



PART 1 Is my mare suitable?

We are fast approaching the time of year when mare owners will begin to consider which one of the various stallions available would be the ideal choice for their mares.

Before you can make that important decision, however, you need to take an honest look at your mare to see if she is suitable to breed from in the first instance. We asked Emma Phillips of Quainton Stud, to give us some pointers.



By Emma Phillips

Health checks

Is your mare healthy and in good condition? Has she been checked for all the 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.

Is she a suitable broodmare?

Once you have established that your mare is physically healthy to breed 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 as vital a component as the stallion you put her to, in an ideal situation she should have a recorded pedigree that is recorded for at least four generations and ideally she will have her own proven competition record in your chosen discipline.

Mare plus stallion equals...

Begin by looking for a stallion that complements your mare - don't rely on the stallion's genes to correct all the mare's conformational faults. However, if for example you feel your mare is a little 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. Remember that a mare that has already bred a few foals will normally throw a larger foal than a maiden mare of the same size.

AI

There is no longer the worry of how your mare will respond to meeting the stallion. In modern breeding practice nearly all coverings are carried out using Artificial Insemination (AI). AI is virtually stress-free for the mare and can be carried out in only a couple of minutes, with minimal fuss and worry.

Is she old enough?

It is not advisable to breed from your mare until she is at least three

years old, mares can produce foals until their early twenties. It is not fair to breed from one mare year after year, as she will need a break from breeding. In most cases your mare's body will tell you when she needs a break, you just simply won't be able to get her in foal one year, only to find she takes first time the next.

Purchasing a broodmare

When purchasing a broodmare it is always important to look for a horse with a recorded pedigree that is approved by an accredited breed society. She should be correct to type in every way as much as possible. Twisted legs, bad feet or wind problems are all traits she could pass on to her youngstock. A kind temperament around other horses will help you with your daily grind, as most mares and foals are best kept out at grass in a herd.



Your mare's cycle

Mares' cycles naturally close down during the winter when there is little sunlight. You can tell when your mare comes into season again by her behaviour in early spring. She will start to 'show' to other horses - this is when she urinates in small amounts and 'winks' with her tail set to one side, often accompanied by a little squeal. She may approach the fence line when you ride past on another horse.

The length of a cycle varies with each horse, but mostly the mare will ovulate toward the end of her oestrus, five to 10 days. Your vet will scan her and advise you on the best time to inseminate her.

At Quainton we enjoy a unique arrangement with our vet, who offers mare owners an all-inclusive package for a set fee. This includes all the scans your mare will require from preconception through to 42 days gestation. Our clients have found this system of caring for the mare's medical needs and preparing her for breeding very helpful in calculating their costs.

Stallion selection

With your mare's needs taken care of, you can enjoy the process of selecting a suitable stallion for her. With the increase in options that AI allows, you are not limited to sires situated in your locality - you can choose from stallions situated throughout the world.

Frozen semen is readily available, but it does come with certain drawbacks. 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 that your vet will have to be prepared to come out and scan your mare in the middle of the night - there are not many vets who are happy to do this.

Fresh or chilled semen is much more reliable and readily available from stallions in the UK and across Europe. You must remember that European countries have different Bank Holidays to us, and this will need to be taken into account when ordering semen for your mare.

Breeding from Europe

Breeders in Europe have adopted a far more commercial approach to breeding horses than the British have. European studs literally farm their horses and sell the foals at weaning. British breeders tend to domesticate their horses and breed for sentimental reasons.

In order for British-bred horses to raise the bar, we will need to take a similar approach to the European style of horse breeding. This is why, at Quainton, we only purchase approved and tested Holstein stallions that have successfully gone through the German systems 70-day test procedure.

In the 70-day test, every aspect of the horse is evaluated (over 70 days) and the accumulative scores are added together, to see if the horse is of a high enough quality to breed within their breeding programmes.

Although this may seem very strict and rigid, the result of such high standards is that the German horses, in particular the Holstein, lead the way for the rest of the

world in the showjumping and dressage spheres - they obtain more gold medals than any other breed of sport horse.

For the love of breeding

Breeding horses is a fulfilling experience and when done with thought, knowledge and understanding, it can provide you with a lovely foal to enjoy and relish in the future. Unfortunately, it has many pitfalls and not everyone is lucky - people can spend thousands of pounds on stud fees, vet fees and preparation, only to get it wrong and lose the foal.

At Quainton Stud we are happy to help and advise you with the best choice of stallion for your mare, we can also take care of your mare and her entire needs throughout the whole process.

For a free DVD on how we collect and inseminate semen, plus details on a selection of our stallions please visit www.quaintonstud.co.uk to order your free copy.