

## Breeding program

The old saying of “Fail to plan, plan to Fail” has merit when it comes to breeding horses. So many people, who dream of having a lovely foal run about, forget that without having a plan of action or goals set for your mare then your dream of having a foal maybe ruined.

Have a breeding plan. Set goals for yourself of what you want to achieve by breeding your mare. Keep in mind that breeding is about improving not about going backwards.

Why do you want to breed? Are you breeding to sell? What if the foal does not sell right away? Are you breeding to get your next performance or line horse? Are you breeding just because? Is this a one time thing or are you looking at a long term breeding program? Knowing why you are breeding can help formulate the basis of your breeding plan.

The start of a program is in evaluating your mare. No mare is without undesirable qualities. Starting with a good mare is great advice but one must learn to recognize a good mare. A good mare need not be a champion and a champion does not guarantee a good mare.

As breeding season approaches and stallion books start to come out it is also time to set up a plan. Your plan should first include your finances. Are you financially able to breed, taking into account stud fees, vet fees, courier costs, boarding out at a reproduction facility if applicable plus your time if you are going to do it yourself.

We estimate that it will cost you anywhere from \$300 to \$700 per cycle to get your mare pregnant, these figures can vary based on your location and if your mare has any problems. This does not include the stud fee, collection fee, or the cost of board at a reproduction facility. Let's hope your mare gets pregnant the first time around. As you can see breeding can get costly if the mare doesn't settle the first time.

Once you have accounted for finances next is picking a sire. This topic could bring a whole new article and too vast to discuss at this time. Selecting a sire is very important; don't base your selection just on fancy ads or the flavour of the month. Look at your mare determine her weaknesses and now select a sire that will compensate for those weaknesses.

When selecting a sire look at the breed if you are breeding for a particular breed and of course what the stallion does or did for a living. If you want a jumper focus your attention on stallions that have done that; same goes for reining or cutting horses choose from stallions that are good in the discipline that you are interested in breeding for. From there look at conformation and how the stallion fits with your mare. Next you may if experienced look at bloodlines and how they might compliment your mare or you may want a particular bloodline that fits nicely with your program or what you want to achieve. Other factors that affect selection are a stallions performance records and his offspring performance, With this criteria you must realize that even though a stallion may have achieved a good record and it may have a bearing on his trainability; that

sometimes other factors predispose a stallion to great performance such as how wealthy a owner is to acquire the best trainers or afford showing and marketing. Breeding your mare to an Olympic champion does not mean that the resultant foal will be a champion, there are too many external factors that affect performance. Again in setting up a breeding program for your mare you will need to set your own criteria and in order of importance of what I have mentioned. Some breeders will not look at a stallion unless they meet their bloodline criteria first then once a stallion has met that criteria then conformation is looked at, then other factors are addressed. Some consider conformation first; some breeders with economic constraints may look at stud fees first to determine which stallions fit. Some breeders may consider colour and breed before any other criteria.

It all comes down to the original question of why you are breeding and what do you want to accomplish? Once those are answered then you can set out your own criteria of what you think is important in selecting a sire and starting your breeding program. If you require assistance in selecting a stallion for your mare or in setting up a breeding plan you will find most experienced breeders will be willing to give you a hand, as well as reputable breeding facilities.

Breeders need to evaluate stallions and their pedigrees not just advertisement and pictures, they need to understand the task of limiting the risk of creating an undesirable characteristic in a foal and maximize the chance of producing a foal that is an enhancement of the good qualities of both sire and dam.

Do your homework, take notes and know that breeding is a gamble even when you have weighed all the options, but most of all have fun. Good luck.