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HORSE BREEDING

Mare Hunt

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Choosing a mare for your hunter under saddle breeding program.



From **The Journal** by Meghan Mackey

We talked to leading breeders of hunters under saddle Nancy Sue Ryan of Show Stop Farm in Nocona, Texas, and Robin DeGraff of DeGraff Stables in Port Clinton, Ohio, to find out what you need to consider when choosing the mare that will share her genes, carry to term and influence the first four to six months of your next hunter under saddle prospect's life.

Conformation

- Heritability is estimated to be 30 to 50 percent

Conformation and structure are the most likely traits to be handed down to a foal by its sire and dam as opposed to trainability, talent and social traits that can be heavily influenced by environment.

Nancy Sue says conformation, structure, balance and straight legs are absolute musts when selecting a mare.

Once you have selected that perfect mare, be sure to transfer her papers into your name. For a limited time, download AQHA's transfer report and [enjoy AQHA's transfer special](#). Normally, AQHA charges a \$15 transfer fee for each transfer submitted to AQHA. During our transfer special, AQHA is charging only \$15 per horse!

A long shoulder will give a horse a long, ground-covering stride, Nancy Sue says.

"Conformation will dictate the movement," Nancy Sue says. "You want the shoulder; you want the elbow in front of the withers; you want the short back, pretty hip, low hocks and nice neck."

Robin says, "I love a high-withered mare with a great big, long sloping shoulder, a big hip and a great topline," Robin says. "Another thing I really like is lower set hocks and knees, which means a longer gaskin and forearm."

Robin says structure and bone mass are also important to look at.

"You want a mare that's good and heavy, strong built," she says. "I think if a mare is of a slighter build or fine-boned, her options are more limited, and she needs a cross that is heavier built."

Mind

- Heritability is estimated to be 25 to 40 percent

"Without the mind, you have nothing," Nancy Sue says. "It doesn't matter how great a horse is – if it doesn't have the mind to go with that greatness, you have nothing."

Robin thinks the mare has more than half the influence over the foal's disposition.

"I think the temperament on the mare has a lot to do with the foal because of how long the foal is around the mare."

With embryo transfer at the front of modern breeding practices, a recipient mare has much to do with the environmental factors that contribute to the foal's temperament.

Breeding

Your wonderful prospect can't succeed in the show ring if your never transferred the mare's papers. Better make sure all of your horses are registered under your name. Take advantage of [AQHA's \\$15 transfer special](#) per horse while it lasts, and get your records updated today!

Crossing the right bloodlines is another important aspect in producing a final product with the conformation, attitude and talent to excel on the rail.

Nancy Sue says she likes mares from the bloodlines of many current popular stallions. She also noted that the racing blood of Dash For Cash has been influential in the hunter under saddle lines. Dash For Cash is just one of many successful sires from **the Three Bars (TB) legacy**.

Robin says she has some foundation-bred mares she breeds to her 17.2 hand stallion, Indian Artifacts. She said those mares pass their athletic ability to their hunter-style babies.

"When you take a look at the individual mare and her overall conformation and cross her back on a very tall stallion, you get a little bit longer, a little bit taller and a lot of elegance."

Nancy Sue and Robin also cite the influence of Thoroughbreds on most of the popular modern hunter under saddle horses. Nancy Sue likes the lines of In Reality, Raja Baba by Bold Ruler and Grey Dawn II. Robin likes big mares by Pleasant Colony and his sons. She also likes mares from the line of 1973 Triple Crown winner Secretariat by Bold Ruler.

Ultimately, when breeding for a hunter under saddle horse Nancy Sue and Robin both say that breeding for correct, good-minded, nice-moving babies that will go to work for anyone is their goal.