



PEDIGREE DYNAMICS

Yearling Sales Tales or Truths?
A closer look at some sales criteria

With the sales season nearly upon us, catalogues have started appearing in the mail. Well before the first yearling arrives at the sales venue, potential owners and trainers are working at ways to pare down the number of yearlings to be inspected. Pages are turned with pen poised in our efforts to discriminate between potential champions and potential money burners.

What criteria do you use in the selection process? There are several ways in which people eliminate prospects, some entirely valid and others that should be put in the 'old horseman's tales' category.

Here we will discuss a few points, which are often subject to speculation.

Foaling Date

Many buyers prefer to buy a yearling born as close as possible to the 1st August with the idea that it will give their horse an age advantage on the racetrack. Breeders maintain however that foals born in September and October are actually the ones who have the bigger advantage. August foals are more likely to be subjected to cold, wet weather at the very start of their lives, whereas in Spring the weather is warming up without being as harsh as the later months. Foals born in November and December are not as popular with buyers and this is because they understandably look less mature at the sales, and it follows on that as early two year olds, their older peers have a physical advantage. Some may argue that the dams of very early or late foals may not be providing as nutritious milk due to pasture conditions, but reputable breeders ensure that the diet of mares is well supplemented during less than ideal conditions.

Yearlings bred for longer distance races generally take longer to mature and are in any case unsuitable for the early juvenile races, which are run over sprint distances. A study done a few years back revealed that the winners of many of the top three-year-old races had birth dates averaging late October.

If you set out to buy a middle distance performer or stayer then, the foaling date (within reasonable boundaries) is likely to be of little long term relevance and buying a yearling born later in the year may mean you pay less at the sales!

Second Season Progeny

The second season progeny of a stallion are, like first season's, a gamble. The sire will have had no runners, making it impossible to assess his ability to produce winners. First season stallions are usually well promoted and with the novelty factor of buying the first progeny of appealing sires, prices are usually quite

healthy. This appeal often drops off along with the hype in the second year that their progeny go through the sales, especially if they have had two-year-olds to run in the preceding few months with little early success.

This can be a particularly misleading factor when the stallion in question is not bred to produce early two-year-olds.

The upside of buying second season progeny is that buyers may find that they don't have to pay as much for these yearlings (or even third season progeny) as they would have in their debut year. The gamble of the unknown however, is still there.

Sex bias

A very few stallions – and mares - have a 'sex bias', producing either more top quality fillies or colts.

For instance, the stakes performers produced by the former Champion Western Australian sire Jungle Boy over a ten year period were comprised of 67% fillies and 33% colts. Unless a stallion has been at stud for many years however, it is very difficult to accurately determine whether a sex bias exists. It is even harder to assess with the progeny of a mare, as compared to stallions they have very few progeny on which to base the argument.

Colour Bias

One thing that does NOT indicate racecourse talent is the colour. Despite some people's theories regarding the progeny of certain stallions, the ratio of winners or stakes winners to the various colours produced by individual stallions is in direct proportion. What distorts the incidence of one colour progeny being more successful than another in some stallions is that there is MORE of that particular colour produced. This is dictated by the genotype of both the stallion and his many partners. For instance a heterozygous bay or brown stallion – who has one (dominant) bay gene and one (recessive) chestnut gene - may produce around 75% born bays/browns and 25% born chestnuts with a few greys (say 4 %) from grey mares taking a couple of percent off both. Grey is not a colour but a factor that, as in humans, overrides the genetic coat colour when inherited. Heterozygous bay (or brown) stallions include Bletchley Park, Serheed, Zabaleta and Is It True. A homozygous bay or brown stallion has two dominant genes and therefore will never produce a chestnut. Haulpak, Metal Storm, Chanteclair and Scenic are examples.

A chestnut stallion has two chestnut (recessive) genes and usually produces roughly 50% chestnut and 50% bay or brown, less a few greys. As an example, three random crops of Marscay progeny totalled 63 bay or browns, 65 chestnuts and 6 greys!

Heterozygous factor grey stallions such as Carry a Smile and Tribu may produce 50% greys (more if put to several grey mares) and, depending on his genotype, roughly 25% bays/browns and 25% chestnuts. A homozygous factor grey stallion such as Raffindale can only produce greys as the factor dominates all colours. Even homozygous bay stallions can produce a grey when put to a grey mare.

Remember Chanteclair's grey daughter Transparency?

In summary, there is no genetic data linking colour inheritance with performance, but it would be true to say that a particular stallion has more stakeswinners of one colour than any other, indicating not a colour bias, only that he had more of one colour progeny to represent him.

Many trainers put much stock in the look of a horse's eye. A large, kind eye hints at a co-operative nature. A few horses have no pigment (in one or both eyes) in the outermost rim of tissue around the eyeball. Some people refer to this as a 'wall eye', although this term actually refers to the lack of pigment in the eyeball, not the surrounding tissue. Lack of pigment in the outermost rim is purely a white marking like a stocking or star, and is usually associated with a large star or blaze. This is not the same pale coloured part of the eyeball shown when a horse rolls the eye back in terror or anger and does not denote bad temperament.

Old Mares

The age of the dam is another factor some buyers consider important. Many trainers and owners rule a line through yearlings whose dams are beyond a certain age, usually around 14 years old. Some do this because they observe that there are not as many top racehorses about whose dams are that old, however this can be partly explained by the fact that there are less mares breeding at that age and they miss more frequently, therefore producing fewer foals. Others assert that a mare's best foals are usually within her first few progeny. One theory attributes this to declining uterine function, which may mean that in some mares, foals do not receive the same level of nutrition that their older siblings were given.

However, there are many exceptions and this is certainly not always the case! From a breeding perspective, there are several outstanding broodmares who are the progeny of old mares, including the dams of Mr. Prospector and Danzig, which were both 16 years old.

From a racing perspective, here is a cross section of superior racehorses and/or sires through history whose dams were senior citizens:

AGE OF DAM	PROGENY
14 years	AIR DE FRANCE, ALQUOZ, LION HUNTER, RUSTIC AMBER, SERHEED, ST. JUDE and WILLOUGHBY
15 years	BULL DOG, GALLANT MAN
16 years	ADVENTUROUS, BELLOTTO, BUCKPASSER, BRIEF TRUCE, BUBBLE GUM FELLOW, COMIC COURT, COMMANDS, DISTINCTLY NORTH, ENCORES, HALO, HIS MAJESTY, IRISH RIVER, NORTHFIELDS, PERUGINO, SANCTION, TIMBER COUNTRY, TODVEGA
17 years	ADAM, HAWAII, HULA CHIEF, IVORY'S IRISH, MACHINE GUN TOM, MAN O'WAR, MISTER C, MONDE BLEU, PINS, ST. SIMON
18 years	ALIBHAI, BAGUETTE, BERNBOROUGH, DOUBLE JAY, GEIGER COUNTER, KENVAIN, NATIVE DANCER, NEARCO, PICCOLO, POLISH NAVY, ROYAL ACADEMY, SOVIET LAD
19 years	GALOPIN, STOCKWELL
20 years	DAMASCUS
21 years	HOLD YOUR PEACE, KLAIRON
22 years	BOIS ROUSSEL, HIDEYOSHI, WILD AGAIN

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