



NEW ZEALAND
THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS'

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TEASE A MARE

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Teasing is the process through which a mare's oestrus cycle is determined and allows for effective timing of stallion covers

The oestrus cycle, a recurring period of sexual receptivity and fertility, occurs seasonally when the daylight hours are long. While naturally-occurring oestrus begins in spring, exposing mares to artificial lights from June onwards allows the cycle to begin in time for the New Zealand breeding season, which begins on September 1st every year.

Determining the oestrus cycle should start in late June with daily teasing. Teasing is when a teasing stallion, an adult horse of any breed and not necessarily a thoroughbred, is put in close proximity with a mare. Her behaviour towards the teaser can indicate signs of ovulation.



While there are several techniques for teasing, in New Zealand, paddock teasing is most common.

The teasing stallion is shown to mobs of mares over a fence. This technique ensures the safety of the the mares, the stallion and the handlers, as mares can have strong physical reactions to a stallion when out of heat.

When a mare is in any stage of oestrus, and thus potentially responsive and fertile, reactions may include the pointing forward of her ears, a raised tail, squatting, visible 'winking' of the vulva lips or urinating, reffered to

as "breaking down". When a mare is out of heat, reactions may include ears which are pinned back, kicking, striking, squealing or moving back from the stallion.



The reaction of the mare is observed and recorded. A numerical score, as follows, is commonly used to classify a mare's reaction:

0 – Out of heat

1 – Change of attitude (for example: quieter, reduced incidence of ear being pinned back)

2 – Winking vulva lips

3 – Breaking down (urinating) after a short time

4 – Breaking down immediately

This system is very helpful and standardised scoring allows for easy communication between broodmare managers and internal and external stud owners, veterinarians and stallion managers. However, not every mare's outward behaviour correlates to her stage in the oestrus cycle. For example, many mares will progress straight from a 1 to 4 and others may show a 1 while actually being at the peak of ovulation. In order to determine an accurate schedule, the Broodmare Manager should present for each teasing so that he can become familiar with each mare's teasing behaviour cycle-on-cycle and from season to season. Maiden mares, ie those which have never been covered, are the most likely to be deceptive when teased.

Teasing is performed regularly on barren mares and maidens, while the process usually begins five days after foaling on mares with a new foal at foot. When an oestrus cycle is determined, the broodmare manager will decide when further tests should be undertaken, including palpation and ultrasounds, and ultimately when a mare should be sent to a stallion. Naturally a mare should only be covered at the most fertile stage of her oestrus cycle: this is for reasons of organisational efficiency and to ensure the highest possibility of her becoming pregnant on her first covering of the season by a stallion.