



Ballybrown Equine Clinic



Ballybrown Equine Clinic, Ballybrown, Clarina, Co. Limerick, Ireland.

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COOLED SEMEN TRANSPORT

Advancements in Equine Artificial Insemination.

Today's breeding technology provides horse owners more options than were available in the past. Artificial insemination and semen preservation techniques make it possible to ship stallion semen to a mare anywhere in the world. But success of transported semen will depend on the careful reproductive management of both stallion and mare.

WHY SHIP SEMEN?

Even under the best conditions, transporting horses long distances can be stressful and costly. Mares with foals are a special concern, since foals are particularly vulnerable to disease and injury when exposed to new horses and environments. Older or injured mares, or those requiring special care, may also benefit from staying closer to home during the breeding season. The ability to ship cooled semen makes it possible for breeders to arrange matings that might be otherwise impractical due to distance, economics or health issues.

GOOD CANDIDATES

Many-but not all- horses are good candidates for the use of cooled, transported semen. Both mares and stallions should be in excellent reproductive health, since fertility problems tend to be compounded when transported semen is added to the breeding equation.

With shipped semen, there is generally only one opportunity per cycle to breed a mare. Problem breeders may fare better at the stud farm, where they can be monitored at regular intervals throughout their heat cycles.

Also, be aware that not every stallion's semen cools or ships well. Therefore, it is critical for a stallion's sperm viability to be checked after a dose has been extended and cooled for 24 hours. This is generally the interval between collection and the time the transported semen is placed in the mare.

If you are planning to raise a registered foal, be sure to check the appropriate breed association's rules regarding semen transport in advance and follow them.

INTENSIVE MANAGEMENT

Breeding with cooled, transported semen is more management-intensive than with on-site matings. Timing is critical. For the greatest chance of pregnancy, a mare must be bred from 12-24 hours before ovulation and up to 6 hours after ovulation. However, once the mare has ovulated, determination of whether it is still within an acceptable time frame for fertility may be difficult. Remember cooled stallion semen only has a shelf life of 24-48 hours.

THE MARE

Prior to the breeding season, a mare should have a full reproductive examination. A uterine biopsy, culture and cytology may be indicated to get a clearer picture of the mare's overall reproductive health. During the breeding season, the mare should be kept where she can be teased by a stallion on a regular basis in order to detect onset of oestrus reliably.

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Once the mare comes into heat, your equine vet will need to predict the onset of ovulation accurately - allowing time for the semen shipment to arrive. The vet will monitor the mare daily or every other day via rectal palpation and ultrasound examination throughout her heat cycle to determine the appropriate time for insemination.

THE STALLION

The stallion should also be evaluated for fertility prior to the breeding season. Semen should be tested by extending, cooling and storing it in the same way it will be handled for shipping. Commercial extenders have different formulations. The stallion manager or vet may want to test the semen to see which extenders promote the greatest viability. Proper handling is also important. Here are some considerations:

- ❖ An insemination dose of cooled semen may initially require up to 1 billion progressively motile sperm cells at the time of collection, twice the number used in fresh insemination doses. Following storage and transport, this should allow for 500 million progressively motile sperm cells for insemination depending on the particular stallion's viability over time.
- ❖ Vets and stallion managers should have the necessary equipment to determine sperm concentrations and motility accurately. Doses should not be estimated.
- ❖ Semen extenders should contain antibiotics to help reduce bacterial contamination and the spread of disease.
- ❖ A high quality-shipping container is essential to semen viability; directions should be followed exactly.
- ❖ Due to variability between individual characteristics of each stallion's semen, the procedures for extending, shipping, handling and insemination may vary. Directions from the attending vet should be followed precisely.
- ❖ Adequate paperwork describing semen numbers, motility and collection time should accompany the shipping container so that the inseminator has a better understanding of the semen quality and viability upon arrival.
- ❖ Any semen, which remains after the mare has been bred, should be checked for quality.
- ❖ Semen not used within 48 hours should be discarded even though it may still appear viable.
- ❖ Certain disposable shipping containers may not provide an adequate environment for the preservation of semen viability with some stallions.

COMMUNICATION & COOPERATION

Good communication between stallion and mare managers is essential. Coordinating semen shipments will take planning and cooperation. Most stallion managers plan collection schedules so as not to overtax a stallion's fertility or reproductive performance. Collections made 3-4 times per week will accommodate most cooled, transported semen requirements without negatively affecting fertility; thus allowing breeders to also meet on-site demands.

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The mare should be on a regular teasing and examination schedule to reliably ascertain the proper time to breed. This will allow planning and timely shipment of cooled semen. Many overnight shipping services provide prompt, reliable deliveries and can reduce the need for last minute trips to the airport.

COSTS

Transporting semen may have some cost saving benefits; however, they can be offset by increased management costs. Additional costs may include:

- ❖ Special handling, shipping container rental and shipping charges.
- ❖ Board, mare care, teasing and management at a breeding facility or clinic.
- ❖ Veterinary examinations, palpations, ultrasound and artificial insemination charges.

CAVEATS

Pregnancy rates with transported semen may be somewhat lower than with on-the-farm breeding depending on the particular stallion and its semen viability over time. This means more than one cycle to get a mare successfully in foal may be necessary.

A TEAM EFFORT

Breeding with cooled, transported semen is a team effort requiring the expertise of qualified professionals. The goal is to produce a healthy foal in the most efficient, effective way. To prevent disappointment, undue expenses and loss of valuable time, you must do your part to ensure success.

- ❖ Understand your responsibilities.
- ❖ Check the credentials and references of the breeders and professionals with whom you plan to do business.
- ❖ Choose stallion and mare management facilities and an equine reproductive specialist whom you can trust.
- ❖ Establish a good line of communication between all parties.
- ❖ Visit the facilities if possible.
- ❖ Read your breeding contract carefully.
- ❖ Contact the breed associations with which you are affiliated for their guidelines.