, choose a stallion who compliments any parts of her that are slightly lacking. If, for example, you feel she is a little long in the back, go for a stallion who has, in your opinion, a perfect length, not too short as a long back crossed with a short back does not necessarily produce the correct length. If she was for example slightly short in the neck, again pick a stallion with a correct length of rein.

I try to work backwards from the foal and plan what I would like to achieve when the foal is safely on the floor and pick the best stallion to compliment my mares to finish with that foal of my dreams. It is often the case for me however much I love a particular stallion, he will not compliment every mare so we take great care in selections for each mare individually.

I adore every one of my mares for many different reasons. I work hard to see every fault I need to improve, it is often quite difficult with my girls to not look through rose tinted glasses, as of course, they are the best to me. However I know each mare individually and choose her husband to be with great consideration. I take hours out for research into bloodlines especially, performance, soundness, conformation and movement and I hope my points will be helpful to all who are deciding on potential sires for the forthcoming season. Of course it goes without saying Good Luck!!! I hope we all produce those foals of our dreams!!!

Penny

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