

To Breed or Buy

Is your mare suitable to breed from? Would it be preferable to buy a weaned foal, yearling or two year old as opposed to breeding yourself? If you do decide to breed from your mare is it better to send her to stud not only to be covered but to remain there for the birth. Gill Stuart asks the experts and finds out the pitfalls of going it alone.

Emma Phillips owner of the Quainton Stud

Breeding horses is a lovely experience when done with thought, knowledge and understanding as it can provide you with a lovely foal for the future.

“Unfortunately said Emma “it can also go terribly wrong, with people spending thousands of pounds on stud fees and vet bills only to end up without a foal at the end of the process.

We did not lose any foals this last season, but we did have one that was born covered in yellow mucus which was rather strange. It was a worrying experience, but being a stud there is always help at hand. We had one person giving the foal mouth to mouth and another massaging the heart until the vet turned up. Luckily, he is fine now and growing well.”

Vanessa Wright, stud manager at Quainton

Vanessa has seen lots of foals being born and agrees that when problems occur, it is vital to have back up and to have the ability to see small warning signs which an amateur may not notice.

“Foals can get stuck coming out of the foaling channel and if you do not know what you are doing, it can be too late by the time the vet gets there. They can also come out breach, and you need to know the

early signs so that you can get the vet out right away. I had one that was badly presented. The vet was on his way. We eventually got the front end out and as the back end came out, it was sitting. The mare was pushing and pushing and the whole ordeal ended up with her smashing her pelvis.

A lot of people use heat foaling alarms which are not very good because they can go off after the event leaving the foal suffocated in the foaling sack.

There are also other problems that can occur two weeks after the birth such as the mare getting colic or the foals can have umbilical problems.

We are scrupulous with what we do here, and even then you can still get an infection setting

in. Again, the average mare owner may not see the early signs of the foal being off colour. We halter break from day one and the foals get led properly which is something you also need to know how to

do as they can be quite wriggly. We also have a remedial farrier who specialises in foals, and it is amazing what he can do to straighten out a crooked leg.”

Foals will stay together in their group until the breaking process



Quainton Stud's two year old gelding Sox by Lasino

“It would not be as expensive to breed your own as it would to buy a yearling or two year old, but you then only get what you are given,” said Emma. “On the other hand, there are definitely foals that are born that can amaze you or disappoint you.

The other thing that we are able to do here which might not be available to everyone is group all the mothers together. Once they have foaled they are reintroduced to the herd then at weaning we normally take two mothers away from the established herd until eventually all the foals are left together. They then stay in the

group that they were born into and will stay together until they are ready to be broken which is much more natural for them.”

Vet Robert Oulton BSc(Agr)DVM MRCVS of the Chiltern Equine

Robert who specialises in breeding agrees that before deciding whether or not to put your mare in foal, you need expert advice and do your homework beforehand. “Learn as much as you can,” he said. “Even if you decide to buy a weaned foal as opposed to breeding your own, there are all sorts of things that can go wrong with them, so you need to know exactly how to care for them.

If you do decide to breed, it is not always necessary to send your mare to stud to be covered as we have Artificial Insemination which allows the mare to stay in her familiar surroundings and this way you can also avoid further costs. Whatever you decide to do, your first port of call would be to take advice from your veterinary surgeon as he will also be able to tell you whether your mare is suitable and to guide you through her pregnancy. Older mares can prove tricky to get in foal especially if they have never had a foal before. The older mare also runs a higher risk of rupturing a main artery at delivery which can have serious consequences.



Quainton Stud manager Vanessa Wright leading the foals. "You need to know how to lead a foal properly as they can be quite wriggly."

foal. It seems such a shame when people have spent all that money on getting their mare in foal, waited months for it to arrive and then lose it because they were not there."

If it had not been for Darren's quick action, CTR's editor Sue Mitchell's second foal would have been born dead. "This foal was what I call a stony foal. He was lifeless. I had to be

quick and rub him with a towel to shock him back into life, which is the same thing farmers do with calves.

As for caring for foals, some people often over feed them on high protein food which can give them joint problems. If your foal has wide open joints then back off with the protein as it will go into the joint capsule which will affect the horse in later life. All the foal needs between that period of weaning and the first year, is good forage, good food and routine. If you get a colt foal and you don't want a stallion, then have him gelded. This can be done at six months or when the testicles

The other risks are re-absorption or loss of pregnancy which does not usually affect the mare too drastically. If they are going to abort they usually do so between 6-7 months gestation."

Darren Blanchard of the Pferde Stud

Darren who is one of the UK's leading breeders of coloured sport horses says that as long as people have the proper facilities such as a stable that is 12 x 14 and CCTV and that they are willing to commit, then it is perfectly ok to breed at home. "You could buy a weaned foal or a yearling or two year old, but why do that if you have a perfectly good breeding mare," said Darren and added "it all depends upon what you want."

The main thing if you want to breed is that you really commit to it, but often people do not realise how many nights they may have to sit up.

When they are given a foaling date, they will sit up maybe three or four days prior, but then start getting lazy and decide to go out. It is a sad fact that ninety percent of dead foals are due to the foal suffocating in the bag because there was no one around to split it. The membrane is very thick and if the foal is unable to break the bag for himself, he will be starved of oxygen and that is when things can go really wrong which is why many people like to send their mare away to stud to



Colic could strike the mare or the foal two weeks after birth

are evident. Some people believe that the longer you leave before gelding, the better the neck. At two and a half years old a colt is fully developed and if he is gelded after that, then yes he will keep his neck.

However, boys will be boys and you could end up getting kicked or bitten if you don't know how to handle him correctly. My advice is that keeping and producing a colt is better left to the professionals who know how to handle them. Don't leave it too long before gelding as the older they get, the bigger the operation will be and therefore far more of a shock to the system."

Is your mare suitable to breed from?

Emma's advice is that you have to take an honest look at your mare to see if she is suitable.

"Is she healthy and in good condition? Has she been checked for all equine sexually transmitted diseases? Most reputable studs will insist on a current blood test for EVA and swab for CEM, before admitting your mare to stud. Once you have established that your mare is physically healthy to breed

You have to take an honest look at your mare to see if she is suitable.

from, you need to think about her temperament. Gone are the days when a difficult, lame or unmanageable mare is put in foal just because the owners no longer know what to do with her. Your mare is just as vital a component as the stallion you put her to. In an ideal situation, she should have a recorded pedigree that goes back at least four generations and a proven competition record in your chosen discipline too. Look for a stallion that compliments your mare; don't rely on him to correct all her conformational faults. However, if for example you feel your mare is long in the back, it is advisable to go for a short coupled stallion, or if your mare has a powerful jump but lacks speed, you may want to look for a stallion that has a bit more Thoroughbred in him. Bear in mind that a mare that has already bred a few foals, will normally throw a larger foal than a maiden mare the same size. It is not advisable to breed from your mare until she is at least three years old; mares can produce foals until their early 20s. It is not fair to breed from one mare year after year. She will need a break from breeding and most times it will be her body telling you she needs it. You just simply won't be able to get her in foal one year only to find she takes first time the next." Some horse owners are worried

Sue Mitchell's Special Edition



Breeding

about their mare's reaction when meeting the stallion for the first time.

"You do not need to worry," said Emma "as now nearly all coverings are carried out using Artificial Insemination, which is virtually stress free for the mare and can be carried out in only a couple of minutes. The beauty of this is that you are not limited to the local sires, you can choose from stallions world wide. Frozen semen is readily available, but does come with certain draw backs. It is usually more expensive and you are limited to a designated number of straws, therefore the timing of insemination is crucial and this sometimes means your vet having to come out to scan your mare in the middle of the night, which is not something all vets are happy to do. Fresh or chilled semen is much more reliable and readily available from stallions in the UK and Europe. Remember that European countries have different bank holidays to us, and this will need to be taken into account when ordering semen."

Gina Armstrong, private amateur breeder talks about why she bred and the costs

Gina originally purchased her mare Aimee by Rhodimont/Donnerhall to produce as a dressage horse, but unfortunately she sustained a soft tissue injury putting a halt to her career, so Gina decided to breed from her



Anya

using Artificial Insemination. "The mare had already had a foal in Germany which was doing very well," said Gina "and the fact that she had such good breeding lines plus advice from the stud in Germany where I originally purchased her all helped, otherwise I would not have done it. To me there is absolutely no point in breeding unless your mare has got known bloodlines or has been a Grand Prix dressage horse or show jumper. You may not want to keep the offspring, and so it has to be a marketable sellable prospect. I sent Aimee to Madeline Cambell at the Hobgoblins Stud to be inseminated by semen from Sandro Hit. His stud fee is around £2,000, then on top of that were the livery costs at stud of £140 per week and further insemination

charges. The first time did not take, so we had to send her back again. The second time she came home, she was successfully scanned in foal and even though she was then turned away for the winter, close to where I live with other horses, one of which was also pregnant, it still all cost around £5,000. You do run the risk of things going wrong, for example Aimee got laminitis and had to be brought in. She was due to foal within the next couple of days. The vet came, sedated her to scan her feet and said that the birth could happen any time, but is not imminent. The vet left at three and by six o'clock Aimee had given birth to a beautiful little filly, who we named Anya. All those added veterinary costs also have to be taken into account plus

you do not know what you might get i.e. a filly or a colt.

You definitely could go to the sales and by a six month old foal far cheaper.

I eventually sent Aimee back to Germany with Anya as there were not many places here that I could send her that were cost effective where the foal could be brought up in a group who remain together into their third years.

I will do it again, but will take all the advice from the stud and leave her in their capable hands. We have already been having discussions about different stallions.

As I already have a horse at home called Roxy that replaced Aimee after she went to stud, I may well keep Anya until she is three to see if she turns out even better than Roxy, or possibly sell her as a three year old.

The idea originally was to keep Aimee in a life that would pay for itself. Definitely in Germany livery and vet bills are far cheaper, so if I sold Anya as a three year old for £15,000, that would cover my costs, but it is not so much the money but rather a hobby and an interest for me which I thought would be fun to do. Hopefully, I will produce some nice horses that go on to be successful. Aimee's mother has produced lots of foals and this year to Forenzio she had one of the top priced colts that went to the Pidgeleys Kilbees Farm Stud in Windsor."

Stallions at Stud

Pure Bred Cleveland Bay Stallion Oakenbank Grenadier



Grenadier is Nasta Performance Tested, has British Dressage points and wins in Show Jumping, Hunter Trials and Ridden and In-Hand Showing.

"He has also represented the Cleveland Bay Breed at the Royal Show, The Equine Fair at Malvern, Your Horse Live to name but a few, where his good looks, charisma and kind nature make him a favourite with the public" said his owner Jean Morgan.

Cleveland Bays are a truly versatile breed turning their hoof to all disciplines including driving. They have great rhythmical paces and are natural jumpers, with a wonderfully laid back temperament which makes them suitable mounts for all ages and abilities. Cross them with a thoroughbred and you have a superb competition horse.

Visitors are welcome by appointment and youngstock both pure and part bred are usually for sale.

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