

## **BROOD-MARES**

The growing popularity of Miniature Horses has seen many new horse owners purchase Miniature Horses. The breeding of Miniature Horses does require extra consideration due to their diminutive size.

Age - a mare ideally will have reached her third birthday before she is bred. This will allow her time to grow and develop before she has the added demands of feeding her developing foal.

Body condition - a mare should be in good body condition (*see body condition score chart on MHF Inc. website*). She will not be poor or overly fat. She should be maintained in good body condition throughout her pregnancy. The problems of poor condition are obvious, BUT less obvious are the problems associated with the mare being excessively over weight during pregnancy. An obese mare will have more difficulty delivering her foal and added stress will be put on her heart. The pregnant mare should ideally be at pasture where she will give herself the gentle exercise nature intended. If she becomes overly fat at pasture it is preferable to give her a few hours at pasture twice a day and confine her the rest of the day to limit her calorie intake. Under no circumstances should feed be withheld for more than 12 hours straight. It is not as nature intended to have her locked up in a yard or stable 24 hours a day, where she will not get that gentle exercise that a grazing horse receives. The use of muzzles to restrict eating should not be used. If mare is bedded on wood shavings, sawdust, rice hulls or soiled bedding and is eating such bedding, or manure it is not getting enough quality roughage to eat. Where-ever she is housed or paddocked, she must have clean cool water available at all times. She must have shade from the sun and shelter from extreme winds. She must have adequate gentle exercise - ideally grazing, a minimum four hours a day. She should not be underfed and only receive top quality feed. If the quality of feed is not suitable for the most valuable of breeding stock regardless of breed, it is not suitable for a Miniature Horse! All hay must be clean, devoid of rubbish and weed, and sweat smelling.

Health care - a mare should be wormed regularly with a wormer suitable for her stage of pregnancy - CHECK THE LABEL as not all horse wormers are suitable at all stages of pregnancy. Some should never be given to a pregnant mare. Her teeth should be in good order and her feet should be kept trimmed as required. She should be vaccinated against tetanus and up to date with her booster shots.

The stallion chosen to breed to a mare should not be overly larger than the mare. This is not just height, **BUILD** should be seriously considered. Ideally the stallion chosen will be smaller in **BUILD** than the mare. Body condition and weight will affect the look of size and build so one needs to see through this and see the true build, which is the bone structure.

Another serious consideration is the size of the horses behind both the mare, and

the stallion being considered. A small mare of slender build, with larger more bulky parents has the genetic make-up of her parents and her foal may inherit these larger genes. She has the potential to carry a foal that is larger than she can safely deliver, so stallion selection is extremely important. It would be safer to breed such a mare to a stallion smaller than she is, with a refined build, who himself has parents that are smaller and more refined than the mare. The size of the mare does not always dictate the size of her foal. The genetic make-up of the foal is not restricted to the sire and dam. A wise formula is - the foal is the genetic result of all four grand-parents.

Inspection of the mare will assist in accessing her suitability to be bred from, and stallion selection. Look at her **BUILD**, not her body condition. A good broodmare prospect will have a generous barrel and well sprung ribcage. She will not appear sausage bodied and have flat sides to her body. Standing in front of her, she will have a chest with width and muscling. One should be able to comfortably fit a fist between her front legs where they meet the chest. A narrow chest indicates a narrow body and lack of room for a developing foal, which will put extra stress on what may be already compromised heart and lungs. Look down on the mare at her hindquarter. She should be noticeably much wider at the hips than the shoulders. From behind, her hips will appear generous and the points of hip will be high, not sloping down sharply from the croup as aptly named 'coat-hanger hips'. The points of buttocks will also be wide. Narrow between the hips and points of buttocks will mean the mare has little room for delivery of the foal through the pelvic region. Temperament and handling is most important. A mare should be kind natured and easy to handle. She should be easy to catch. These things ARE important as if she needs assistance during foaling her attitude towards people and being handled WILL make a big difference to the success of any assistance required. A mare that will not be caught that requires assistance delivering her foal can still make it next to impossible to catch until she is that exhausted that assistance may be too late. Mares in labour can and do get up during contractions to evade being caught. Once such a mare foals if she feels threatened she may abandon her newborn foal, or run her newborn foal to exhaustion and even death.

Stallion selection - a stallion ideally should not have a large bulky head, nor heavy shoulders as can be seen on heavy ponies. These traits may be passed onto his foal and if so will make delivery of the foal more difficult for the mare. Ideally he will be a similar or smaller size and build to the mare.

Before it is decided to breed a mare consider where she will foal? She should not be left in the paddock unsupervised. Most mares do foal without assistance but if it is required there is very little time to get her that assistance. From the time her water breaks she should deliver her foal within 20 minutes. The chances of the mare and her foal surviving after one hour are greatly reduced even if experienced equine veterinary assistance is available. Any longer than twenty minutes an experienced equine veterinary assistance should be sought even if

such a vet is only 'five minutes away'. It would be wise to investigate the availability of such a vet well before the mare is due to foal. If one is not available at close proximity it may be advisable to send the mare, a month before her expected foaling date, to a suitable stud where a suitable vet is available. Investigate the reputation of the vet and any such stud well before the mare is due to foal.

There are many excellent books on breeding horses including what to expect leading up to the mare foaling, the actual delivery of the foal and the care of the newborn foal and the newly foaled mare. Knowledgeable practical experience is impossible to replace with books and if the first time horse breeder has the opportunity to observe a mare foaling under experienced supervision, such an opportunity should be taken. Your mare and your best friend at foaling time is NOT 'Joe Blow' down the road who knows something about horses. It is an equine veterinarian experienced in horse reproduction. Find one and get to know him.

May your mare's foaling be without problems and you have what we all want - a healthy mare and new-born foal.