

Stallion Selection – What am I trying to build?

by Robyn Lay

Breeding season is just around the corner. For those who plan to breed foals it is important to look at the factors that will determine what kind of foal you actually build. I have conducted a non-scientific poll asking people in my Facebook group what criteria are vital in their stallion selection. The five most important criteria overall – determined by how often they were mentioned by different people was, 5 Panel N/N, Performance, Pedigree, Conformation and Color. Most people selected color as their least important. Performance and 5 panel testing seemed to be at the top of the list.

The first question to ask is; what you are planning to do with the foals you breed? If you are looking for a specific discipline, you might want a stallion that excels in that discipline. The second thing to look at is what flaws your mare(s) may have that you need to correct in a foal and make sure the stallion you select will be able to address those flaws. Next would be to search for a disposition that is sane, workable, and trainable. A performance record can be proof of a good disposition. Stallions that are able to get out and compete in the public prove they are sane and not just wild breeding machines. This kind of mindset in a horse is vital for a successful life.

Personally I like a horse that handles “new” things in a thoughtful way. Typically, untrained horses do not have this characteristic simply due to never being asked to use the thinking side of their brains. Therefore an untrained stallion really represents a lot of question marks as to what he can bring to the table for your foal. For me, a stallion that has at least been put under saddle and has a sane and impressive temperament is a must.

Two things are very specific to Appaloosa breeders due to the nature of our breed. The first is pedigree. ICAA has strict pedigree requirements and a clear goal of getting to purebred status at 8 generations and beyond. In this regard it is important to select a stallion with as much Appaloosa breeding as possible. However, if there are bloodlines that you prefer in stallions that are lower F numbers we still have a structure whereby they can be added to our collective gene pool. Now is the time to build those lines up to the 8 generation level.

The second specific criterion is color. This is the primary identifying characteristic of the Appaloosa and the best examples of the breed exhibit beautiful color and/or coat pattern. That should always be the goal however; it should not be the only or even the most important criteria. As breeders of colored horses we are constantly criticized by those who do not like our breed as breeding only for color. Conformation is paramount in building a horse that will have a long and productive life and that along with disposition, in my opinion, should be the most important factors to consider. Having said that it is easier now than ever before to breed and get color due to the genetic testing that is available. In breeding a foal to sell I will always try to get color as much as possible but that selection is only made after I consider conformation and disposition.

Genetic testing should have gone at the beginning of my article because it is imperative that we have a genetically clean gene pool with which to create the purebred. With recent rules added to our registry all stock will need to be tested and clean by 2017 so it would behoove everyone with breeding stock to have them tested as soon as possible. I applaud the registry for taking a stand on this issue and we are the only stock breed registry to do so.

I think it is just as important to hold your mare to these same standards. As breeders it is our responsibility to do our best to improve the breed by selecting mares and stallions that produce offspring better than they themselves are. Not all horses should be bred. Try to be objective when you look at your horse. I can tell you from experience that it is much cheaper to buy a foal on the ground than it is to produce one. Breeding your mare will not guarantee that her personality will transmit to the foal. I have two out of my mare and neither really has her personality. If that is the only reason for you to breed, I would encourage you instead to find a foal that meets your other criteria because it will be a lot cheaper and you won't have to wait a year to get started working with her.

Considering all these criteria and thoughtfully selecting a stallion to pair with your mare will give you a sound, sane and beautiful foal and will improve our registry with the quality that will set our breed apart from all the others.

Happy trails and happy foaling ☺

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