

## STANDING STALLIONS TO THE PUBLIC

There are multiple measures of successfully standing a stallion to the public. The ultimate measure of success is progeny of the stallion that perform well in the arena or racetrack. Another measure of success is short term and long term profitability. In order for everyone to be aiming at the same goal the stallion owner and the facility that stands the stallion should have a realistic discussion of their expectations on these subjects. They should then develop a plan that they are willing to stick with until the stallion has a chance for at least a few crops to perform.

There are many good stallions vying for the attention of the mare owners so in order to be successful a stallion must stand out from the crowd in some manner. The most successful stallions will have a combination of a proven family, a performance record that says he can compete with the best in the business, a conformation that lends itself to soundness that he can pass on to future generations and a mental attitude that allowed him and will allow his offspring to concentrate on and give their best effort to the task at hand. If he does not possess all of these attributes then the ones he does have must be all the better. Stud fees for outstanding stallions have become very competitive in recent years so lowering the stud fee is no longer an attribute that will distinguish a stallion from his competition. All of these topics should be in the discussion that makes up the initial plan to stand the stallion.

Once it is decided that the stallion is worthy of the expense and effort that it takes to stand him at stud then he should have a breeding soundness exam (BSE) performed to make sure that he has a reasonable chance to get a high percentage of his mares pregnant. The BSE will also help determine the number of mares he can breed each year and whether or not his semen can be successfully shipped as cooled semen or frozen semen. The results of the BSE can make or break the deal on standing him to the public.

### THE BREEDING SOUNDNESS EXAM

If the stallion has bred mares privately in the past then the BSE includes a thorough history from previous years. It should also include any medications the stallion may have been on while racing or performing if he is a retiring race or performance horse. The history should include the previous breeding management programs, the number of mares bred, the first cycle pregnancy rate and the seasonal pregnancy rate for all previous breeding seasons. The stallion's temperament and ease of collection should be part of the history.

Good body condition and good overall health are important aspects of having a successful breeding season and are part of the BSE. The BSE also includes examination of the stallion's genitalia, semen collection and collection of samples for culture along with an Equine Viral Arteritis test. The cultures are taken from the stallion's semen, prepuce, urethra and urethral fossa. These cultures allow the

identification of any bacteria that are growing in the reproductive tract that may affect fertility. The EVA test can be taken with a blood sample. If it comes up negative then the negative test should be documented and the stallion should then be vaccinated with an approved EVA vaccine. Most breeding farms requiring incoming shipped semen to be from EVA negative and vaccinated stallions. If the sample comes up positive for EVA because of a previous vaccination that was undocumented, the semen can be tested for EVA viral isolation. If the stallion is truly EVA negative but tested blood positive because of a previous vaccination, the semen viral isolation test will prove that he is EVA negative.

The libido and ability to mount a breeding phantom or live mare is evaluated. While the stallion is being prepared for semen collection, his penis is evaluated for any abnormalities or injury. If there has been more than a week since the stallion's previous collection a second collection should be performed an hour or so after the first so that a more accurate estimate of daily sperm output (DSO) can be obtained. DSO is used to predict the number of mares a stallion can impregnate in a breeding season. DSO can also be estimated by measuring the size of the testicles with ultrasonography. Testicular size is directly related to DSO. Ultrasonography of the testicles allows for evaluation of any abnormalities such as tumors or scar tissue from previous injuries.

The semen is evaluated for color, morphology, volume, concentration, raw and extended motility. The motility is evaluated for total progressive motile sperm. The semen is also evaluated for its ability to survive shipping, cooling and freezing if shipping and freezing enter into his reproductive management plan. If the BSE is being performed because of subpar fertility then other tests such as endoscopy, biopsy, sperm chromatin structure assay and hormonal analysis may be indicated.

The final evaluation is done when all the tests results are available. The stallion BSE does not guarantee a stallion's reproductive abilities but it can be a good predictor of a stallion's ability to impregnate mares. The results of all the tests will determine how many mares he can breed per day and per breeding season. The BSE requires some time and financial investment, it is usually well worth the time and money to know where the stallion stands reproductively before he is well into the breeding season.

## CHOOSING THE FACILITY TO STAND YOUR STALLION

Choosing the correct facility is important for two major reasons. The people there will be taking care of the stallion and they will be taking care of the mare owners and their mares. A stallion will stay healthier and will be less likely to develop undesirable habits if he can have plenty of time and space in which to exercise and to be a horse. The best situation allows him to have a pasture to run and play in and a large comfortable stall to spend his other time in when there is rain, or snow or the temperature is too hot or cold outside. Staying outside in very hot weather can decrease a stallion's fertility. The stallion should be placed in a stall and paddock or pasture where he feels comfortable in his surroundings. Many

stallions like being in a pasture or paddock where they overlook a group of mares while others may become too frustrated in such a situation. Their stalls should be large and well ventilated and preferably give him a view of what is going on outside so he can keep his mind occupied while in the stall. The facility should be kept neat and clean not only for the health of the stallions and mares that live there but a clean and neat facility often says that the people of that facility pay attention to details. Attention to detail is often the key to a very successful breeding season with happy mare owners.

Routine is very important to a stallion. They do better and are happier if they are put outside and brought back in at the same time each day. During the breeding process, routine is very important in order to get consistent results. Some stallions require minimal teasing while others require a lot. Some need to be close to a mare to perform while others may actually do better if they see the mare only briefly just before being collected. Other stallions don't need to be exposed to a mare at all. They can be collected just from the routine of being taken to the collection area and seeing the breeding phantom. The important take home message is that all stallions are different. In order to make sure the stallion does not develop any undesirable habits the routine must be designed to fit the stallion's personality. Trying to make the stallion's breeding routine into a strict cookie cutter pattern will only result in frustration for the stallion and the people collecting him. The handlers at the facility must be committed to crafting a routine that best fits the personality of the stallion.

The people at the facility should be knowledgeable in equine nutrition. A well balanced diet is extremely important for maximum fertility. If he is in a grassy paddock then grass is good for him to eat while outside. During his time in the stall most stallions do well if given free choice hay. The diet should be structured around a forage base. The grain and any supplements should be tailored to the individual stallion's needs. Different parts of the country will have different hays and grasses with different nutritional values and this will result in different needs for grain and supplements.

The stallion facility should be dedicated to making sure that the semen the mare owner receives is good quality. Nothing is more frustrating to a mare owner than to pay for the expense to get the mare ready to breed and have the semen arrive in poor condition. Some stallion's semen needs special processing. Semen with a low concentration will ship much better if it is centrifuged to a higher concentration. Equine semen ships better and lives longer if it can be shipped in a high extender to semen ratio with a concentration of between 25 million to 50 million progressively motile sperm (PMS) per ml of extended semen. Each mare on average should have a minimum of 1 billion PMS shipped to her for insemination. If the mare is bred at the stallion's facility she can be bred with 500 million PMS. It takes a coordinated effort on everyone's part to get good semen to the mare owner in a timely manner. Sometimes this will require that the stallion facility have specialized equipment in order to deliver quality semen to the mare.

The people at the facility should be dedicated to customer service. One of the most important parts of standing a stallion is customer relations. The stallion owner and the mare owner should always feel comfortable enough to call the facility and ask any questions they might have about the stallion or their mares. The people at the facility should understand that breeders will want to come to see the stallions and therefore someone knowledgeable about the stallions and someone that is comfortable showing the stallions must allot time to allow for this. The stallions should always be well groomed and their feet kept in good shape so that they present themselves well. Choosing a facility that is committed to customer service, taking excellent care of the stallion, getting mares pregnant and to delivering excellent semen to the shipped semen customers is paramount to the success of the stallion's career.

#### ADVERTISING: ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE

We will assume the stallion has all the positive attributes that include a proven producing family, a proven top level performance record, excellent conformation and a mental attitude that indicates that his progeny will be trainable. Promoting and advertising the stallion is a major key to successful stud career. The best promotion and advertising is winning progeny on the race track or in the arena. Stallions that are just beginning their career do not have that advantage. However whether a stallion is proven or is just beginning his career, he needs to be constantly in the public's eye. When a stallion has just come off of a successful career on the track or in the arena, he will have the attention of the breeders. However as he gets some distance between the present and when he was performing he will depend more and more on advertising. Now he must be presented to the public in his best light. Breeders use a variety of print and internet sources to help them make their breeding decisions. Magazines and websites such as Barrel Horse News with high subscriber numbers and high traffic numbers of potential breeders are excellent places to promote your stallion.

A good breeding stallion should have excellent conformation. There will always be horses that have good race and performance records that don't have the best conformation. However with all things being equal a horse with good conformation will stay sounder longer and perform better than a horse with less than perfect conformation. A breeding stallion will have a much better chance of long term success if he has excellent conformation to pass on to his progeny. The advertising program must draw the breeder's attention to the stallion so the stallion manager can demonstrate to the public that the stallion has good conformation, good bone and feet to pass on to their progeny. The idea of the advertising program is to get the breeder interested enough that he wants to further investigate the stallion by seeking more information or by visiting the stallion in person. The best way to do this is with a well designed ad with a great photo in a well respected magazine or website.

A stallion with good conformation not only has straight and correct legs with nice big strong feet but he is well balanced with a short back and long underline. If he is a runner he needs a powerful rear end to power his forward motion and nice strong well sloped shoulder that matches the rest of his body. He must be well balanced. A good photo can demonstrate a well balanced stallion's conformation. A poor photo is worse than no photo and can make a great looking horse look bad. The photographer must take light and time of day into consideration when photographing the stallion. The photographs must be taken at the correct angles so that a well conformed and balanced stallion shows those qualities in his photographs. Several different photographs with different angles demonstrate that the stallion manager is proud to display all aspects of the stallion's conformation. A horse can look good from one angle and not so good from another angle. If he looks good from behind then show it. If he is well balanced then a well taken conformation shot from the side is a good investment. As he matures new photos will need to be taken. Good action shots are also attractive to mare owners. After all, his foals won't be doing their job standing still. It cannot be expressed enough how important good photos are to the success of an advertising and promotional campaign.

It is important to keep the stallion in front of the public on a constant basis. A good advertising campaign starts before breeding season. The photos and ad campaign should be planned and started in November or December before breeding season begins in February. The stallion should be in front of the breeders in magazines and websites by at least December and monthly through April or May. A good advertising campaign with magazines and websites can cost \$10,000 to \$20,000 or more per year depending on the size and frequency of the ads. Consistency and quality are the keys in a good advertising program. Magazines such as Barrel Horse News have experienced consultants who can guide you through the process.

Standing a stallion can be a very rewarding business. It can also be an expensive business if not done correctly and with a well thought out and realistic plan. It is not a business that comes with a guaranteed pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The stallion business, like most good businesses, is a business for those people that are in it for the long haul. To be successful it requires a team effort from everyone involved.