

# So You Want To Breed Your Mare?

By: Danette Musselman

If you have decided to breed your mare in 2005, here are some tips that may help you out for making the process easier for you and your broodmare.

Properly prepare your mare for breeding. Make sure that her heat cycles are regular and that you have found a good reproductive facility or veterinarian. Your vet may suggest a uterine culture or biopsy for your mare prior to breeding. This enables your vet to rule out any infections or abnormalities. Nothing is more frustrating than to find out that your mare has had a problem AFTER you have made numerous breeding attempts! Determine whether you are going to have fresh cooled semen, or frozen semen (if available) shipped to your mare. Maybe you and your veterinarian will decide to transport your mare directly to the breeding farm where the stallion is located.

- Call the stallion management or breeding farm to request information on a potential stallion. Be patient while waiting for the stallion's information. Many mare owners are calling prior to breeding season.
- Once you have determined the "stud of your mare's dreams," contact the stallion owner again. Ask for a stallion contract. Go over their breeding schedule, costs, time frames of notification for shipped semen, mare care, etc.

Stallion owners or breeding farms should be prepared to answer your questions, or mail you the needed information.

- Ask about all costs including: shipping fees, airport courier fees; stallion collection fees; equitainer deposit or rental fees; or equitainer penalty fees. (Penalty fees apply when equitainers are not sent back to the breeding farm within the allotted time frame.)
- Fill out & return stallion contracts, breeding fees, and any other paperwork - Do this way ahead of intended breeding time. Do not wait until the last minute. (Most farms require all fees & contracts to be completed prior to breeding.)



After all paperwork is complete & stallion contracts have been signed, semen for your mare can be ordered, when needed.

Transported Semen:

- Find a good reproductive vet if you are planning on transporting semen.
- Call the breeding farm & let them know when your vet plans on cycling your mare OR when you think your mare will be coming into her heat cycle. This allows farms to plan ahead for transported semen. (Remember, you are not the only mare owner that is booked to the intended stallion.)
- Call the Breeding Farm *again* when your mare shows her first sign of heat. This will further prepare for a successful stallion shipment.
- Your reproductive vet will monitor your mare's follicular progress via ultrasound or palpation. Your vet will let you know when your mare's follicle will be maturing enough to be ready for a stallion shipment. Please call the farm 24 hours prior to the intended stallion shipment. Do not order semen by fax!
- The stallion shipment that you ordered will be sent out to arrive on the day when your vet needs to

inseminate your broodmare. Fed Ex or Airline deliveries are most often used.

\*\*\*\*Please remember to order semen ahead of time. Airline Flights and couriers must be scheduled in advance. So many people want to order their shipments at the last minute. *Same day service!!!* Please understand that shipments must arrive at the airport two hours prior to departure. Failure to do so will result in a change of the intended flight schedule plan. You must also take into consideration the driving time needed to get from the breeding farms to the airport. *Yes, we do get speeding tickets while trying to make the intended flights!* Also, semen shipments (under normal circumstances) are taken to the cargo section of the airport. The cargo department works under specified hours, unlike normal airline hours. This means that semen shipments must be scheduled during normal cargo business hours. Most shipments can be picked up after cargo has closed via “over the counter” methods with your major airlines. Contact your airline for intended pickup times & pickup locations. Most airlines in major cities will also provide maps of their cargo & pick up areas.

- Advise your vet of intended arrival times for stallion shipments. Let them know if the shipment is coming in by either airline or Fed Ex carrier. (Or other) Some vet clinics order all stallion shipments and also schedule a pickup for semen shipments. Please be in contact with your vet so that there is no miscommunication when ordering and/or picking up fresh cooled semen shipments for your mare.

\*\*\*\*\*Yes, we do run into the above situation during breeding season. “Stressed Owners” will call the farm & yell at employees for not receiving their stallion shipment, when in fact, it was never ordered in the first place. In other words, the vet thought the mare owner had ordered a shipment, and the mare owner thought that the vet clinic had ordered it! Oops!

- If your shipment does not arrive, call the breeding farm immediately. We will call the airlines or track your shipment for you. (Some farms give owners tracking numbers so that they can do this themselves.) When your shipment has been located, every effort will be made to help your shipment arrive. If all else fails, hopefully new shipments can be sent—sometimes in the same day via another airline flight, etc. Please be patient and work with the stallion management. It is also smart to make sure of the Fed Ex delivery time in your area, since they differ depending on location. If your fresh cooled shipment is coming in on an airplane, contact the airlines to make sure your flight arrival time has not changed. This will eliminate long waiting periods at the airport and also help your vet make the most of his/her time.

All shipments do not arrive. This is a fact of Transported Semen! While in most cases, everything goes as scheduled, on other occasions the shipments run into carrier problems. (Some mare owners do not want shipments delivered by air; when in fact during the 2004 breeding season, our Fed Ex shipments were delayed more often than airline shipments.)

- Acts Of God. Severe weather was the culprit for many Fed Ex shipments not being delivered on time in 2004. Fed Ex packages go into sorting hub locations and do not go back out. If it is weather related (acts of God) your semen shipment will not be delivered on the intended day. There is nothing that the breeding farm can do about this. Refunds are not made because of “Acts Of God.”
- Expect The Un-Expected. Do not scream at the shipping company. Some airlines no longer carry semen in their cargo section because of recent lawsuits, etc. due to the fact that shipments did not arrive on time. It does not help anyone to be rude to the carriers. We know that this is extra expense, time, & loss for mare owners when a shipment does not arrive on time. Please contact your breeding farm, and we will make every effort to get more semen for your mare. It doesn't help your mare or anyone else to scream about lost shipments. The more complaints carriers hear about, the less likely they are to continue to transport semen for the equine industry. Breeding farms get just as aggravated . . . please remember that YOU may have lost one stallion shipment, but the farm may have lost 25 shipments that day!!!
- Most stallion shipments will come with two insemination doses. If your mare has not ovulated after the last insemination dose, please contact the farm & keep them updated of a possible need for another stallion shipment. Again, please remember that your mare is not the only one booked to this stallion!

Do NOT assume that your mare will AUTOMATICALLY ovulate after her last insemination. I often ask mare

owners if they have ultrasounded and/or palpated their mare to find out if she ovulated, and so many times the answer is no. They reply, “Her follicle was big, so I’m sure we are fine.” Well, that may be true, but a lot of variables go into ovulation. Please have your vet follow up with a palpation and/or ultrasound to make sure that your mare has dropped her follicle. (Released her egg)

\*\*\*\*Your veterinarian may suggest using a variety of different drugs to enable your mare to ovulate properly. Included in these drugs would be HCG, Ovuplant, or Injectable Deslorelin. These drugs may assist ovulation to match the arrival of the semen and prevent further semen shipments. (Because she did not ovulate)

- INSEMINATION DOSES. A normal insemination dose, depending on the stallion, would be 500 million progressively motile sperm per dose.

For example, if you receive one billion sperm at 50% motility; that is 500 million progressively motile sperm. If you receive two billion sperm, and it is 25% progressively motile, that is still more than enough sperm to breed your mare-as you still have at least 500 million progressively motile sperm. Thus, many stallion managers employ different techniques to deliver you the proper insemination doses. You should not get hung up or upset about the motility, until you know about the sperm numbers of progressively motile sperm you have been delivered. Of course, great motility is always preferable; however, there is a variability between stallions’ semen and it’s cooling capabilities. Also, many people that are evaluating cooled semen often do not take the time to warm the semen properly for an accurate semen evaluation.



- Return your Equitainer in a timely fashion. One of the most common problems and frustrations for stallion owners is getting broodmare owners to return the equitainers after their mare has been inseminated. PLEASE immediately return your equitainer. Make sure all internal compartments are intact. You will be billed for equitainers that are not returned complete. Equitainers are approximately \$350.00 per container. They are expensive to replace, if lost or not returned properly.

\*\*\*\*\*People actually let equitainers ride around in the trunk of their cars and forget about them. You would not believe the stories we hear regarding “why I did not return the equitainer.” They are almost as good as what the grade school teachers hear for why a child did not turn in their homework!!!! We have received equitainers one year after shipment. During the height of breeding season, it is really important to receive all equitainers back immediately. We personally have close to 80 equitainers out per week during the peak season, and it represents a sizable investment to service your needs.

- Check for pregnancy. Call your vet and schedule an ultrasound so that you know if your mare is in foal. (Mares can be checked between 14 - 16 days post ovulation by ultrasound.) Twins can also be noticed at this time.
- Often a blood progesterone analysis is performed at this time. Your vet will help you determine whether your broodmare needs to be supplemented with any additional hormones.
- Please have your vet re-ultrasound your mare between 35-40 days to insure a viable pregnancy.
- If she is not pregnant, notify the breeding farm as soon as your mare is being cycled back for re-breeding.

If breeding farms would get together and write a book of all the “happenings” associated with breeding, you would

all be amazed. We have had mare owners actually order semen for their mare (although she was in foal) just because she had small follicles on one of her ovaries. One night, while doing paperwork in the barn office, I received a phone call from a mare owner at 9:00 P.M.. The woman was ordering a semen shipment and when I asked what day they needed it for she replied, "Collect now, I need it tomorrow morning and please send it out using Fed Ex tonight." While I was laughing to myself, she informed me that she had already checked on the main Fed Ex station in Louisville, and that it did not close until 10:00 P.M. She had asked for the impossible and needless to say, I will not tell you how I replied! Many of you would also be amused of how we "chase" down Fed Ex trucks (acting like the world has almost come to an end) just because a mare owner called after the final pick up or drop off time. I actually believe I could hold my own on the Indy racetrack. What could be so different between a racecourse and Louisville rush hour traffic as we are speeding to the airport like Mario Andretti? With all of the above, please be timely and courteous when ordering shipments!

This spring, please keep these tips in mind as you are getting ready to breed your mare. Your courtesy and organization will benefit everyone in the goal of getting semen successfully to your mare. It is to everyone's advantage to produce a LIVE FOAL, which requires working together and having mutual respect for each other to achieve the desired result.



Good Luck during the 2005 Breeding Season!