

## PONY BREEDING - ODDS AND ENDS

The following commentary is almost all opinions – opinions with which you are welcome to agree or disagree and opinions covering a wide range of topics. Much of what I have to say is common sense; however, since common sense is a commodity too often lacking in the pony business, I feel no need to apologize for pointing out what should be obvious to all.

There is a wonderful preciseness to words and that quality should never be ignored; that is why you will often find me using dictionary definitions for words that we use daily in a careless and a less than exact fashion. However, exactness is vital to a full understanding of most of the terms we use; let us begin with the word “breeder”. A breeder is one who causes something to reproduce, one who propagates and raises a specific breed. We can expand on this meaning and flesh it out a bit without losing sight of its essential meaning. A breeder has plans and goals - short range (1 to 2 years) and long range (5 to 10 years). A breeder knows the breed standard, attempts to achieve it and has an eye for a pony. A breeder breeds the best to the best and hopes for the best and a breeder has integrity that encompasses both the breed and his/her clients. Some of the decisions a breeder must make are difficult; for example, little Suzie's first pony is a Welsh mare. This is the pony that brought you into the breed; this mare is an outstanding performance pony with rows of rosettes under saddle and in driving classes. However, the pony never did much in breed halter because she is lacking in breed type and movement, has a slightly crooked front leg and her immediate ancestors are lacklustre. (Thoroughbred breeders say that famous ancestors more than three generations back are worthless or of exceedingly minor importance genetically) You have been thinking of breeding this mare. What should your decision be? You owe this mare a great deal for giving you hours of pleasure and for bringing you into Welsh, but do you owe her a foal? I think your response ought to be NO! Not every mare or stallion is worthy of being allowed to reproduce and certainly sentiment should not be the deciding factor. It is true that this mare has at least two plusses – she is trainable (arguing good disposition) and has athletic ability – but are these enough, especially when you can find these same characteristics in ponies brimming with breed type? Little Suzie's mare should be leased to another family with “wee tinies” so she can continue to do what she was made for – provide fun and equine education for children – and there is no disgrace in this.

The conditions of the lease should be (1) you can check on the pony regularly and remove it if it is being mishandled and (2) the mare is not to be bred: other aspects

such as insurance can be worked out mutually. In my opinion this mare should only leave memories behind, not offspring. If you insist on breeding her, you will be contributing to one of the most aggravating problems faced by the serious breeder – fair recompense. I earlier mentioned common sense; how unfortunately that common sense is so infrequently utilised in the breeding and purchasing of ponies. Isn't it common sense to expect a well-bred expensive pony to do better in the show ring than a “cheapie” with no type or quality? Of course, it is common sense; however, ownership seems to immediately confer stable blindness on new owners!

How many of you have met the sort of ethical breeder who has the courage to tell you, “Don't breed a mare”. I suspect not very often. However, I have had one breeder who possessed sufficient integrity to tell me that. He did not think to himself, “No one will ever know or I won't be blamed”. Harian Hoffa (dead these several years and sorely missed) told me immediately on delivery of a mare that he had asked me to sell for him that she was priced as a gelding because she would not settle in foal. The mare was sold with that understanding and was the best short-stirrup pony I have ever seen. Next time you have a mare that should have been a gelding, why not sell her as a gelding and tell the buyer that she is not suitable for breeding? It might “queer” your sale, but your conscience will be clear and we all have prospective buyers who come to us asking for animals that are not “halter quality”. Give them what they ask for.

Another even more telling incident with Mr Hoffa occurred when I was looking at some of his mares with leasing/breeding in mind. He told me that two were not available for lease because they carried a genetic fault that he had traced to their sire and that he could not allow anyone to get involved with that problem which would undoubtedly crop up in succeeding generations. The above may seem a digression, but we are defining breeder and a breeder cares about the breed! This also brings up the entire question of genetic faults and how to handle them. Let us suppose that your mare produces a foal with a sow mouth (undershot jaw). What do you do? In my opinion, if the fault is slight and the foal is a colt, you geld *before* the colt leaves your premises. If a filly, my response is to put her down or have her spayed *before* she leaves your farm. Otherwise someone will undoubtedly breed her at some time. If the fault is sufficient to interfere with biting and training – put the foal down whether colt or filly and do it at once. Sow and/or parrot mouth (overshot jaw) are both genetic and transmittable defects. No one ever said being an ethical breeding is easy; some say it is not even fun, but the bitter tears you shed as you bury that tiny foal will save other bitter tears in the future and helps preserve the integrity of your chosen breed.

While genetic faults are under discussion, I'll take on what I regard as our breed's "biggie" – cryptorchidism. This exists in our breed and, in my opinion, is rather common. It will become even more common if Welsh breeders continue to use, as stallions, ponies having this defect. I personally know of several stallions that have enjoyed long careers at stud with only one testicle descended. This is unconscionable. The novice breeder has no way of knowing this part of the genetic makeup of his/her pony. I have few suggestions for people owning mares coming from lines where cryptorchidism is a problem. However, something can be done in colts by never selling a colt of whatever age, without a veterinary certificate that the colt has been examined and both testicles were down and normal in appearance. How many of you breeders examine all your colts at birth or shortly after for this trait? Do not ever sell, buy or use any colt that is not normal in this regard. If you have cryptorchid colts, for the breed's sake, geld them before moving them on. Beware the stallion that has a high percentage of cryptorchids amongst his offspring and while it is difficult to gather statistics on this problem (no one will ever admit to having one or more), I suggest you consider how many sons a particular stallion, especially if older and well established, has at stud. If a 15-year-old stallion with good books of mares has no or perhaps only one or two offspring at stud and all other others are gelded. I would beware or do a little investigating. I also give no credence to the old tale that the testicles will descend. According to an article in the WP&CS Journal of several years ago, the testicles on a normal colt are descended at birth; even though they may descend later, that is not to be viewed as a *normal* pattern.

Now that I have pretty well delineated what I feel a breeder should be, I shall turn my attention to what it is he/she is breeding. We have already casually touched on knowing the breed standard and being able to hold it in one's mind for the evaluation of all Welsh coming before one, but we should also carefully consider the words used to describe our breed and the order in which they are used (generally if the writing is precise as in the Rule Book; first words are given precedence over succeeding terms, *e.g.*, if a description of a performance class states that it is to be judged on manners, performance, quality and way of going, then manners is the most important element of the class, followed in descending order by performance, quality and way of going being the least important). Terms often used in describing Welsh include:

\*Hardy: Bold, brave, resolute, confident, strong, firm, inured to fatigue or hardship, robust.

\*Substance: That which underlies all outward manifestations; material of which a thing is made; hence solidity; body.

\*Type: The mark or impression of something; a distinctive stamp; a figure or

representation of something to come; the combination of characteristics appropriate to a special kind of use; hence an animal or group having such a combination of characteristics.

\*Quality: That something what it is; basic nature; the degree of excellence which a thing possesses.

\*Elegant: Characterised by dignified richness and grace; refinement

\*Scope: The area or field within which any activity goes on; length, extent or sweep

\*Pony character: The dictionary cannot help us here for no real definition of pony character exists; however, character means an attribute, quality or property; especially a distinguishing attribute; the aggregate of distinctive qualities belonging to an individual or a race, the stamp of individuality impressed by nature. Thus, it would seem likely that the best definition of pony character is that combination of characteristics we associate primarily or only with ponies, NOT horses, just ponies. When I think of it in that light, words such as sturdiness, substance, little ears, big eyes, short heads, lots of cheek, movement, come immediately to mind.

How many Section A ponies have you seen recently that possess all or even a majority of these characteristics? I have seen quite a few horse-like Section A ponies recently but not too many possessing pony character. Welsh are not meant to be miniature Arabs, Thoroughbreds, Morgans or whatever fits your “horsey” fancy. The description given by the WP&CS states: “The head of the Mountain Pony should be small, with neat pointed ears, big bold eye and a wide forehead. The jaw should be clean cut, tapering to a small muzzle; the silhouette may be concave or 'dished' but never convex or too straight. The neck should be of a good length and well carried with shoulders sloping back to a clearly defined wither. The limbs must be set square with good flat bone and round dense hooves. The tail set high and gaily carried. Action must be straight both in front and behind, quick and free with hocks well flexed”. You will notice that the description does NOT state the jaw shall taper to a pint-pot muzzle or tea-cup muzzle which are both Arab, NOT Welsh characteristics. My reading of the description indicates that the head is to have a wedge shape not a cigar shape. Profiles need NOT to be “dished” and they may be straight, but not too straight. The vital factor, as I see it, is that the head be short and wedgy. Arab heads are proportionately long, NOT short – go and measure an Arab head – it may be lovely but it is certainly not short – it is long which is a fault of the breed. Now examine the Mountain Pony used by the WP&CS as an example of what you should be looking for – nary a pint-pot muzzle there and no look of the Arab, TB or any other breed.

While it is true that braiding and presentation can help rob or imbue a pony with pony characteristics which are there or are lacking – the pony *itself* must have pony characteristics. I have recently seen many A's and B's being presented across North America that have what I call cigar heads – there is little or no cheek, no wedge to the head and they are the same size at the muzzle as at the poll or close to the same size thus resembling a cigar (they are also uniformly long). In my opinion this is a fault and judges should view it as such.

While considering breed type, it might be helpful to consider that having a pretty pony, even a prize-winning pony does not automatically mean that the pony has breed type. I shall never forget my first experience with the unwillingness of some to comprehend what is meant by breed type. At one of the first breed shows I ever managed, I had one furious exhibitor come to me saying, “What does this judge mean by breed type? These ponies win open pony halter classes every weekend and she is putting them bottom of the class”. What he said was true, his Welsh were big winners in open pony classes, but the judge was right, too, for his Welsh lacked breed type in most ways – they had cigar heads, legs too long (too much air under the ponies), small eyes, long ears, etc. – yet they had quality, refinement and were shown with flair – they were worthy winners of a showmanship class (where the handler is judged) or an open pony halter class where the judge was looking for a miniature American Saddlebred and in such a class they undoubtedly would defeat Welsh that were true to type. I tried, tactfully, to explain what breed type meant but this man would/could not understand the distinction between open pony halter and breed halter, went home irate and never again has shown in a Welsh show where the judge was true to the rules or knowledgeable about breed type. He has a reputation for winning Welsh and although his wins are negligible to the knowledgeable, I am certain that he has sold many ponies to the novice who is entranced only with the words, “winning pony”.

Mountain ponies are not meant to have horse-long legs; the British describe this as having too much air under the pony. Welsh are also to have short, very short, canon bones. Keep that in mind next time you evaluate a Welsh and you will notice that there are many that do not.

Almost every thoughtful breeder is in agreement that Section A Welsh have lost the large eye, little ears and short wedgy head the breed standard demands; however, rarely have I ever heard anyone decry the loss of movement experienced by the breed in the last 15 years. One reason for this lack of public outcry, I believe, is that so few Welsh enthusiasts have ever even seen the sort of extravagant motion

the Section A ponies can have. In addition, with the constant emphasis on Section A as pleasure mounts and/or hunter ponies, few breeders make any effort to keep motion in their herds, yet, being honest, what *single* attribute first attracts the “looker” at the typical horse show, to our breed – the wealth of motion seen occasionally in a harness class and, by me, only three or four times under saddle (and I can recall the names of each of the three or four Welsh that provided the show). I do not mean by motion what one sees in Fine Harness classes which are modelled on the American saddlebred class. Animals that are checked too high, over-weighted or have been worked in shackles, rubber bands or slap chains lose the spontaneity and extravagance of motion that are *typically* (or should be) Welsh.

This article has obviously been very subjective and is my attempt to clarify for myself and any interested others some of the puzzling problems inherent in breeding Welsh. Most importantly, though, is a plea for common sense in breeding and a plea for truly ethical behaviour to be given consideration in breeding Welsh. I care very deeply for this breed and it distresses me to see so few people seriously and knowledgeable considering the future of the Welsh Breed.

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WELSH ROUNDABOUT USA**

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*“A lovely horse is always an experience ..... It is an emotional experience of the kind that is spoiled by words” ~ Beryl Markham*

*One of the outstanding breeders of Welsh has said: “The bigger the eye, the better; the deeper through the heart, the stronger; the prouder the lift of the head, the more courageous; the swifter the action, the more fearless”*