What Mare Owners Should Know About: Stallion Collections, Shipping Semen and Contracts.

by Colleen Embree-Jay

Today with Artificial insemination (AI) and Shipping practices, many more stallions are available to mare owners. But with distance comes problems. Lack of personal contact with the people you are dealing with can cause communications to break down.

What happens at the stud farm - the daily management of the stallion - is something that is critical to your mare getting pregnant. And the stallion owner who seems unconcerned with your immediate needs, may simply be maintaining a schedule crucial to the outcome you so desire. Stallion management, though not complex, is demanding in its requirements for consistency and accuracy. A stallion needs food, exercise and proper handling to function well in the breeding shed. And although this sounds no more than any horse requires, oversights can be disastrous. If a stallion contracts a virus and suffers from a fever, it can negatively alter the semen for approximately 60 days. A stallion who is over bred (every other day breeding and/or collection is ideal) can also quickly deplete his sperm count and require up to a week to breed successfully again.

It is the stallion owner’s responsibility to provide the required amount of viable semen to the mare being bred. Studies done by Colorado State University have found that 1 Billion Progressively Mobile Sperm (PMS) is the optimum number to ship. 500 Million is what is required On Farm to get a mare in foal. More is a waste and less may not do the job. So it is not necessary to get the entire collection. Splitting collections is the best way to ensure that all the mares booked to a stallion will receive the required dose. It is also not unusual to ask for a semen analysis with the shipment. This will tell you how many live sperm there are swimming in a straight line (PMS) and what percentage of the entire raw collection was alive at the time of collection.

It is also ideal to breed a mare once per heat cycle. The less foreign substance (i.e. extenders) inseminated, the less the mare’s body has to absorb. With climate changes and other factors known mostly to Mother Nature, some mares hold onto follicles or lose them and more shipments are required thus more foreign fluids for her system to get rid of.

One of the most depressing phone calls a stallion manager will get is the request to rebreed. Now he has to book another appointment and arrange to have the stallion shipped off to the collection farm. Some are miles away and can cost a fair dollar for their services.

If he collects at home, arrangements have to be made for extra staff to handle the stallion, the tease mare and the collection unit (AV), not to mention the supply of shipping containers that must be purchased, the lab materials like incubator, microscope, slides, a mechanism for counting sperm and other various sterile equipment, $$$$.

Every time a stallion collects on a phantom he risks hurting himself. Many stallions take a break from the show ring during the breeding season, because of the extra stress on their backs. But if you are not out there winning, nobody wants to breed to your stallion. And if you are not available for collections the mare owners are screaming. A real Catch 22.

I have been hearing some complaints from mare owners about having to pay collection fees, knowing the collection was split and shipped to other mares. Perhaps “Collection Fee” is the incorrect term and it should be “Re Service Fee.” Most contracts specify how many shipments are included in the initial price before having to pay for further collections.

One of the reasons for this extra fee is to discourage people from breeding more than one mare or wasting the collections. Once the shipment leaves the stud farm, there is no guarantee what will happen to it. A breeding contract is for one live foal.

Of course there is the mare owner who is having all kinds of problems with the mare’s cycles. This drives everyone crazy and the mare owner ends up spending a small fortune and getting no foal. Then everyone is blaming each other for bad semen or a bad vet. It is best to develop a good relationship between the mare owner, the stallion owner, the inseminating vets and the collection technicians. It is a team effort and the mare owner is the glue that keeps it all together. If you are breeding and investing a lot of money, take the time to educate yourself fully. Colorado State has a fantastic short week long program. So do many other universities and colleges.

Trust your instincts and know your mare’s cycling habits. Try not to blame when the mare doesn’t catch but rather work together to solve her problems.

All in all breeding your mare should not be traumatic. Good communication and attention to detail should keep the stallion owner and mare owner in partnership, not at odds. And in eleven months both will enjoy a delightful phone call announcing the successful birth of a beautiful new foal.