



West Virginia

THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

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The Great Debate: Stallion Vs Mare

Horses, like people have their own personalities and peculiarities.

When looking for the ultimate pairing, to maximize racing potential or financial gain in the sales ring, which component in the equation, stallion or mare takes precedent?

In the selection process, does one use a scientific or subjective approach to the mating configuration?

It seems especially difficult to determine, in a sport, where males and females often compete against each other as equals.

The layers to this story appear endless, so I sought out an assortment of local breeders for their qualified opinions.

Maurice Casey DVM, owner of Mares Nest Farm, located in Shenandoah Junction, was the first to chime in with his knowledgeable thoughts on the subject.

"While it takes two to tango, I personally feel the mare contributes more to the foal, than the stallion," said Casey. "There are so few stallions whose AEI (average earnings index) is greater than their CI (comparable index). The CI indicates the producing quality of the mares bred to a stallion. Examples of this anomaly are Midshipman and Quality Road. In 2020 their AEI was greater than their CI, but perennial national

leading sires Tapit and Mineshaft were not. A foal spends 11-plus months in the uterus of his/her mother, followed by 6-7 months they experience during this period is intensely shared and certifies the unification process. Good mares can be bred to most stallions and produce a runner. Many elite sires produce black-type runners in the 7 percent range. Compare that with an elite mare and the incidence of her success is much greater. A good mare can take her pick of prolific sires. I believe the time a foal spends alongside it's mother influences personality, character and desire. I don't minimize a stallions importance, but my preference is clear."

The next contestant on the mating game is the enterprising trainer and well-respected advocate for horse aftercare programs, Diana McClure.

In conjunction with her husband Michael, the couple own and operate DMC Training Center in Berryville, Va.

"I have always subscribed to the theory, 'If the stallion was a racehorse and the mare was a racehorse, you have a good shot of producing a racehorse.'

A stallion in the current market has to be successful and earn a considerable amount of money, at the races to be highly valued. So, that would lead you to

believe that all thriving stallions have successful foals. However, that is not always the case.

Enter the mare into the equation. If you have a mare that was victorious at the races and has foals that are winners, then you have a proven producer and your challenge is to breed her to a sire that crosses well for your desired distance or surface.

Because stallions are bred every year to multiple mares and a mare can only produce one foal per year, it is only natural to assume that the sire contributes more to the industry than the mare. But, if a mare produces a winner every year, she obviously is working harder and longer to benefit the breed. Furthermore, the mare carries the foal to term and raises the foal for at least 4-6 months, thus her characteristics and behavior are imprinted on that individual.

There are stallions that pass on good and bad behavioral genes to their offspring, as well as tendencies of soundness and unsoundness. Patterns, traits and attributes can be established easily in stallions than mares due to the large amount of offspring a stallion produces, however if a mare produces a winner every year it validates her effort is greater than the stallions, especially if she is bred to a different stallion every year.

Another observation is that of a mare that never makes it to the races, due to injury, yet becomes a proven producer of winners, contributing a higher level of accomplishment to the foal than the stallion.

It is very rare that anyone would stand an unraced stallion, however unraced mares are bred constantly, so its natural to assume that the mare and her family have more influence on the foal."



The Stehr family continues to wage a generational battle for survival in a market that has pummeled farms with considerably more assets.

Their response to adversity is to emphasize family unity, hard work and prudent judgment.

Tabitha Stehr-Wilhelm, daughter to Vicki and niece of Joe Stehr, provided me some personal keys to their survival.

"Growing up in the breeding/racing industry, it was obvious how lucrative and important to have a performing stallion.

As a family unit, it was always a heated debate when a discussion ensued on future stallion prospects. Characteristics that a good stallion must possess are solid race record, money earned and lineage. It is hoped that he will pass this on to his offspring, but for me the mare holds a primary place in the formula for success. While stallions are the superstars of our business, I prefer a sturdy mare with determination, if you want all the boxes checked for what you are searching for at the racetrack. . . the winner's circle."

Tabitha enumerated that even mares past their reproductive prime can have healthy productive foals, while an aged stallion often loses his commercial value in the early teens.

Said Tabitha: "So many factors can determine success or failure. Are you breeding for speed or stamina. Are you a commercial breeder or breed to race? Your local picture may be dramatically different than

nationwide. Here the need for speed is intensified by Charles Town's track size. Everyone would like to breed for quality, but economics decide many an argument. For the Stehr operation, the development program in West Virginia has been the proverbial carrot for our family-run operation, while the carding of state-bred races imperative to our continuation. In ranking, my focus is the mare first, stallion second."



Sires considered good or great may produce stakes winners at a 5-7 percent rate, while I've witnessed extraordinary broodmares produce in the vicinity of 60 percent.

In this ongoing argument, I'm a mamma's boy, so I'll defer to my sensitive side, and prefer the matriarch to instill dimension and athletic prowess.

Ultimately, even with unlimited research, DNA analysis, structural and cardio measurements, Nick ratings, etc., it's a roll of the dice.

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- The WV Thoroughbred Development Fund distributes almost \$5 million to breeders, owners, and stallion owners of accredited WV-bred and/or -sired horses based the horse's annual earnings at Charles Town and Mountaineer Park racetracks.
- The West Virginia Breeders Classics pays out almost \$1 million in purses for WV-bred and/or -sired horses. It is held annually on the second Saturday in October.
- \$800,000 in purses are allocated for up to 16 WV accredited stakes races during the year.
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- West Virginia offers year-round racing with approximately 300 race days per year.

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