

STALLION CHOICE, an aid

By Hermien Wierdsma

With spring already here, the first foals have already been registered. Many people are wondering about the question of what stallion to use for their mare this year. There are many criteria that can be used for making a choice of stallions. For long-time breeders it's like second nature, for breeders who are looking at the first breeding season for their mare, the multitude of possibilities can be very confusing. In this article you'll find a number of 'aids' that can help you come to a decision.

Inbreeding Coefficient

A number of stallions can be eliminated as a partner for your mare because of a too close relationship. An easy way to see immediately if a stallion fits your mare by pedigree (and only that) is to write out the pedigree the foal would have with the stallion of your choice. When the same name doesn't appear twice in the first three generations (parents, grandparents, great-grandparents) the inbreeding percentage will not be too high. FHANA members can obtain inbreeding coefficient percentages by accessing FHANA's web site at www.fhana.com and clicking on Inbreeding Coefficients in the Member Services block. Or, FHANA will mail the inbreeding coefficient percentages to members who submit \$10 for each mare for which they want a report. The FPS studbook advises to keep the inbreeding percentage below 5%. However, the notion that the lower the percentage, the better the combination, is not a correct one! There are many more factors you will have to take into consideration.

The Mare

Each horse has its strong and weak qualities. You will want to improve on the weak ones and maintain the strong ones. An impression of the qualities of your mare is given on the linear score sheet that is filled out for every mare and gelding that enters the main studbook. The completed form is sent home to you some time after the judging.

In the stallion index that is enclosed each year in *Phryso* you can find information about the hereditary traits of each stallion. In this way you can look for a stallion that seems to improve on the points that are weak in your mare. These points can lay in exterior (length of the head, height, back, deviations in leg positions etc.) and in the gaits (length, balance, regularity etc.).

Of course it's not only about conformation; the horse also needs to perform. Your mare might have competed or done a mare test (ABFP or IBOP)

if she was imported from Europe. This is where strong and weak points come forward, especially those that are hard to notice during a judging on conformation, like character or love of work.

When you know your mare well, it will be easier, with the available information of the stallions, to find a good partner for her.

Successful combinations

When your mare has produced foals before, you can evaluate the results of those matings. With a young mare without offspring, you can evaluate the combinations with various stallions with, for example, her sisters. This not only applies to judging results, but also to performances. You can look for 'good' combinations in breeding in general, for example study certain 'stammen' (family lines) in the mare book and look for succesful combinations in the large family lines.

The Stallion

Often it's easier to get information about a stallion's breeding results, because a stallion can produce many more offspring than a mare.

Conformation index

As mentioned before one can find the inheritance of certain traits in the stallion index. Indexes are not a 'one time deal', they can change every year because of the number of judged offspring. An index based on a low number of offspring is less dependable than those based on a larger number. You will have to keep this in mind when studying the indexes. Some of these things are illustrated thoroughly in the explanation up front in your index.

Judging results

Foals: each year the results of the past judging period are published in *Phryso*, both the results of foals and of adult horses sired by each stallion. Foal results for each stallion are published with information about the premiums they received, the percentage white per stallion and also the births as a percentage of mares bred. For a good impression of the judging results of the foals, the number of both first AND second premiums should be looked at, instead of only the number of first premiums. When owning a mare with white markings, or one from a mare or stallion line with a higher 'white occurrence',

it is wise to choose a stallion with a low white percentage.

Studbook/star mares: From stallions whose oldest offspring can be presented for entrance into the main studbook the results regarding percentage studbook entries and star mares are published each year—not only from the past judging season, but also from the overall cumulative total of star mares produced by one stallion. You have to realize again that the results of this 'life total' can shift each year and that the dependability of these lists increases with a higher number of judged horses.

Offspring report: Each year results are published of the stallions that are up for their offspring evaluation. These reports contain a treasure of information for breeders, especially now that the offspring evaluation has been extended with information about the performance abilities of the offspring.

See for yourself

Sometimes a theoretical review is the only possibility for breeders, when for example large distances (an obstacle for most breeders outside The Netherlands) make it impossible to visit judgments and compare horses. But it is of course important to see for yourself what you think of the offspring of various stallions. Two horses can be of different types and still both become star or receive first premiums as foals. This information cannot be found in lists or schemes and by visiting judgments you can see for yourself which type of horse you prefer.

Sports performance

At judgments mostly the conformation of the horses presented can be evaluated. The joy over a new star mare is, understandably, enormous, but it's not only, or always, the horses that are at the top of their class that also are the best for performance. There are some very good sports horses that for some reason have not been registered in the studbook or have not received star status. Examples of these

reasons can be: unallowed white, insufficient height, temperament (the well known jig-er which never shows its walk at a judging) or imperfections in conformation.

Besides the performances made by the stallion himself, the information about his children's performances are especially important to find out whether a stallion passes on his talents. Many Friesian horses compete in various disciplines. You can stay up to date by reading performance results listed in *Phryso* and horse magazines featuring specific disciplines. Also the results of IBOP and ABFP-test (where the sires are always mentioned), always published after a test has been done, can give you valuable information.

The Goal

With all the information mentioned above in the back of your head you have to think for yourself what goal you have set for your breeding program—what kind of horse you hope to breed for. What are your wishes concerning character, performance and conformation? What is most important for you? It won't be possible to change everything at once, you will have to set priorities.

Is Breeding Gambling?

Some will say it is, others will dispute this. It is a fact that breeding is not simply a matter of adding strong points and weak points, eliminating and then breeding the perfect foal. With help of all the information above we hope to have helped you a little bit in finding your way in the fascinating world of breeding. Talk a lot with other breeders; visit as many judgments and horse shows as you can to look for your ideal horse; and remember that every mare is different, so you want to find a mate for your mare that specifically suits her.