

JUGGLING THE DEMANDS OF YOUR STALLION'S BREEDING SCHEDULE WITH HIS SHOW CAREER

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With the increasing demands of scheduling shows while maintaining a breeding season, stallion owners often times are on the verge of pulling their hair out. Stallions need to establish their value by performing in the show ring but also have the time to “earn their keep” by breeding. This challenge has been dealt with in the horse industry for decades but in recent years a focus has been on utilizing strategic management techniques to maximize the value of both disciplines. Depending on the breed and discipline of interest, scheduling conflicts in these areas can easily arise. This is because the show season often overlies with the breeding season (March through October). A further understanding of recent advances in reproductive management has eased this burden to some degree.



Dual Roles: The stallion can learn to be a valued competition horse while also being a productive breeding stallion.

One approach stallion owners have successfully utilized is in creating a shortened breeding and show season. Under natural conditions the mare's ovulatory season doesn't begin until April or May however with the use of artificial lighting, mares can now start cycling as early as February. This allows certain stallion owners to designate the first 3 to 4 months (February through May) of the season solely for breeding purposes. As May draws to a close then all efforts become focused on executing the show

schedule. For this management scheme to be beneficial it is important for stallion owners to plan ahead and prompt all potential mare owners to put their mares under lights. Interestingly, stallions are like mares in that they are seasonal breeders. This simply means that he produces the most sperm during the summer months when day length is long. If a stallion is in high demand early in the season then it may be prudent to expose him to artificial lighting (16 hrs/day for min. 60 days beginning Dec 1) so his sperm output can be at optimum levels earlier.

Alternatively, owners may elect to try and juggle their breeding season around certain prescheduled shows. This can work as long as all interested mare owners are aware of those dates he's not available for service. In planning around such dates, it is wise to utilize an estrous



synchronization scheme. This simply means that one coordinates all potential mares to come into heat at the same time. With proper response to

hormonal therapy, most mares can be manipulated to come into heat only when the stallion is available. Since most stallions produce enough sperm in a single ejaculate to breed several mares, this scheme can be very effective in minimizing the number of semen collections necessary. Of course, an initial assessment of daily sperm output would help owners know how many mares can be bred with one ejaculate. Various progestins (most notably progesterone) and prostaglandins (specifically prostaglandin- $F_{2\alpha}$), are the family of hormones typically used to help synchronize mares. Protocols for estrous synchronization can be given if desired.

At times, some stallions have difficulty understanding when he is or isn't allowed to exhibit sexual behavior. This is particularly an issue when the owner is trying to have a show schedule and breeding season at the same time. Commonly seen are stallion-like tendencies, such as calling to mares, having an erection, rearing, resistance to leg aids all while still under saddle and/or in the show ring. Even after certain training methods are utilized, many horses still fail to understand. If all options are exhausted, then a possible alternative may be to use semen freezing techniques. These procedures can be done at any time of the year. Essentially, semen is collected, processed and stored for future use. There is no time limit in which the semen remains viable. It can stay in storage for years without losing appreciable integrity. Although all stallions do not have semen characteristics acceptable for freezing, those that can utilize these techniques may make

the owners' lives much easier. A common scenario is to collect and freeze semen in the fall when it doesn't conflict with the show schedule. Then when spring comes the stallion only needs to focus on the riding and training. Any stallion-like behavior can be appropriately reprimanded without giving conflicting signals to the stallion. If mare owners want to breed to him during this timeframe, then they simply use the frozen semen in storage. Even though frozen semen can be a benefit, one must realize that it does take appropriate experience and management skills to breed mares with this technique.

Lastly, if a person owns a stallion but only wants to focus on riding and training for his initial years, then hormonal therapy may be of some benefit. This is of particular interest to those owners with very vocal, sexually preoccupied stallions. Although other hormones are being evaluated, some evidence already exists that by administering certain progestins, sexual behavior in stallion can be markedly suppressed. The benefit is getting that gelding-like behavior without physically castrating him. One must realize however that this will most likely create a form of pharmacologic castration. Depending on the dose used, the stallion's testicles can shrink in size and stop their ability to produce sperm. Evidence suggests however that once the progestin is no longer administered, spermatogenesis will begin again resulting in viable sperm 75 to 90 days later.