

BREEDING THE MINIATURE HORSE – SIZE DOES MATTER

Is it safe to breed my mare?

Regardless of what one may have read, or been told by so called “breeders” of Miniature Horses, the size relationship of the stallion to the mare **DOES** matter! Nature has a cruel side to her and left to nature miss-matched breeding can have disastrous outcomes. The fallacy that nature adjusts the size of the foal for the size of the mare has meant many foals and mares have been lost due to the foal being too big for the mare to deliver.

To breed a small mare, to a stallion much larger than herself is a high-risk gamble of the mare’s life. The Miniature Horse mare is at greater risk as the genetic background of her breeding may include larger horses, which may not be apparent from her size. The mare owner also needs to consider the not so uncommon practice of restricting the nourishment given to growing Miniature Horses to stunt their growth. A mare may not have reached the full size that her genetic make-up would have allowed due to nourishment restriction. She still will pass on those genes governing size to her unborn foal. The size of the horses behind her is also of utmost importance. If she has a parent or even grandparent much larger than herself she may pass on those larger genes to her unborn foal as well. Remember the heights recorded on pedigrees are not always accurate.

A mare, regardless of size should never be bred to a stallion proportionally much larger than herself. A rule of thumb with BIG HORSE breeds e.g. Thoroughbred - is a maiden mare should never be bred to a stallion more than one hand (four inches) taller than her-self, and a Thoroughbred mare that has foaled without difficulty should never be bred to a stallion more than two hands (eight inches) taller than herself.

**CONSIDER THIS - A MINIATURE HORES MARE IS ONLY A
QUARTER THE SIZE OF A THOROUGHBRED - THAT WOULD MEAN
A MAIDEN MINIATURE SHOULD NEVER BE BRED TO A STALLION
MORE THAN ONE INCH TALLER THAN HERSELF, AND A MARE THAT
HAS FOALED WITHOUT DIFFICULTY SHOULD NEVER BE BRED TO A
STALLION MORE THAN TWO INCHES TALLER THAN HERSELF.**

There are other important considerations. A ‘narrow’ mare should not be used for breeding. Any broodmare should be wide between the hips to allow enough room for delivery of the foal. A small mare with larger horses in her pedigree – check back at least two generations - has every chance of passing on those larger genes to the foal she will carry. A mare should not be bred to a stallion than is obviously ‘bulkier’ than she is. Find out the size of the horses in the stallions pedigree as well. If he has larger horses in the first TWO generations back he has every chance of passing on those larger genes to the foal he sires.

If you care about the welfare of your mare you will want to breed her to the most suitable stallion for HER! This may not be the most popular stallion. Even when monetary value of the prospective foal is a consideration think about the costs of

emergency veterinary intervention to a complicated foaling, and the real risk of losing the foal and even the mare.

When we decide to breed a mare we must take full responsibility to give her the best chance possible to safely deliver a healthy foal. We must choose wisely, the stallion she is to be bred to. We must ensure she receives the best care possible during her pregnancy. We must do all we can to supervise her foaling in a safe environment. We must ensure she has sufficient nourishment to maintain herself in good body condition while meeting the demands of feeding her foal.

Beware 'breeders' who claim that nature takes care of her own. She doesn't always! It is true that some small mares deliver foals by larger stallions. HOWEVER there are many more that don't. One doesn't have to go far to find a sad situation of an inexperienced new Miniature Horse owner that buys a mare in foal only to lose her due to her inability to safely deliver a too large foal.

Sometimes we do all we can to ensure our mare has a safe delivery to no avail. Nature still can show her cruel side. So why would one stack the odds against the mare and breed her to an unsuitable stallion. A very old saying amongst breeders and stable-hands – *if in doubt, don't*. This may be the ideal summing up of "Is it safe to breed my mare?"