

## Selecting a Holsteiner Stallion for Your Mare

By Wendy Webster

With dozens of beautiful photos and owner comments lauding each stallion's exceptional accomplishments, how is it possible to make a decision and choose the "right one"?

As in most endeavors, it helps to have an organized plan in order to make a decision on which stallion will be right for your given situation. It would be helpful to proceed with paper and pencil to answer a list of pertinent questions regarding the intended purpose of the offspring that you will create.

Firstly, are you breeding your mare to create a riding horse for yourself and family or are you breeding in hopes of selling the resulting foal? Do you aim to produce a horse for competition or will it be a pleasure horse to be enjoyed without the added pressure of the show scene? Does your mare have a show record which will make her offspring attractive to potential buyers or a temperament that you would like to reproduce for the enjoyment of amateur riders?

Once you have realistically answered the above, you can proceed to the physical evaluation of your mare. If she has been presented at a Holsteiner Mare Inspection you will have received a set of scores known as "bonits". These numbers give a rudimentary picture of how your mare measures up to the ideal conformation and gaits of the Holsteiner sport horse. If these scores indicate a less than ideal characteristic in her conformation, or gaits that are limited in scope, it is important to analyze potential mates for her with these characteristics firmly in mind.

Approved Holsteiner stallions have also been given bonits (in most cases) and this data is available online for scrutiny by potential breeders. Stallions that have scored better in the criteria where the mare is weak should be noted on your analysis. (i.e. if the mare received a 6 for her topline and walk, choosing a stallion with a score of 6 for topline and walk may do little to improve the quality of the foal) Here is where the adage of "Breed the best to the best and hope for the best" applies. The goal of breeding Holsteiners is to produce a product that exceeds the previous generation's quality. Of course, if your mare has already produced one or more foals, you may be familiar with characteristics she is passing on to her offspring already. If so, that is valuable guidance on what type of stallion she should be paired with or which type should be avoided. Also, keep in mind that just because a horse is a particular size, the size of the offspring produced can vary widely depending on what other genetics are present in the horses to be bred. If you have a 15.3 hand mare and you would like to create a 16.2 hand offspring, breeding to a 17.2 hand stallion may not produce the desired result. Scrutinize several generations of the stallion's pedigree to see what the average size of his relatives are.

At this point in your analysis, you may have a reasonably long list of potential stallions but still need some help to whittle the list to a final few. Referring back to our first set of questions, now it is time to differentiate the choices by whether they can be marketed effectively should you have chosen the sale route for your foal. Does the stallion have a substantial track record in competition which will be attractive to buyers or has he produced quality offspring that can verify his prepotency as a sire? If you are breeding for yourself, has the stallion produced

offspring that are effectively ridden by persons with your skill set as a rider? If the stallion produces big gaits and you are a novice dressage rider, future riding compatibility could be questionable. The same can be said of stallions that carry superior jumping genetics. If you aspire to the ranks of the show hunters and your chosen stallion has proven himself at the highest level of grand prix jumping you may not end up with the horse you desire. The attributes needed to jump the highest fences require quickness across the ground, sharp reflexes, and a certain amount of “fire” in the horse, not the same characteristics as required in today’s show hunter.

The next item to consider, especially if you are breeding a mare with 100% Holsteiner genetics, is whether there are duplicate names in both your mare’s and potential stallion’s pedigree. While the use of linebreeding has been commonplace in Holsteiners bred in Germany there is scientific information which warns that too much crossing back to the same bloodlines can be detrimental to the health and well being of the offspring.

Now that your list has become a bit shorter it is time to talk about the economics of this endeavor. The basic stud fee for fresh semen is only a portion of the cost required to get your mare in foal. Frequently the stud fee is totally separate from the fee for collection and shipping of the semen. If your mare is a reliable broodmare and your vet has reproductive expertise, then it may only require one or two shipments to produce a pregnancy. Sometimes, however, the mare does not settle right away and multiple shipments become necessary, adding to the costs. In addition, if the stallion is only available by frozen semen it is recommended that the mare is domiciled at a reproductive facility to ensure the best possible timing of the insemination. Be sure to verify that your vet has experience with frozen semen breeding if an equine reproductive facility is not available to ensure a reasonably successful outcome. You may be able to reduce your shipping expenses by procuring multiple doses of the frozen semen at one time and keeping it on site at the vet facility for use when your mare is ready. More and more vets are finding this alternative a far less risky protocol given the potential for overnight semen shipments to be delayed or worse, even lost, just when the mare is ready to breed.

If you have decided fresh semen is the optimum choice for your mare, it is imperative that you check with the stallion’s manager regarding his availability for collection during breeding season *before* you sign the breeding contract. If the stallion will be competing, it may not be possible to get fresh semen on the schedule you desire. Additionally, some stallions are highly popular and during peak breeding season it may be necessary for the stallion manager to “split” the amount of semen collected at any one time in order to accommodate all breeders.

While the prospect of producing a stunning foal that emulates the best attributes of a gorgeous stallion is nice to imagine, the reality is that your mare plays a huge role in producing the youngster and selecting wisely based on her quality will lead to the best result.

Good luck and happy breeding!