

## **Getting ready to breed your mare**

### **Is your mare suitable?**

Breeding a mare for the first time can be expensive, time-consuming and can even end in tragedy. Professional studs still lose their best mares and foals unexpectedly, due to complications. But, if you own a good mare and you are prepared to spend the time and money it takes to breed and raise a foal, it is a wonderful experience. Ideally, a mare should be between 4 and 12 years old or have bred a foal before, she should have good conformation with no inherited faults, and she should have a good temperament. A mare that's hard to catch, float and handle will pass much of it onto her foal as its first teacher.

### **What condition should she be in?**

Mares should be 'rising' in condition when they're bred to a stallion for optimal fertility. This often happens naturally with spring weather bringing on more grass, but she shouldn't be overweight either. A fat mare should lose some weight over the winter so that she can start putting on condition slowly over the two months before you breed her. Use this time also to see that she's fit and in good health, either by continuing to ride or work her, or ensuring she gets good exercise in the paddock if she's not being ridden.

### **Feeding and care prior to breeding**

Before you breed your mare, you should continue all normal horse maintenance and treat any illness or injuries she may have. In the two months prior to breeding, she should be getting vitamins and minerals suitable for breeding, either in a complete feed like 'Easi Breed' or, if she's in good condition on grass or hay, a palatable supplement like 'Khonke's Own' for breeding horses. She should be in good health and able to eat well enough for herself and her growing foal. This means she needs her teeth done, worming and vaccination, and her hooves trimmed (and shoes removed) before being bred.

### **Other health checks**

Your mare should be up to date on her vaccinations, both for the immunity of the foal and because she'll most likely be exposed to other horses and possible injury in a stud environment. It's also a good idea to get her checked by a vet for breeding soundness. Many studs will request a certificate of uterine health, which just means a vet swabs her to check for infection and any diseases that can be transferred to a valuable stallion and the mares he serves in the future. An ultrasound at this time can also be useful to check for cysts in her ovaries and where she's up to in her cycle, particularly if you're unsure.

### **Breeding history and other information you'll need**

Once you've ensured your mare is in good health, and you've selected the stallion and stud for your mare, you should make a list of other information you'll need. Take note of any reports and advice from your vet as you will need to tell the stallion owner about her health and breeding history. In addition to details about you and your mare, they'll want to know her medical history, if she's had any foals before, and any problems she's had getting in foal or giving birth. It is also helpful if you know when she was last in season.

