



"Cappuccini" by renowned equine artist Jan Künster

The Mommy Track

SHOULD YOU BREED YOUR BELOVED MARE?

BY AUDREY PAVIA

YOU LOVE YOUR MARE, AND YOU'VE BEEN THINKING about breeding her to a super dressage sire in the hopes of producing a quality prospect. After all, isn't that one of the perks of mare ownership?

Breeding your mare can have a number of benefits. You can produce your own horse to train and compete, or you can sell the baby to someone looking for a young dressage prospect. Knowing these things, it may be tempting to put your mare's reproductive capacities to work. However, ex-

perts in the field of breeding recommend that you consider a number of factors before you take the plunge.

Examine Your Motivation

"The first step you should take before breeding your mare is to examine why you want to breed her in the first place," says Hanoverian breeder Gina Krueger, who co-owns Garland Farms Dressage, Dahlonega, GA, with her husband, John. "Is it for personal use? If so, what discipline attributes does your mare possess that you would want to have in the foal? What



Dr. Sandi Lieb's Dutch Warmblood mare Promised (Wanroij x Lacewing - Rolls Royce) with Venturo, her 2002 colt by Olympic Ferro

attributes does she not have, or is she weak in? If you are interested in producing a dressage horse for yourself, you'll want to look closely at your mare's trainability, including her temperament and character, her conformation as it pertains to soundness, and her gaits and way of going."

If you are planning to sell the foal as a dressage prospect, you'll need to take a few other factors into consideration as well, according to Krueger. "You must be very critical of your mare if your main interest in breeding is for resale," she says. "The mare must have not only good overall quality of type but also of pedigree to command a price that will offer you a profit. Minimal expenses are the breeding fee (average \$2,000), mare care for the year of pregnancy (\$2,000), and foal care per year after birth (\$2,000). In order to make 10 percent on your investment, a yearling would need to be sold for a minimum of \$7,200. This won't repay you for all for your time, energy or worry—and this is a best-case scenario, meaning the mare becomes pregnant on the first cover, there are no problems at birth that require veterinary care, and so on."

Even if you have no plans to sell the foal, you still need to consider the costs involved and to determine whether it's truly worth your while to lay out the money and to devote the time needed to raise a youngster.

Is She Mommy Material?

After you have decided that you are willing to take on the expense of bringing a foal into the world, your next obligation is evaluate your mare as with as little bias as you can.

"When breeding for a dressage horse, I consider three major factors: movement, temperament, and longevity of soundness," says Sandi Lieb, PhD, of Micanopy, FL, an associate professor in the University of Florida's Animal Sciences Department and a long-time breeder of Dutch Warmbloods and Holsteiners. "To breed for movement and longevity, you must have a strong working knowledge of the conformation points that produce and influence these two factors, especially as they relate to dressage." (For more on evaluating conformation and movement, see October's "Hot Prospecting: A Buyer's Guide.")

Moral issues enter into the decision as well. "A breeder also has the responsibility to breed to improve the breed or type they are producing," says Lieb. "This means you must start with breeding stock that is at least average in quality, not at the bottom of the quality scale. If you are contemplating being a breeder, therefore, you must be extremely familiar with the end product you want to produce and be able to recognize an individual mare that is average or above in the factors required."

Lieb recommends going forward with breeding only if you can determine that the mare has a good chance of producing an above-average foal. "Look at your mare's own com-



Lieb plans to breed this three-year-old homebred NA/WPN mare, Samsara (Idocus x F Charmion - Johanniter), for the first time next year



COURTESY OF LYN SKILLINGTON

Lyn Skillington's Morgan mare Bethesda Sorceress with her three-month-old colt, Spring Hollow Night Magic



COURTESY OF LYN SKILLINGTON

Skillington's Morgan mare Caduceus Jocasta (shown here with five-day-old Spring Hollow Dark Shadow) has a new Dutch owner, who will use her as a foundation mare in a Morgan sport-horse breeding program

petition record and at her pedigree," she says. "If these are above-average, then evaluate her conformation, movement and temperament. No horse is perfect, but you need to know your mare's best points and shortcomings so a stallion that best complements her can be chosen."

Lieb points out that experience—whether it's your own or someone else's—is invaluable in evaluating a mare. "I have many years invested in studying and learning about conformation, biomechanics, and movement, and have handled and raised a few hundred horses," she says. "This has taught me about these factors. You cannot learn all this overnight; so if you are not knowledgeable, have someone who is look at your mare and give you an opinion of her usefulness as a broodmare."

Lyn Skillington, of Spring Hollow Morgans, breeders of American sport horses in Hopewell, PA, adds that your mare's health also should be a factor in your breeding de-

cision. "Look at her health, both general and reproductive," she advises. "Regardless of whether the stallion owner requires a reproductive soundness exam and clean culture, it's a good idea to get them anyway. This will often save you money in the long run."

Are You Breeder Material?

Aside from the mare's quality and health, other factors should come into play when you are considering whether or not to produce a foal.

Sandy Werner, of Odessa, FL, raised a foal from her own mare as a dressage prospect. The resulting Andalusian-Hanoverian cross, Maxwell Smart, went on to become a champion in driving, in halter, and under saddle at the 2002 Andalusian Southeast Regional Championships, Newberry, FL, at the age of three. Werner believes that mare owners should take a good hard look at their physical and financial situations before they embark on the road to breeding.



COURTESY OF SANDY WERNER

Sandy Werner bred her Hanoverian mare, Wolkenrose, to an Andalusian stallion, and got . . .



ANNA MARIE URQUIHART

. . . Maxwell Smart (shown here competing in hand)

THE BREEDING PROSPECT

All of the same good traits you'd want in a riding prospect are desirable in a breeding prospect—and even more so, according to breeding and buying experts Willy Arts, co-owner of DG Bar Ranch, Hanford, CA; Judy Ehlers, owner of Glenwood Farms Hanoverians, Wilton, CA; and Debby Harrison, DVM, owner of Lio Lomas Dutch Warmbloods, San Juan Bautista, CA.

"A breeding prospect needs to be more correct than a riding prospect because it's going to produce lots of riding horses," says Ehlers. "The riding horse is the end product; the breeding horse is the beginning. So I would want to start with as good conformation as possible. Correctness is very important: Toeing in or out, for example, is a serious fault in a breeding prospect."

The same goes for movement. "You can't throw away the horse's natural ability for engagement and collection in favor of conformation or you'll be breeding prettier

horses that can't perform at the upper levels," says Harrison. "You have to have both; but if the horse doesn't have the movement, to me, why breed it?"

Other traits are also particularly important in a breeding prospect. These include:

Good character, particularly in a broodmare, who will influence her foals until they're weaned.

Solid pedigree, which helps to ensure that the horse's good traits will be passed on and aren't merely a genetic fluke.

Breed type and sex type, which help to stamp the get with presence and expression.

The bottom line, says Arts: Choose breeding animals with as few shortcomings as possible; then make sure you can live with those deficits. Breed two strong individuals "and you get something special," he says.

— SUSHIL DULAI WENHOLZ

"The mare owner should first consider him- or herself," Werner says. "Do you have a suitable place to raise the foal? Do you have sufficient knowledge to raise the foal properly and safely? Do you have the time and money to devote to raising a foal and seeing that it gets a proper start in training? In this latter regard, help is out there, but you must be careful to pick trainers with good reputations who have already produced many well-trained animals. I have found that those who truly know what they are doing are very kind and gentle with the horses—an important quality in selecting a trainer for my own horses."

Be honest about your own capabilities, Skillington urges. "You should be realistic about your ability to care for a mare before conception, during pregnancy, and after she foals," she says. "Do you have the knowledge, experience, and facilities to raise a foal safely? Do you have a good vet who is successful and up to date in equine reproduction? If you are going to use shipped semen and keep the mare at home, do you have a vet with a proven track record of being able to time collections and inseminations? If you are planning to breed using frozen semen, is the vet experienced—and successful—with that breeding method?"

"Also, do you have a flexible enough schedule to be home for multiple veterinary appointments?" Skillington continues. "If not, then you are better off sending your mare to a clinic or to the stallion to be bred. But even if you do send her away for breeding, you will have follow-up care: periodic exams, vaccinations, and then the foaling and subsequent mare and foal care, which will take a great deal of your time and may require you to be available on short notice. If you have a hectic full-time job, lack

the ability to be home when needed, and have no backup, then you are probably not a good candidate to be the owner of a mare in foal."

Krueger adds that you should consider how you feel about not having full riding access to your mare during part of her pregnancy. "The loss of use of the mare for several months should also be considered," she says. "Most mares become rather uncomfortable at five to five-and-a-half months of pregnancy, which is when the fetus is of such a size that it begins to pull on the muscles of the back and loin. This is not to say that the mare can't be ridden. On the contrary, it is important that she be kept in as good a shape as possible. But she will not be as comfortable in the work as normal, especially during the last month or two of gestation, when most mares are not comfortable carrying a rider for more than simple pleasure riding, like a walk in the woods.

"Also, once the mare has foaled and throughout lactation, riding her can be problematic at best," Krueger says. "Some mares and foals are more accepting of being separated during this time than others. If you are lucky enough to have a facility that is safe to ride in with the foal by your side, that is also an option. Most of the time, it is easiest on everyone to wait until weaning to put the mare back to regular work."

Can You Find Mr. Right?

Another factor in your breeding decision is your ability to provide your mare with a suitable mate. In order to make the endeavor worthwhile, you need skills in picking the right stallion.

According to Lieb, if you are starting with an average or above-average mare, producing a foal that is an im-

provement over its dam should be fairly easy. "Identify the two to three most obvious factors of the mare's conformation, movement, or temperament that are deficient or needing improvement; then find a stallion that is good in these specific traits and consistently produces them in his offspring," she advises. "The difficulty is that most sires have a few of their own deficiencies, so you need to make sure that your mare is very good where the stallion is weak."

Lieb suggests reconsidering your decision to breed if you find that you've listed more than two or three obvious deficiencies in your mare. "The same thing goes for the stallion," she says. "If he has too many faults your mare must compensate for; he is not a good bet for breeding. Trying to improve more than a few factors at a time usually means very slow genetic progress, and you end up producing below-average foals."

If you lack the expertise needed to pick a stallion for your mare, ask the advice of those who know more than you, Werner advises. "I found many judges eager to offer their opinions as to what stallion would be best for my mare and why," she says. "That was extremely helpful to me. Also, breeders offered advice that I listened to carefully. Another good tool is the Cosequin/USDF Breeders' Championship Series. Taking your mare to some shows

will get you a good assessment of her strengths and weaknesses as seen by some extremely knowledgeable horsemen and -women. Use their comments to choose a stallion whose conformation complements your mare's strengths and who is strong where she is not." (Visit www.usdf.org for information about the USDFBC Series and other sport-horse-breeding-related programs and events.)

Experienced breeders know that, even if you micro-manage all of the details, the resulting foal may be less than you'd hoped for. (After all, every Thoroughbred foal doesn't go on to a successful racing career.) "Breeding is always a risk," says Skillington. "Even if you adopt the motto, 'Breed the best to the best and hope for the best,' in the long run it's often smarter to purchase a youngster that suits your needs and desires rather than gambling that your mare produces the foal of your dreams."

Bottom line: Although breeding for a dressage prospect is always a roll of the dice, for many mare owners, the prospective joy of owning a foal that they bred themselves is well worth the gamble. ▲

*Audrey Pavia is the author of *Horses for Dummies* and a former editor of *Horse Illustrated* magazine. She lives in southern California, where she trains in dressage on a Connemara named Frankie.*

LAITIN

1995 16.2h bay
Oldenburg Stallion
by Le Champion
out of Isabelle
by Argus

2001 USDF Champion
Oldenburg ~ 1st Level

2001 USDF Region 7
Champion ~ 1st Level

2001 CDS Res. Ch.
Horse of the Year ~ 1st Level

2000 Highest scoring
Oldenburg at the
100 day Stallion testing

Trained & shown by
Rachel Satory Saavedra

Laura Dwyer ~ Laitin Life Farm
3061 Avellano Dr., Walnut Creek, CA 94598
925.943.4998 email laura@laitin.com www.laitin.com

Landon ~ 3 month old ~ High Point Premium colt

photos by Sheri Scott ~ Nancy Hawkins ~ Laura Dwyer