

# ***BREEDING THE MARE***

## **Sexual Maturity**

Most fillies will start to cycle between 12 – 24 months of age. A mare has two ovaries and a large number of eggs are formed inside these ovaries. The eggs are nourished in fluid filled sacs called follicles. Only a few eggs a mare produces will ripen. Those eggs that do ripen, are released when the follicle bursts into a shallow pit on the surface of the ovary. This process is called ovulation.

Prior to ovulation the follicles release a hormone into the mare's bloodstream. This hormone causes a change in the mare's behaviour. This behaviour is called being on heat or oestrus. If the mare is not bred during this heat or is bred and fails to conceive the mare's behaviour returns to normal for a period of 15 days. This cycle of 21 days (6 days oestrus and 15 days interval) is called the oestrous cycle. The oestrus cycle lasts until either the mare becomes pregnant or the mating season ends. The winter usually coincides with a period of reproductive dormancy called anoestrus where the mare does not come on heat. While the normal cycle is 21 days with a period of anoestrus, some mare's cycles may vary in length and frequency and some cycle all year round.

## **Physical Maturity**

The age a mare should be put in foal for the first time depends on the maturity of the mare. Few mares are well developed enough to be bred as two year olds so it is better to wait until they are 3-4 years of age. If you do breed a two year old mare she will need extra care during the pregnancy as she herself is still growing. The mare will also be losing her foal caps during this period so will have a harder time maintaining condition than a mature mare with her adult teeth. A mare is called a maiden mare if she has not had a foal before. These mares, regardless of age should be monitored closely during the pregnancy and especially during foaling.

## **Physical Condition**

The physical condition of a mare plays a part in her fertility level. Thin mares have lower fertility rates than mares in good to fat condition. Assess the condition of your mare before breeding.

1. **POOR.** Extremely emaciated. Spinous process, ribs, tailhead and hooks and pins projecting prominently. Bone structure of withers, shoulders and neck easily noticeable. No fatty tissue can be felt.
2. **VERY THIN.** Emaciated. Slight fat covering over base of spinous process, transverse process of lumbar vertebrae feel rounded. Spinous process, ribs, tailhead and hooks and pins prominent. Withers, shoulders and neck structures faintly discernable.
3. **THIN.** Fat buildup about halfway on spinous process, transverse processes cannot be felt. Slight fat covers ribs. Spinous process and ribs easily discernable. Tailhead prominent, but individual vertebrae cannot be visually identified. Hook bones

appear rounded, but easily discernable. Pin bones not distinguishable. Withers, shoulders and neck accentuated.

4. **MODERATELY THIN.** Backbone still protrudes along back. Faint outline of ribs discernable. Tailhead prominence depends on conformation; fat can be felt around it. Hook bones not discernable. Wither, shoulders and neck not obviously thin.
5. **MODERATE.** *Dividing line for acceptable body condition for a broodmare.* Back level, ribs cannot be visually distinguished, but can easily be felt. Fat around tailhead beginning to feel spongy. Withers appear rounded over spinous process. Shoulders and neck blend smoothly into body.
6. **MODERATE TO FLESHY.** May have slight crease down back Fat over ribs feels spongy. Fat around tailhead feels soft. Fat beginning to be deposited along the sides of the withers, behind the shoulders and along the sides of the neck.
7. **FLESHY.** *Considered optimum broodmare body condition.* May have a crease down back. Individual ribs can be felt, but with noticeable filling of fat between ribs. Fat around tailhead is soft. Fat deposited along withers, behind shoulders and along neck.
8. **FAT.** Crease down back. Difficult to feel ribs. Fat around tailhead very soft. Area along withers filled with fat. Area behind shoulder filled in flush. Noticeable thickening of neck. Fat deposited along inner buttocks.
9. **EXTREMELY FAT.** Obvious crease down back. Patchy fat appearing over ribs. Bulging fat around tailhead, along withers, behind shoulders and along neck. Fat along inner buttocks may rub together. Flank filled in flush.

