

# BREEDING

## Pedigree Analysis



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### Mating Rules of Thumb

October and November are exciting times in the Thoroughbred business. Besides the last of the yearling sales and the first of the breeding stock sales, autumn news is filled with announcements of horses retiring to stud and farms releasing the next year's stud fees. Now the real fun begins: planning the 2014 matings.

There are a few basic rules of thumb that breeders at any level should use. First is the question of using proven or unproven sires. The first rule is that at least one of the partners in a mating should be a proven animal. If your mare is a proven producer of winners and if you've had her from the start, you're probably more aware of the kinds of foals she puts on the ground. If you just bought her, learn about the foals she's produced, particularly their conformation strengths and weaknesses.

If your mare is unproven, then you are more vulnerable. If she's had a few foals but no runners yet, study what she seems to be passing on, whether it's her own conformation or more like her mates'. If she's a maiden or carrying her first foal, you're flying a little blind unless you know the family well. Study her conformation in relation to her pedigree and try to determine which ancestors she resembles most—which genes might be switched on. Do the same with

the stallions you're considering. With an unproven mare it's strongly suggested to use a proven sire because breeding an unproven mare to an unproven stallion puts too many unknown genetics into play.

Like broodmares, proven sires will often cost more because of what they are: successful sources of good runners. Established sires are also desirable because the qualities they pass on are better understood, along with the kind of mares they cross best with as far as bloodlines, conformation, maturity, and speed types.

Unproven sires are full of unknowns. Although we know their pedigrees, race records, and conformation (presuming nothing has been altered surgically), we have no idea what they bring to the party. They may produce attractive foals that sell well and race well, or attractive foals that sell well and race poorly, or unattractive foals that sell poorly but race well, or unattractive foals that run like pigs.

Every year 20 to 30 or more new stallions enter the breeding pool in Kentucky. Statistics show that 80% will fail. In 2006, 38 commercial-level stallions entered stud in Kentucky, and to date, only seven could be considered solid successes (18%): Kitten's Joy, Ghostzapper, Afleet Alex, Saint Liam (who died after one season),

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Roman Ruler, Pollard's Vision, and Leroidesanimaux. Of those 38 stallions, only seven are still in Kentucky, showing how quick the attrition rate can be.

In 2007, 31 stallions entered stud in Kentucky, and nine of that group remain, including seven success stories (22.5%): Bernardini, War Front, Artie Schiller, First Samurai, Bellamy Road, and Flower Alley.

In 2008, 38 entered stud in Kentucky, and of those, 17 remain in-state, with seven that can be considered successful (18%): Hard Spun, English Channel, Scat Daddy, Street Sense, Lawyer Ron (who died after two seasons), Discreet Cat, and Hat Trick.

Despite the fact four out of five new stallions prove to be duds, breeders are still eager to send mares to these bright sparks of potential. This is not to say that new stallions should be avoided, rather that breeders should show common sense when considering them. Send proven mares to new, unproven stallions, and young, unproven mares to older, proven stallions.

When using first-year stallions, consider their own maturity level if you have commercial aspirations. Don't expect a tall, lanky, later-maturing horse to sire early, fancy sales yearlings without the help of a mare that can add that early maturity and muscle.

Breeding "like to like" will produce more predictable results than crossing animals that represent physical extremes. Try to make smaller changes. A small, fine-boned mare will probably not produce a perfectly balanced result when bred to a huge, coarse stallion. The foal is more likely to resemble one parent or the other, and could be a bad combination of both. If your horse has a fault, use a stallion who is perfect in that regard, rather than overcorrecting with the opposite, such as sending a mare that toes in to a stallion that toes out excessively.

The same goes for a horse's aptitude. Make smaller changes, such as sending a sprinter to a miler to stretch it out, or a stayer to a miler to get a horse with a little more speed. There's a strong correlation between aptitude and conformation.

Finally, remember that it's more important to get your young mare off to a good start with winners, than it is to gamble on new blood to breed purely for the commercial market, a strategy that may compromise her career in the long term. **BH**



Saint Liam

COURTESY LANE'S END FARM



Lawyer Ron

SIZE: PICCOLI-DHAM