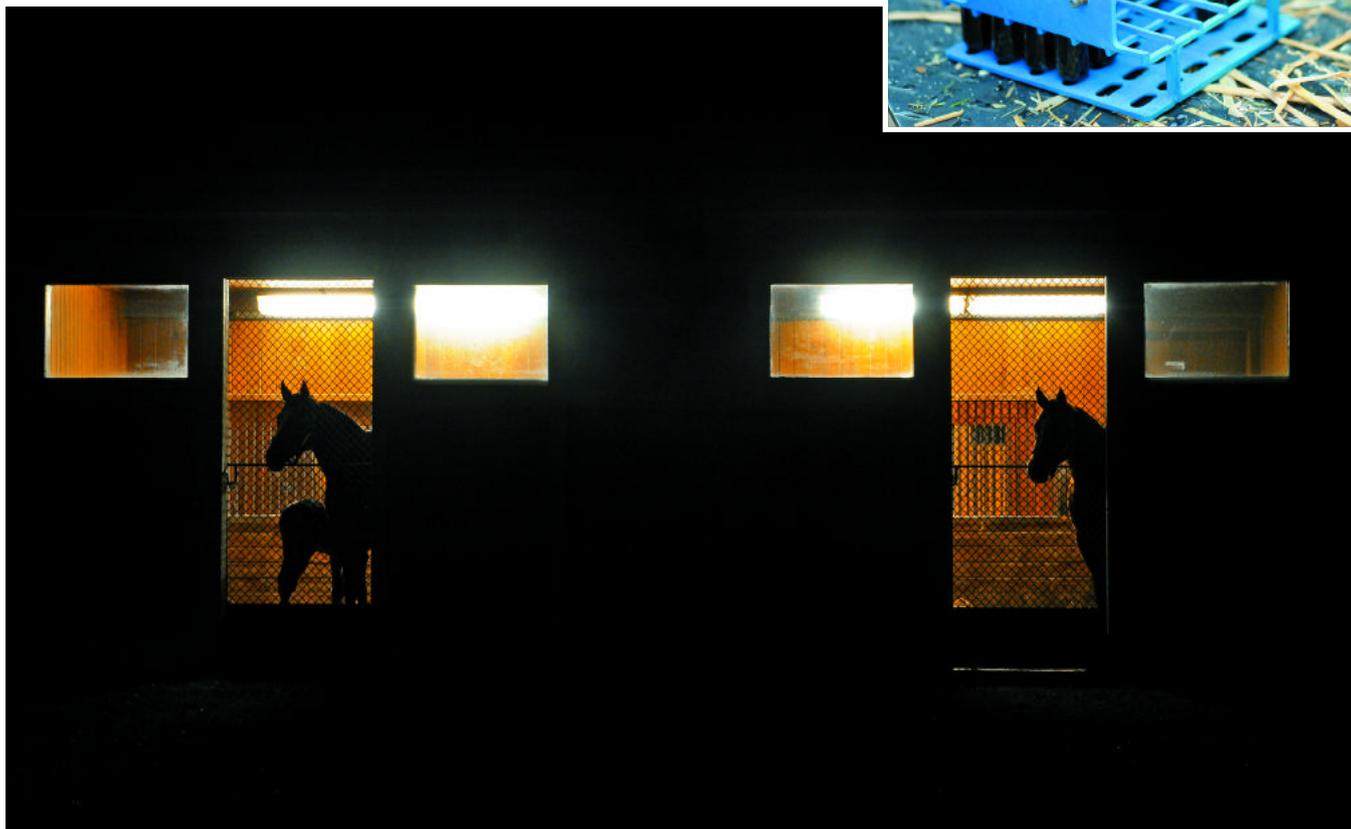


Pre-Breeding Management of the Mare

Mares should be in optimal health prior to breeding season

It is of paramount importance that any mare intended for breeding be in optimal health before the beginning of the breeding season. The mare should have her Coggins test updated, as well as annual vaccinations such as Eastern and Western encephalitis, tetanus, rabies, and Potomac horse fever. It is probably a good idea to give the mare a booster against rhinopneumonitis and influenza before the beginning of the season as well. If the mare is going to be bred to a stallion positive for equine viral arteritis (EVA) and the mare does not have a protective titer against the disease, she also will require an EVA vaccination before being exposed to that stallion's semen. Fecal examinations should be performed, and any parasite infestations corrected under a veterinarian's supervision.



There are plenty of health checks to make on mares prior to their visit to the breeding shed



Regular veterinary examinations are essential to maintain detailed records about a mare's reproductive history



Ideally, mares already on a regular deworming schedule using anthelmintics should have their treatment coordinated with the first breeding cycle so that anthelmintics (even those considered safe for administration during pregnancy) will not be required during the first 60 days of pregnancy.

The mare's feet should be trimmed and cared for on a regular basis as prescribed by a farrier and veterinarian. A potential broodmare's feet and legs need to be carefully evaluated before breeding to determine whether she can support the added weight of pregnancy without undue pain or stress. Likewise, if the mare has a chronic medical condition such as laminitis, Cushing's disease, or heaves, a critical and honest evaluation must be made as to whether the mare is capable of carrying a pregnancy to term and whether it is fair to ask her to try.

Dental maintenance also should be addressed before the breeding season. A veterinarian who is knowledgeable about equine dentistry should perform a thorough examination and correct any problems and perform the annual floating so the mare can make the most of her diet and not have to undergo the stress of dental procedures during pregnancy.

The mare's overall body condition should be evaluated to ensure she is neither too thin nor too overweight when it is time to breed her because both conditions sometimes hamper a mare's ability to settle. In addition, her coat and eyes should have a bright, healthy appearance and expression. A potential broodmare's age also needs to be considered carefully. The optimum period of fertility for a mare seems to be between the ages of six and 11, and, correspondingly, foal birth weights also appear to be optimal when a mare is between seven and 11 years of age. That is not to say an older mare cannot successfully conceive, carry her pregnancy to term, have a healthy foal successfully, and raise that foal to be in a good and appropriately grown condition at weaning. Many older mares do this just fine. In general, however, a mare's overall fertility decreases after she is 12 years old while her risk of pregnancy-related complications also increases. In general, the older girls will require especially careful management both at home and in the breeding shed to reproduce successfully.

When a young mare (less than four to six years of age) is being considered for breeding, it is prudent to choose one that is physically mature enough to handle the demands of pregnancy and lactation without compromising her own or



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her potential foal's well being and to feed her appropriately to meet her growth and pregnancy needs.

Regarding mares that are in athletic training or have recently retired, some experts agree that a mare performs her best reproductively when she is allowed time to settle into the reproductive rhythms of her body and to become comfortable in her environment. Many athletic mares need time to unwind from their peak training condition, undergo withdrawal from any anabolic steroids they might have received, and get re-acquainted to being out with other mares and competing in a herd situation before they will become pregnant and stay that way. With some mares, this can take months. In an ideal universe the decision about whether to breed a performance mare is reached the fall before the breeding season. This way, the mare can take the fall and winter off to begin making these adjustments, and she can be teased and managed in the beginning of the breeding season (as opposed to the frantic and hectic middle and end months). This allows the extra time, patience, and handling a maiden mare will require while she is learning and adjusting to her new role in life. Events, however, don't always turn out as planned, and whether due to injury, lackluster performance, opportunity, or human capriciousness, mares often are asked to change from a performer to a broodmare overnight. It will require diligent management and observation for them to be bred successfully in a timely fashion. For some mares, no matter how well they are managed, time and persistence ultimately will be required.

A number of clinicians have noted that some mares recently out of training have the best chance of conceiving if bred on their very first estrus upon arrival from the training center (some as they actually come off the van). If this first opportunity after training is missed, it usually takes the mares valuable time before they get into the swing of things and cycle and breed appropriately. A critical point to remember is that the more the mare is asked to alter her natural way of doing things, the less likely she is to succeed, which ultimately will require more intensive breeding management.

Record-keeping

The importance of accurate, detailed health and reproductive records when breeding and foaling mares cannot be overemphasized. The human memory is unreliable. Good record-keeping is vital to successful broodmare (and stallion) management. Breeding records come in a variety of formats and technologies, ranging from a well-marked wall



Off-the-track mares may respond to being teased at the beginning of breeding season

calendar and individual mare cards in a notebook to elaborate computer systems. It makes little difference what system is used, provided that the system contains all the information required, recorded in a clear fashion. Information needs to be readily accessible and retrievable. Records by their nature are useless if they

are not well maintained, and the more complicated, time consuming, and inaccessible the system is, the less likely it is to be maintained.

Each mare needs to have a running health record that details her vaccinations, deworming schedule, hoof maintenance, dental maintenance, chronic

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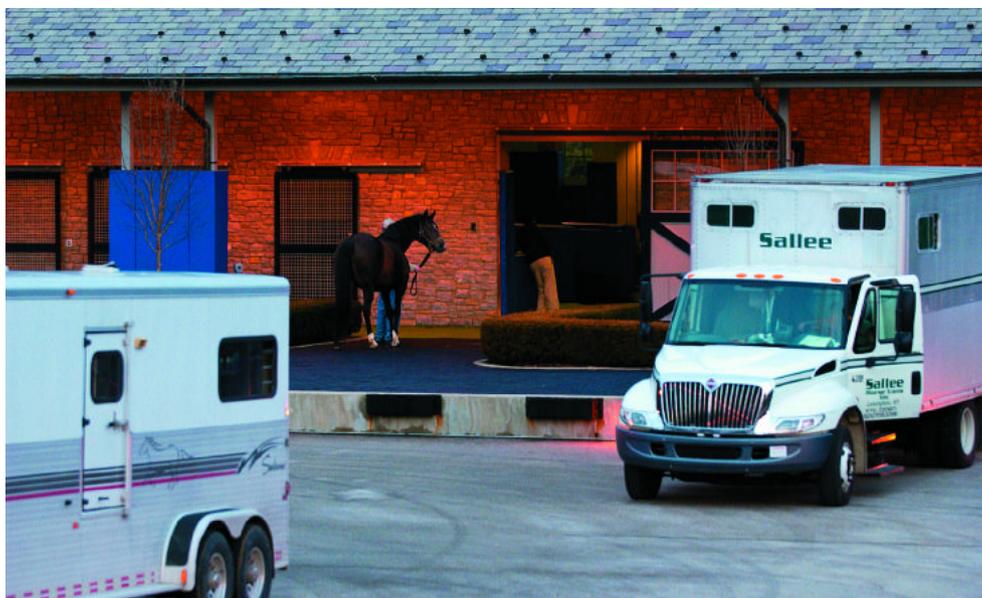
medications, and any health problems (what they are/were, when they occurred, what diagnostics were performed, what treatments

were administered, and what the outcomes were). Notes that also mention and detail individual mare's preferences, sensitivities, stable vices, and social skills also can be useful, especially if more than one person routinely cares for the horse or if the regular caretaker is unavailable for any reason.

Specific reproductive records for a given mare should be maintained season to season because mares tend to repeat foaling patterns. Initiate a record for each mare at the start of each season.

Record such general information as the year, the mare's registered name, her age, owner, owner's address and telephone numbers and previous pertinent reproductive history. The latter would include number of foals, foaling complications, breeding injuries, tendency to urine pool, previous abortions and their identified cause if known, and previous uterine biopsy scores.

Also, record her status at the beginning of the current breed-



Detailed records should be kept before, and after, the mare enters the breeding shed

ing season: maiden, open, barren, or foaling.

A maiden mare is a non-pregnant mare that has never been bred. An open mare is a non-pregnant mare that previously has produced a foal but was not bred during the previous breeding season. A barren mare is a non-pregnant mare that was bred during the previous breeding season and either failed to establish a pregnancy or lost the pregnancy at some point during the gestation either through embryonic resorption or fetal abortion. A foaling mare is a pregnant mare that will foal sometime during the upcoming breeding season.

For foaling mares, highlight the last known breeding and ovulation dates as well as the estimated due date based on 340 plus/minus 10 days. Foaling mares should be further classified as maiden (having her first foal) or multiparous. If a mare has had previous foals (she is multiparous), record her previous gestation lengths as well as any neonatal complications. For foaling mares, record the name of the sire of the expected foal.

It is important to record a mare's status as it reflects possible management differences a given mare might require during the upcoming breeding season. For example, unless the mare is old or has a history of a certain problem, it is not anticipated that an open mare will be difficult to breed. On the other hand, a barren mare might require investigative work and a breeding soundness examination as well as more intensive monitoring and minimal contamination breeding techniques. A maiden mare, meanwhile, might require more time for patient handling.

To complete the general portion of an individual mare's reproductive record for a given breeding season, report the following: the name of the stallion to which she will be bred, his owner/manager, and the address/phone numbers.

Detailed records of each estrous cycle during the season a mare is monitored and/or bred are critical for effective management, and these records commence with the first reproductive-related event of that particular mare's season. For all non-pregnant mares, it could begin as innocently as recording the date in November or December that the mares are put under lights and subsequent daily teasing activity leading up to and through the spring transitional period. (Mares typically will be up and cycling 60 to 90 days after the initiation of the artificially extended daily photoperiod.)

For foaling mares, make daily notations on mammary gland and teat development, relaxation and softening of tailhead and croup tissues, behavioral changes, and milk electrolyte values.

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Also, report the date she foaled, the difficulty of the delivery, and any post-foaling complications. Additionally, report the details of her first post-partum reproductive examination seven days after foaling and the progress of the foal heat. Records of daily events should include how the mare teased and what the results of any examination were, such as the size and consistency of structures (follicles or corpora lutea) palpated and/or ultrasounded on each ovary; the palpable tone and quality of the uterus and cervix; the visual vaginal and cervical findings on a speculum examination; and the presence of uterine edema or fluid on an ultrasound examination. Records should include important details such as ovulations, breedings, uterine culture and cytology results, and treatments on the days they occurred. It is useful to have a record-keeping system that allows the manager or veterinarian to detail this daily information while providing a monthly overview of the mare. The days the mare spent in behavioral estrus, ovulation dates, breeding dates, diestrus length, manipulative treatments such as prostaglandin and human chorionic gonadotropin and pregnancy status are laid out in a calendar fashion to provide a ready feel for a given mare's patterns and calculation of inter-estrous intervals, days in behavioral estrus, and early pregnancy examinations.

Some veterinary practices use a double-sided card with 21-day periods laid out per month in a calendar fashion for an entire six-plus month period in the spring and early summer on one side. The other side contains individual lines with columns to record detailed teasing, palpation/ultrasound findings, treatments, and observations for a given date. These cards are maintained in a notebook the examiner takes to the barn to record details about teasing and examination so the overall record for a given mare can be checked and reviewed at that time and management decisions made. Each record is reviewed again at the end of each day, and breeding management plans and schedules are made for the following day. Reviewing every mare's records every day ensures that very little is lost through the

cracks. Having a visualized overview of what a mare has done and is doing helps the manager and veterinarian anticipate what she should be doing next and highlights possible problems. (For example, say a mare was bred March 31 and had an identified ovulation April 1. A quick glance has the manager anticipating that the mare should tease out by April 3 and



The end result is a healthy mare and foal by the following spring

Specific reproductive records for a given mare should be maintained season to season because mares tend to repeat foaling patterns.

should be ready for her first pregnancy ultrasound examination on April 14. If the mare is carrying a pregnancy, it likely will be identified on that date. If the mare is open, the mare manager would anticipate that she should begin teasing back in by April 18-19. Should this mare deviate from this expected pattern, a red flag should go up, and the mare should be examined more closely.)

A variety of scoring and symbol sys-

tems are used to describe and categorize things such as type and quality of ovarian structures, uterine tone, teasing, and intensity. Each one can be as individual as the person using it. As an example, in one system the designation of "m20f" under the daily column for findings on a mare's left ovary means multiple 20 mm follicles were on that ovary. In other farms' record systems, the term "clustered" under a left ovary column refers to the same thing. Some practitioners and farms score follicles on a number or a letter scale such that a "ripe 3" follicle on one farm may refer to a 45 mm follicle that seems ready to ovulate, while another might use a straight diameter millimeter scale to record the follicle or perhaps designate such a follicle as being a "Grade A." The lack of an industry-wide form of record-keeping can cause confusion when a mare moves from one management system to the next, so it is important to be able to read and interpret your own records, as well to communicate their meaning clearly to others who might be involved with the breeding of your mare. [E]

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