



The Multitaskers

Savvy management paves the way for stallions to shine simultaneously in the show pen and the breeding barn.

By Stephanie Duquette

Stallions who gain popularity early in their show careers are often asked to start breeding mares before they retire from the performance arena.

When a sensational new, young stallion blazes a winning path through the Western performance horse industry's futurity and derby events, the admiring and speculative "buzz" about him inevitably raises the question: how soon will he stand at stud?

Initiating or maintaining a stallion's breeding career while he continues to pursue major titles in the show pen has become customary in cutting, reining and reined cow horse programs. Although the double-duty career path is not without challenges, many stallion managers say shrewd planning and common sense allow their multitasking males to flourish as both show horses and champion sires.

An early start

If the average equine gestation period was closer to that of chickens (21 days), canines (62 days) or even swine (114 days), the logistics of breeding horses for the competitive arena might be drastically different. However, the average mare takes 342 days to deliver a fuzzy-eared foal, and that is one of the shortest waiting periods in the drawn-out process of proving a sire. Factor in the time frame to establish the stud's own show record, and the wait for his first foals to come of riding age, and "it's at least a six- or seven-year commitment," said Mary Robertson, of Plymouth, California, the breeder/owner of 2016 American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) Senior Working Cow Horse Champion One Fine Vintage (One Time Pepto x Shiners Siena x Shining Spark).

That lengthy schedule is part of the motivation to launch a promising stallion's breeding career as quickly as possible; in many cases, it begins years before he has retired from the show arena. Opening a stallion's book with alacrity not only hastens the process of conceiving and growing foals to riding age, it also allows him to capitalize on his success in the show pen before his hot-ticket flames subside.

"It's easy to get 'out of sight, out of mind,' in the horse business," said Jeremy Barwick, co-owner of Brazos Valley Stallion Station in Stephenville, Texas. "When they are out there winning and in the public eye, you're going to get a lot of interest in breeding the higher-quality mares when they're still visible."

He used current headline-grabbing 2013 stallion Hashtags (Metallic Cat x Dual Rey Tag x Dual Rey) as an example of the extended time frame between star performer and



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Getting a head start on a stallion's breeding career is motivated by the extended timeline required to raise his foals and get them in the show pen to prove his prepotency. In the meantime, the stallion must stay relevant.

celebrity dad.

"2018 will be Hashtags' first breeding season, and it will be years before the first colt shows. He will be a 10-year-old by then," Barwick explained.

While many of the names on the Brazos Valley stallion roster are retired from the competitive arena, Barwick's facility manages Hashtags and another new National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) superstar – Metallic Rebel (Metallic Cat x Sweet Abra x Abrakadabracre), a 2012 stallion who was the 2017 NCHA Open Horse of the Year and NCHA Open World Champion Stallion. Both stallions spent the latter part of last year with one hoof in the show pen and the other in the breeding barn.

"When [Metallic Rebel] won the [NCHA] Super Stakes, we had collected him that morning. [It was the] same way with Hashtags. Tatum [Rice, Hashtags' trainer] and I have been working together and coming up with a schedule," Barwick said.

He added that the two sons of Metallic Cat "are the only ones we've dealt with that have

been showing and collecting. We don't have too many that show and breed, so we don't have any secrets to managing it. We collect them every other day. They get hauled back and forth to the trainer's. We do try not to show them too far away, so we don't miss breeding days."

Location, location, location

With Barwick's stallion station, having trainers' facilities and show venues all conveniently located in and around the Weatherford, Texas, area, helps simplify the schedules.

"There are so many shows right here, we don't miss anything," Barwick said.

In other parts of the country, where the equine industry is less concentrated, location can become a significant challenge. Robertson discovered that when she opened One Fine Vintage's breeding book in 2015.

The longtime cattle rancher and horse-woman was thrilled with how National Reined Cow Horse Association (NRCHA) professional Phillip Ralls, of Paso Robles,

Numbers Game

When launching a performance stallion's sire career, the magic minimum age seems to be 5 or sometimes 6.

"To me, it is. You get to see what they [the foals] look like, and maybe ride a couple, and have an idea of what they're going to be," Tim McQuay said.

By the time a stallion reaches the age of 5, he has matured in body and mind, according to Barwick.

"We've never bred any 4-year-olds, but as 5-year-olds, I think they can mentally and physically handle showing and breeding," he explained. "We didn't have any issues with [Metallic] Rebel last year, and so far, Tatum says it hasn't bothered Hashtags."

Because horses are creatures of habit that learn quickly, the professionals say stallions seem to adjust best if they never connect the dots between their riding and breeding duties. For instance, if McQuay has a breeding stallion in his show string, at collection time, "I don't touch him at all. They associate the breeding staff with that part."

Different handlers and even different paths in and out of the barn help guide a stallion's attention from one job to the other.

"Everybody has their own protocol," Mary Robertson said. "When [One Fine Vintage] was with Phillip [Ralls] and at Goforth Equine, he was on the same ranch. If Phillip was going to ride, 'Vinnie' went toward the tack room. If it was breeding time, Martin [Goforth] would come get him and take him out the other end of the barn."

"Now, at Corey Cushing's, they always have someone else haul him – never Corey. Jerry Longworth, the vet there, said when Vinnie is there, it's all over in about 10 minutes. They unload him, collect him, then load him on the trailer and he goes back to work."

California, and nearby stallion station Goforth Equine managed "Vinnie." Ralls trained and showed the 2009 stallion successfully, while the staff at Goforth Equine was meticulous about semen collection and preparation for shipment.

However, Robertson found she was less than satisfied with what happened to Vinnie's semen when it was handed over to the freight company. The second stop from her location in California is, as she explained it, a notorious freight "black hole." That left Robertson in search of solutions.

"I felt a responsibility as a stallion owner. It was a reflection on me if the semen was not reaching the mare owner in a timely fashion," Robertson said.

She went into problem-solving mode. The discussion involved Ralls, as well as Ralls' friend and fellow trainer, NRCHA Million Dollar Rider Corey Cushing, of Scottsdale, Arizona, who catch-rode One Fine Vintage to the 2016 AQHA Senior Working Cow Horse World Championship while Ralls awaited the birth of his daughter in Paso Robles. Ultimately, Robertson decided to move her stallion to Cushing's barn in Scottsdale, conveniently located near another top-flight equine reproductive facility.



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Assisted reproductive techniques, primarily frozen and cooled shipped semen, have made it easier for stallions to juggle dual roles with breeding and showing.

"If Corey couldn't have taken him, then I would have had to find someone else in Texas or elsewhere, close to a good repro facility, who could also show him, maintain him and get along with him as well as Phillip or Corey had," Robertson said. "Scottsdale Equine, where Vinnie is now, has frozen

Courtesy of Robertson Ranches



One Fine Vintage's owner, Mary Robertson, faced some tough choices when she added breeding duties to the stallion's show schedule. In the end, she had to consider the best location for "Vinnie" to succeed in both venues.



Waltenberry

Legendary \$6 million sire Hollywood Dun It started his breeding career while he was still showing during a time when shipped semen was not permitted by the AQHA. The McQuays helped keep "Dun It's" mind clear by having someone other than trainer Tim McQuay handle him for breeding purposes.

semen as one of their specialties, and they have been excellent to work with."

Science, nature & the rules

Assisted reproductive technology, primarily cooled or frozen shipped semen, is possibly the most significant factor in a stallion's ability to maintain a busy show schedule and settle a full book of mares in the same year.

"We've been collecting and freezing Hashtags since October," Barwick explained. "Frozen semen's getting really big. [Metallic] Rebel is booked full, and Hashtags is booked full [for 2018], but we were able to sell some frozen contracts and breed more mares that way. And, of course, you have to have the frozen semen to send to Australia and Brazil.

"As long as the stallions freeze well, it's a good thing to have around, and the frozen semen is sort of an insurance policy on the stallion, too," he continued.

Shipped semen was not always a customary procedure for American Quarter Horse breeders. In fact, the AQHA would not

issue registration papers for foals conceived via shipped semen until almost 1990. The AQHA rule change came during a pivotal point when the iconic Hollywood Dun It (Hollywood Jac 86 x Blossom Berry x Dun Berry) was embarking on a sire career that eventually surpassed the \$6 million mark.

"There are advantages for breeders today," said Tim McQuay, the National Reining Horse Association (NRHA) Hall of Fame horseman who guided Hollywood Dun It's career as his trainer and owner until the famous stallion passed away in 2005.

McQuay started Hollywood Dun It's breeding career in earnest in 1988, when the stallion was 5. "Dun It" had earned two major championships at the NRHA Derby and Super Stakes, making him in high demand among mare owners. At that time, the AQHA would only register foals conceived via "live cover," defined as an actual mating between stallion and mare, or semen collection and artificial insemination with both parents on the same premises.

"When we started breeding Dun It, you had to have the mare on your property. You couldn't ship [the semen]. It was a whole different ballgame," McQuay said.

In Hollywood Dun It's first year of breeding outside mares, McQuay Stables was located in Maple Plain, Minnesota, on the cusp of the McQuays' move to Tioga, Texas, in the fall of 1989. The stallion welcomed a healthy number of mares to his court during that first year in Minnesota, but his breeding book grew still more after he moved south.

"We did a little bit of live cover in Minnesota. When we got here [to Texas], I think he bred 80 mares that first year and over 100 mares the year after that," McQuay recalled.

After the AQHA's new policy on shipped semen, "I felt like it did have an impact on the breeding side. Living in Minnesota, there weren't a lot of mares coming and going from Minnesota. You could get them here [in Texas] a lot easier. Now, it's not quite a consideration." ★