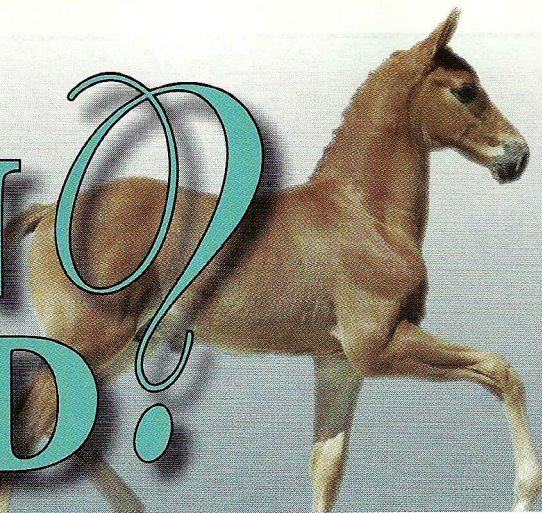


BORN ^{to} BREED!



By Gigha Steinman

You poured over pedigrees, studied stallion websites and memorized your registry's guidelines backwards and forwards. You bought a breeding, and now a year later, your mare has foaled a healthy beautiful colt. Or perhaps you purchased a lovely young colt from a breeder. Either way, you are proud and excited about your new arrival and his potential. Your friends think he is fabulous. They assure you he will be spectacular some day! It suddenly occurs to you that maybe you should keep him as a stallion prospect. Visions of a cresty neck, glistening muscles, lofty passage steps or a glide over a giant oxer suddenly inspire you ...

Being a stallion owner is exciting and rewarding, but at the same time it's expensive, time-consuming and not without its risks and potential disappointments. What is involved with raising and standing a sport horse stallion? The decision to keep a colt intact as a stallion prospect isn't a decision to be taken lightly.

Is He Stallion Quality?

The first and most important thing to consider is whether or not a colt is high enough quality to be considered a legitimate stallion prospect. Of all the Warmblood and sport horse colts born each year, only a tiny percentage of

them will have what it takes to be approved for breeding.

You must evaluate your colt honestly with a critical eye. Remember that mare owners have easy access to top stallions worldwide using fresh and frozen shipped semen, so why should they select your horse? Is your colt as nice or nicer than other stallions which are already available? Does he have movement, conformation, trainability, and talent which will improve the breed and/or sport? Does he have breeding and bloodlines which are desirable?

Martin Richenhagen is an FEI judge and was the Chef d'Equipe for the German Dressage Team at the 2008



Leatherdale Farm keeps all their stallions standing in Germany. This is Damsey ridden by Steffen Framm. Photo by Kiki Beelitz



Just the Best, now 19, was bred and raised by Tish Quirk and proved to be a successful stallion prospect. She owned both his sire and dam, Best of Luck and Timely Persuasion. Photo by Tish Quirk

Olympics. He has also been on the panel at Germany's Bundeschampionat in Warendorf. He feels that movement and conformation are the most important things to consider in a stallion prospect (and he notes that the two things are connected). He also advises that anyone considering keeping a colt as a stallion prospect should have the horse fully evaluated by a veterinarian to ensure there are no health or soundness problems which could be passed on to the offspring or which could cause the horse not to pass stallion testing. He further advises all stallion prospects should have quality bloodlines with good mare lines in addition to top quality sires, and he adds that often in the United States there is not enough emphasis put on the dam.

Doug Leatherdale is the President of the American Hanoverian Society and owns Leatherdale Farm with his wife Louise. They have five stallions, including the Hanoverian stallion Damsey, who made headlines when he was one of the stallions chosen to be bred to the Olympic mare Brentina. (That colt was born in April of this year.)

When asked what his biggest piece of advice would be for someone considering keeping a colt as a stallion prospect, Doug's response is "I wouldn't advise them to keep a stallion!" He feels that we have too many stallions already in the U.S., and that too many of them are unsuitable quality. He says a stallion prospect must have "absolutely exceptional quality conformation, movement, temperament, and rideability—they must be top class." He estimates that even in Germany, less than 1% of colts will go on to become licensed stallions.

Doug also adds that "we don't have the tradition in this country for stallions, for riding and promoting them properly." Not enough people know how to handle a stallion or realize the extra experience that is needed to handle a stallion properly. He says the same is true of riding; that we don't have enough people accustomed to riding stallions. He adds that he has seen "too many people attempt to stand a stallion, and later they are sorry."

Evaluating a young colt can be difficult, especially for someone without a lot of experience evaluating young horses. Breed inspections can be helpful as inspectors will sometimes single out certain horses to be presented again at a later date as stallion prospects. This is no guarantee that the horse will be approved for breeding in the future, but this professional outside opinion can be helpful for someone considering keeping their young colt intact. It can also be helpful for a colt owner to seek the outside opinion of other experienced, respected breeders and stallion owners.

It's a 'Thumbs Up'

Assuming your colt is determined to be stallion quality, and you think you may "go for it," there are many practical

issues involved with keeping a stallion which you will want to consider.

Keeping the stallion prospect healthy and sound as he grows and matures is always a challenge. As most breeders know, raising youngsters who are curious and accident-prone requires careful management and simply put, luck. Maryanna Haymon stands the Grand Prix dressage stallion Don Principe and has bred numerous colts, some of which she feels are potential stallion prospects. One of Maryanna's favorites, Dance Master MF, a three month old 2010 colt, recently was seriously injured while out in pasture. So serious that the jury is still out as to whether he'll survive. "He was fine with the herd at 2:30 one afternoon," Maryanna reports. "I came back out to check on everyone at 7:30 and there he was, three-legged avoiding all weight on his left hind. We are heart-broken and are waiting to see if he'll pull through." Ask any experienced breeder: accidents can and probably will happen.



Three month old Dance Master MF, a very promising stallion prospect for Maryanna Haymon, is seriously injured within a week of this photo taken. Photo courtesy Maryanna Haymon

Most people will agree that stallions should be handled by professionals, and at the very least a skilled handler. Mature stallions are also typically kept separated from other horses requiring additional paddocks or pastures with generally sturdier and higher fencing. Where will you keep him? If you don't have your own farm, be aware that many boarding barns will not accept stallions.

There may be additional liability issues with keeping a stallion, and some states have laws specifically referencing stallions. In Arizona for example, "a person who maintains a stallion or jack with reckless disregard for the safety or health of other persons or property or livestock of another is guilty of a class two misdemeanor." So before deciding

to keep a stallion prospect, it may be wise to check into local regulations and/or the availability of boarding barns where he can be properly housed.

The Approval Process

Most Warmblood and sport horse registries have some sort of approval process for stallions to be approved for breeding. This can range from a one day inspection to a 10-day, 30-day, or 70-day stallion test, depending on the breed and registry.

The expense involved can be as variable as the approval requirements. Some registries will approve (or provisionally approve) a stallion based on a single inspection. In this case the stallion owner will be looking at the cost of the inspection, the cost of hauling to inspection, and in most cases the cost of hiring a professional handler to present the stallion.

Registries requiring 10-day, 30-day or 70-day stallion tests can be significantly more expensive. For these tests, the stallion should be started under saddle well ahead of time so that he is in shape for the testing (stallion owners will usually hire a professional for this), and the tests are held in fewer locations (resulting in higher expenses for shipping or hauling the stallion to the test site.) The recent 70-day stallion test hosted by Silver Creek Farm in Oklahoma received a lot of attention because it was the first test of its kind to be held in the United States. The cost of this testing alone was \$8,500 per stallion.

Training

Training begins with groundwork well before they are started under saddle. Maryanna believes in allowing all her young male horses, yearlings to three year olds, to be turned out together in what she labels the "bachelor herd." This is important for the colts and geldings to understand herd psychology and how the pecking order works. This teaches them respect at a young age so that when she or other handlers work with them in hand, they understand how to behave with the herd leader, now the handler. Maryanna also brings them to inspections and breed competitions when young to experience the show scene.

To bring out the full potential in a young stallion, most will be sent to professionals for training. Not all professionals are experienced working with stallions, and not all professionals will take stallions in training, so a stallion owner may have to do a bit of homework to find an appropriate trainer for their stallion. The expense of keeping a stallion with a professional trainer can also become fairly significant, as full training with a professional can easily range from \$1,500 to \$3,500 per month. There are different types of arrangements that can be made with trainers, i.e., part ownership of the stallion for reduced training fees, but this is rare. Every

situation can be a little different; the main thing is to have all arrangements in writing so that there are no misconceptions for either party.

Your stallion's training and showing may progress nicely, but you have to be prepared for the unexpected. Maryanna experienced this when her trainer, Courtney King-Dye, had a serious fall from another horse putting her in a coma early this year. Immediately Maryanna was faced with finding another trainer to step into Courtney's shoes until Courtney is back in the saddle. After interviewing seven riders, some with Olympic experience, she selected Courtney's assistant trainer Jennifer Marchand to take over the reins.

Also, young stallions must be trained for semen collection. This process is often referred to as "phantom training." Phantom training typically takes less than a week and is usually done professionally. At this stage the young stallion will be taught to mount the breeding phantom (or "dummy") and breed the AV (artificial vagina). The semen volume, concentration, and motility will be evaluated, and the semen's longevity will usually be tested using a variety of semen extenders to see which works best for the particular stallion. Some breeders have the equipment and experience to do this training and evaluation at home themselves while many prefer to have these initial steps handled by a professional reproduction facility.

Marketing

You may have the nicest stallion in the world, but you won't sell many breedings if people haven't ever heard of him! It's a competitive business, and a stallion which is well trained and showing successfully is more likely to attract the attention of mare owners. This can become another significant expense with the cost of trainer fees, show entry fees, hauling and more. For example a week of showing with a top trainer at the prestigious HITS (Horse



Maryanna Haymon's stallion prospect, Delacroix MF, a two-year-old by Don Principe out of a Sandro Hit/Don Gregory dam, competed at the Dressage at Lexington show where he won Colt Champion and second Reserve Young Horse. The handler is Brendan Curtis. Photo by Mary McKenna

“You may have the nicest stallion in the world, but you won’t sell many breedings if people haven’t ever heard of him!”

Shows In The Sun) hunter/jumper circuit could easily cost \$4,000 or more. A typical three day dressage show with a professional could easily cost \$1,000 or more.

Besides competing the horse, advertising him is crucial. Simple basic stallion ads on a few of the primary internet sales sites will cost around \$50 each on average. Print advertising is considerably more, starting around \$200 for a small ¼-page, black-and-white advertisement in some prominent magazines and going as high as \$1,500 for full-page color advertisements. Professional graphic design of the ads can further increase this cost. The goal of internet and print advertising is to drive traffic to your website, an extremely important marketing tool.

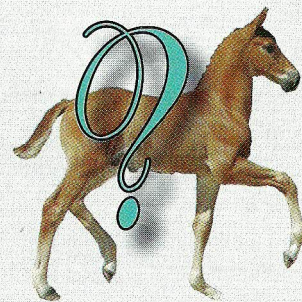
You’ve spent the money on training, showing, and even advertising; so now it’s imperative to make a good investment in your website, which is ultimately where your customers will visit. The quality of your website can affect the perceived quality of your stallion and leave the visitor with the feeling that either he is top-notch or he’s in a backyard operation. EQ Graphics is a company specializing in designing and managing equine websites, with basic websites starting around \$2,500 and running as high as \$7,500 to \$10,000 or more for bigger more elaborate websites. It certainly is possible to create and manage your own website with the many affordable website design software packages available today, but it is time consuming and it may lack the polished look of a professionally-designed website.

As part of your website, you can’t underestimate the importance of a quality video of your stallion. Seeing him move freely as well as under saddle is desirable for most stallion shoppers. Adding video clips of existing progeny is a good idea too if there’s time. Videos which are poor quality or too long can lose the interest of your viewers.

Other Logistics

Once all of the other pieces have fallen into place, you’re ready to begin sending out shipments of your stallion’s semen. This can be another hurdle! Do you have the facility, knowledge, and help to collect him at home? A basic lab can be set up for around \$3,000, and the cost of a breeding phantom (to collect the semen) will be another \$3,000 approximately. Many stallion owners prefer to haul their stallions to professional facilities for

stallion collection. This can cost an average of \$200 - \$300 per collection (and may vary by area), plus the time and expense of hauling the stallion to and from the collection facility. Whichever route a stallion owner chooses, this is another expense which should be taken into consideration.



There are other little details as well. Stallion owners will have to decide if they will ship using Equitainers (\$220 each) or disposable shippers (around \$30 each), and they need to have enough shipping containers on hand to meet the demands of breeding season. And then there is the paperwork. There are breeding contracts to be signed, breeding certificates to be sent out, and most registries have their own paperwork which must be submitted as well.

Stallion owners also have to be available and “on call” during breeding season. Most stallion owners must be prepared to collect and ship semen with very little advance notice (typically the same day or the next day.) Stallion owners have to ask themselves if their schedules will accommodate this kind of unpredictability. Some choose to send their stallion to a professional who has the facility and experience to manage stallions during breeding season. For example, Hilltop Farm in Colora, Maryland offers this kind of service for a select group of “Guest Stallions.” This can make the entire process much simpler for the stallion owner but also more expensive. It can also be difficult to juggle a stallion’s training and showing schedule during breeding season—another important thing to coordinate with the trainer.

The Benefits

Your stallion has been approved for breeding, he’s with a professional trainer, he’s showing successfully, you’ve got a good marketing strategy in place for him, and you’ve got a half dozen new Equitainers waiting for shipments. Now what?

Nobody knows the real figures, but it is commonly accepted as a fact that Warmblood stallions in the U.S. average only five to six breedings per year. With some popular stallions selling closer to 30–40 breedings per year, this means that there are also many stallions selling only one or two breedings per year or none at all. Stud fees on average fall into the \$1200–\$2500 range.

It is easy to see that the majority of stallion owners are not going to make a profit in the most literal sense of the word! However, there are many benefits to be gained from standing a stallion which can’t be measured in money.

Many stallion owners take a great deal of pride in

standing a stallion. Some get satisfaction in knowing they are contributing to the future of their breed and horse sports in general by offering breeders another quality stallion to choose from. Still others enjoy cheering for their stallion from the sidelines, reveling in his successes or seeing him featured in a top notch magazine ad.

Jill Burnell currently stands four imported approved Warmblood stallions at her Gray Fox Farm in California (with a fifth stallion soon to be added to the roster). She says she began importing stallions because she couldn't find exactly what she wanted in a stallion here in the U.S. She admits she didn't initially think she'd like owning stallions, but has found it "really satisfying to have more control over the babies [she produces]", and has found that she really enjoys the stallions. "They have more personality, they're more fun, and they're beautiful," she says.

It can also make sense economically for a farm to stand their own stallion if they are breeding a lot of mares. Gray Fox Farm currently has forty mares, and Jill says that by owning her own stallions "I can get exactly what I want, I can save on stud fees, and it's more convenient." She's also found that the stallions bring attention to her farm and more traffic to her website which is beneficial as she has foals for sale in addition to the roster of stallions available.

Jill feels that "if you do it right, you can make money with stallions." She says she had a blueprint and a plan before she ever bought her first stallion. She advises that "you have to know the market and buy accordingly." She also stresses the importance of marketing noting that "ads have a cumulative effect" and "you have to get your name out there." She also feels showing is important to prove her stallions and to get them additional exposure, and she also advises to "show smart"—choosing the best trainers, shows, and venues to get the most for your money. She adds that she is lucky in that mare owners seem to share her taste in stallions.

Tim Holekamp owns the Olympic eventing stallion Windfall. Tim offers another perspective on stallion ownership. He says that for him "standing a stallion isn't about chasing the ephemeral profit" but about "trying to upgrade things, trying to incrementally improve horse genetics, trying to improve the horses for everyone participating in eventing and dressage, and in particular,

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to improve the horses available for our country's international teams."

American Success Story

Mo Swanson's stallion Shakespeare RSF made news in 2009, when he was the winner of America's first 70-Day Stallion Test. His success was even more exciting because he was an American homebred, bred and raised at Mo's Rolling Stone Farm in Pennsylvania. Mo says she knew even when Shakespeare was a foal that he was a really special horse. According to her, "he had a certain 'it' factor—it was his movement, his conformation, and the 'it' factor which let me know he was a stallion prospect." He was the top scoring colt at his inspection, and while she says it was nice to get confirmation from the inspector that Shakespeare was a stallion prospect, she says in this case she would have kept him a stallion anyhow, because she "just knew..."

When Shakespeare won the 70-Day Stallion Test, Mo says it was "a really special moment" for her husband and herself, and even more special "because we did it all ourselves, from buying the semen and breeding the mare to the 70-Day Test. It was thrilling...just thrilling."

Success stories like this are what many breeders may dream of when they see their newborn colt. But raising a successful breeding stallion isn't for everyone. With the majority of colts ultimately gelded, only a select few should remain as stallions. Without the owner's dedication, experience, and financial backing to bring out the stallion's fullest potential, in the end, it's just another horse. **WT**



Left: Shakespeare RSF years ago as a young colt. Mo Swanson "just knew" he was going to be a great stallion some day. Right: Shakespeare RSF in 2009. (This horse was featured on WT's March/April 2010 cover.) Photos by Susan Stickle