

Broodmares or Bust

How much *does* the mare contribute to the performance ability of her offspring? Depending on who you ask and the performance event that you are discussing, expect the answer to be somewhere between 50% and 80%.

If you asked us, we believe – from the best information available – that the mare contributes about 70% to the performance ability of her offspring, regardless of the event. This seems to be obvious in the marketplace where the price of a young horse is more dependent upon the quality of its dam than any other factor other than soundness. A foal out of a low quality mare will be lucky to bring the stud fee while an offspring from a superior female will fetch a price 5 to 10 times the stud fee.

With all this being true, why then is so much emphasis placed on the sire's side of the pedigree? One reason is the sire's influence on the population. A stallion can have many offspring every year where as a mare is normally limited to one.

Another reason for the emphasis on males is the historic American attitude about upgrading. It has been a traditional breeding practice to gather locally available females of inferior quality, cross them on a superior male and keep the best fillies for broodmare replacements.

"The times they are a changing." No longer is a mare capable of producing just one foal a year. Modern technology is allowing multiple births through the transfer of embryos into surrogate dams.

And as we move into the 21st century, show horse breeders have identified most of the exceptional female dam lines. Interestingly, this mirrors the evolution of the Thoroughbred breeder. By the end of the 20th century, Thoroughbred breeders had established which female families held the genes capable of producing superior race horses.

As with great stallions, unfortunately, there are never enough "Blue Hens" to meet the demand. (A Blue Hen is a term used to identify a broodmare that has produced a family of outstanding performing and producing offspring.) Even if embryo transfer becomes wide spread, finding enough great mares to go



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around and be affordable for every horseman's pocketbook just isn't going to happen.

This means that breeders who want to breed good horses need to buy into the best broodmare family that they can afford. It is our recommendation that if you have \$7500 set aside to purchase broodmares, buy 1 rather than 5.

Search for the mare that has best distaff side – the female dam line. Do an extensive pedigree to see if that dam line traces to a "Blue Hen". The closer the mare is to that foundation broodmare the better the odds are that she will also be a successful producer.

Of course, there are other characteristics that are important for a broodmare. The mare should have the correct conformation for the event that you are breed-

ing for and she should have a trainable disposition. Remember, 70% of the ability of the foal is going to come from his dam and some of that is related to its conformation and ability to take training - both physically and mentally.

To become a successful breeder in the 21st century, it is time to give up the idea of making a broodmare out of any mare, especially the ones that are too unsound of body or mind to ride. The bottom line: Without quality broodmares the chance of producing economically valuable offspring is a bust.

— Dr. Jim and Lynda McCall

Visit the McCalls at their website:
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