

USING CUES TO HELP THE STALLION KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO BREED AND WHEN IT'S TIME TO SHOW

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It has become commonplace to see stallions in the performance ring strutting their presence. At times, the stage-presence is breathtaking. All too often however, stallions may also show instinctive signs of sexual behavior during these seemingly inappropriate times. We've probably all heard, seen or been around show grounds that have at least 1 stallion bellowing out to mares, or carrying an erection while in the ring. These are the challenges any stallion owner could have when faced with dual roles for a stallion, trying to increase his value by showing while earning his keep by breeding.

Although it is essential for stallions to express mating behavior for breeding purposes, it comes into conflict during the training/showing mode. While appropriate reprimand may be warranted under such circumstances often times trainers have quite different views as to what is an "appropriate reprimand". With over 50 stallions visiting our facility every year, we see quite a disparity in how each stallion gets acquainted with the breeding situation. Some stallions adapt to the breeding atmosphere quite well

while others exhibit some abhorrent behavior that presumedly is a result of previous negative experiences. These sexual dysfunctions range from complete shutdown of all sexual interest, inadequate erection, inconsistent performance, anejaculation (failure to ejaculate), to "stale or sour" attitude, over aggressiveness, and mean and/or mutilative behavior. In order to avoid us humans from being the cause of such undesirable sexual responses, stallion owners and trainers need to educate themselves on how to help their stallion

determine when it's time to breed and when it's time to show. This seems to be most effective when there is a use of "cues". Cues can be any tangible or environmental tool that aides in achieving the desired response. A rather simple but quite effective cue for many stallions is a change of environment. If a stallion is accustomed to only using certain paddocks and/or rings for riding and training then make a separate part of the facility only for breeding. This can be a paddock or open space in an area of the property he's never seen before but when exposed, he is allowed to exhibit normal sexual behavior. If a stallion is housed in a barn with a center aisle and doors on each end, one might designate one door to take him out for saddle work while the opposing door is only used to enter into his breeding area. It is interesting to watch most of the stallions coming off of the trailers at ERC. As soon as they see the surroundings, they start

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exhibiting their stallion-like behavior. Only seconds earlier, they were as quiet as a gelding. Other cues that are commonly used: when handling a stallion with a stallion shank put the chain in his mouth for breeding and above his nose for all other non-reproductive needs (i.e. going to turnout paddock, trailer, riding ring, etc.). Some owners strongly believe in lining one halter with sheep wool and only using it for breeding purposes. The stallion can get sexually aroused at the site of putting on this big halter. We also

cannot disregard the mere association a stallion can have with a certain handler. When possible, it may be wise to have a totally different person handling the stallion in the breeding area while an alternative person does the riding and showing. Lastly, one could take advantage of certain times of the year to help the stallion understand breeding time versus show time. This can be done by collecting and freezing his semen in the fall so that he only needs to focus on performance during the spring season. Those mare owners who want to breed in the spring can have easy access to his frozen semen while he is on the show circuit.

Along with cues, it is also important to know how to reprimand a stallion.

Reprimanding a horse should not be with the desire to pound him into submission. It is simply a verbal or contact cue that deters him from doing the undesirable act. Often times, a single, but abrupt pull down on the stallion shank will do it. Hitting the penis with a whip or any other piece of equipment is not recommended. Usually a short but noticeable tap of the whip on the croup or spurs in the belly can aid in drawing up his penis. Forced exercise via lunging or trotting can also be a very effective

means of getting his attention back to you. Just remember, when everyone has their own methods of getting the point across it is important to keep the goal in mind. The goal is that you help establish mutual respect. You respect his natural tendencies and allow him those freedoms under specific circumstances. He, in return, needs to understand that those tendencies are only appropriate when in the appropriate environment.

CUES:

- *Separate facilities for breeding and training.*
- *Bring stallion out of different doorway when breeding.*
- *Shank in mouth vs. over nose*
- *Sheep wool on halter when breeding.*
- *Different handler when breeding.*
- *Freeze semen during noncompeting season.*

One of the most rewarding times an owner will have with his/her stallion is when it acts like a gelding (quiet, mindful) in the show-ring while freely but respectfully exhibiting sexual behavior in the breeding situation. Stallions can learn to be wonderful dual-role horses when given the opportunity and proper learning techniques.