Thinking Of Putting Your Mare In Foal?

Whilst the thought of having a lovely home bred foal which in time matures into your perfect riding horse is a lovely idea this may not be the reality. The decision to put your mare in foal needs much planning, time and effort.

There are four main questions that anyone considering breeding from a particular mare should ask:

- **Is she suitable for breeding?** Conformation, temperament and performance are key. A mare shouldn’t be bred from simply because she is no longer suitable for any other purpose!
- **Are suitable facilities/expertise available?** Including facilities not just for the in-foal mare but also for foaling, for the new born foal and in time for a growing youngster. Do you have the experience to deal with a foaling mare and potential problems or would she be better at stud?
- **Can I afford it?** Stud fees, livery charges and routine and unexpected veterinary bills can add up to a substantial sum and there is no guarantee that a healthy foal will be produced/the foal will mature into a quality horse. Breeding can be a risky business for both mare and foal.
- **What are my plans for the foal?** Are you breeding to sell or breeding for yourself? What will your circumstances be in 4 years time when the foal is grown up and ready for riding?

Having considered your options and decided to go ahead your next decision is which stallion to use. This is influenced by your mare in terms of conformation and abilities but also what the foal’s intended use is. Considerations include conformation, soundness, performance, temperament, fertility, cost and terms of the stud fee and availability of chilled/frozen semen.

*So you have a suitable mare and have found the ideal stallion to complement her, what next?*

Your vet will need to come out and perform some pre-breeding checks prior to commencing the process of actually getting her in foal to ensure the best chance of success. These include;
- Swabs and blood tests to check for specific bacterial and viral diseases, namely Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM) and Equine Viral Arteritis (EVA) – It is worth getting these done early in the season to save time later on.
- Gynaecological examination to inspect the mare’s vulva, vagina and cervix.
- Ultrasound examination per rectum to ensure both the uterus and ovaries are normal and to check the mares stage of the oestrus cycle. Uterine swabs can be taken at this stage if there is any concern over infection/previous fertility issues to allow appropriate treatment.

If your mare is not in season at the first scan then she will be given drugs to bring her in to season. Once she is in season your vet will need to visit regularly to perform repeated ultrasound scans to ensure that she is inseminated at exactly the right time to optimise chances of pregnancy. If you are using frozen semen the number of visits and scans is much increased due to poorer semen quality. It is essential that you have adequate facilities to restrain your mare for these examinations, some mares need sedation for everyone’s safety.

Remember to liaise with the stud and ensure that the semen is available and delivered when requested accompanied by the correct paperwork – contact the stud with plenty of notice!

After insemination we will visit again to ensure that all has gone to plan, that the mare has ovulated and there is no adverse reaction to the semen. Some mares will need further treatment at this stage including further injections and flushing of the uterus.

Assuming all goes to plan then pregnancy diagnosis will be performed between 15-18 days and at 30 days where hopefully we will identify a heartbeat! Unfortunately many mares (especially older ones) won’t get in foal first time so be prepared to go through it all again!

In a nutshell consider your options carefully, contact us in plenty of time to discuss your plans, be aware that your mare will need several visits prior to insemination and then keep your fingers crossed for a happy bouncing foal!