

# **XVII** Congresso Internazionale SIVE

## **XVII** *SIVE International Congress*

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**ATTI**  
***PROCEEDINGS***

# How to Train the Stallion on a Phantom

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Semen collection with an artificial vagina while the stallion mounts a phantom rather than a live “jump mare” is practiced by most professional collection facilities and is a way to increase safety for both the stallion and the handlers as well as improve the hygiene of the collection process. Training a stallion to mount a phantom can be accomplished with nearly all stallions including novice stallions that have no breeding experience and mature experienced stallions that have previously bred by natural service.

Prior to attempting to train a novice stallion to collect off of a phantom it is important to insure that you have all the required elements to be successful. The required elements are: 1) an experienced team, 2) a safe and appropriate environment, 3) appropriate equipment and 4) the right attitude.

### EXPERIENCED TEAM

1. A stallion handler that has experience handling a variety of stallions for breeding. Do not attempt to train a novice stallion to mount a phantom with a stallion handler that is unaccustomed to handling stallions in a breeding situation. Novice stallions are going to be nervous and very unpredictable when first introduced to breeding and since you are placing them in a situation where they will inevitably become extremely frustrated it is critical that the handler does not make the situation worse because he or she is also nervous. The stallion will sense this nervousness and lack of confidence and it will only increase the anxiety that the

stallion is feeling. The stallion handler is responsible for the safety of the horses and people in the breeding shed as he is the only one in a position to control the stallion. Ideally the handler should have experience training novice stallions to mount a phantom as the process is quite different from handling a trained stallion.

2. A mare handler that is a good horse person and can control the tease mare. Often novice stallions will need to aggressively tease the mare positioned next to the phantom before they will be stimulated enough to mount the phantom. This will make the stallions extremely frustrated and they may bite the mare or tease aggressively before mounting. Mares will try to move away from this aggressive teasing and biting so the mare handler must have the ability to keep her positioned correctly.
3. A quiet tease mare that does not get nervous or skittish around the excited and aggressive novice stallion.
4. A semen collector that has collected numerous stallions and is confident and unafraid when placing the AV on a fractious, unpredictable and disorganized stallion.

### SAFE AND APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENT

The breeding shed should be large, quiet, enclosed and have adequate room on all sides of the phantom, adequate clearance overhead, a padded rail for close contact teasing of the mare and excellent footing. It is also helpful if there is an escape route for the tease mare,

handler and the collector. The shed should be free from loose equipment, clutter and debris.

## **APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT**

Strong and well fitting halter

Strong and long enough chain stud shank

Wraps to protect the inside of the stallion's knees from burns or hot spots

Adequate tease mare restraint. Depending on the mare this may include a chain lead shank, hobbles, kicking boots and twitch.

Comfortable, well lubricated, appropriately sized and heated artificial vagina

Well constructed phantom. A good phantom is critical when training a novice stallion and should possess the following characteristics:

1. Sturdy and quiet. A phantom that is wobbly or makes a lot of noise when the stallion bumps or mounts it will frighten many horses and cause them to dismount quickly or prevent them from mounting at all. The stallion needs to feel secure when mounting the phantom.
2. Well padded
3. Preferably adjustable for both height and angle
4. Durable, non abrasive cover
5. Biting straps and artificial "hips"

## **THE RIGHT ATTITUDE**

Patience, persistence and a calm, quiet, confident and reassuring attitude from all members of the team is critical. If you are rushed and impatient and not willing to positively reinforce all progress and allow the stallion to proceed at his own pace you will only become more frustrated and cause the stallion to become frustrated. As a result he may develop bad habits in the breeding shed that could stay with him for his entire breeding career. Do not wait to attempt to train a stallion to the phantom on the day you need to obtain semen. The goal here is not simply to obtain a semen sample at all costs but rather to develop good breeding behavior that will result in a stallion that is safe, reliable and easy to work with for the rest of his career.

The following is the general sequence of events that we use to train a novice stallion. Some stallions may readily mount the phantom without much preparation and others may take numerous sessions over several days. Again here patience, persistence and consistency are the keys.

### **Ground work**

When handling a novice stallion in the breeding shed the stallion handler needs to establish communication with the stallion so that the stallion respects the handler but also trusts him and is not overly reprimanded for exhibiting normal stallion behavior. A few basic commands should be mastered outside the breeding environment before the stallion is even introduced to the mare. The handler should work with the stallion on standing, walking forward, stopping and backing. This should be done without excessive force, using the stallion shank positioned as will be done in the breeding shed. We prefer to start all stallions with the chain over the nose which gives the handler good control over nearly all stallions if used properly. Only for extremely aggressive stallions that do not respect the chain over the nose do we place the chain in the mouth. You should try to control the stallion with a loose lead as much as possible, teaching him to respect cues from your body and voice. The stallion should be taught to move forward, backward and in circles (both forward and backward) and only upon signals from the handler. The handler should create a safe zone of personal space and teach the stallion that he must respect this space as it is a very common behavior for young novice stallions to crowd the handler, forcing the handler into a vulnerable situation where the stallion could injure him by striking with a front leg. Do not allow the stallion to walk behind the handler and make sure they walk forward and at a safe distance from the handler and not "in his back pocket". Depending on the level of ground training the stallion has had, this may take some time and you should avoid rushing the introduction to the breeding shed and an estrus mare until this communication and respect has been established.

### **Familiarize the stallion with the breeding shed environment**

Before introducing the stallion to the tease mare first bring him into the breeding shed and allow him to familiarize himself with the shed and become comfortable with the surroundings. Allow him to sniff the tease rail and the ground, walk him around the shed a few times. Allow him to approach the phantom and smell it. Then remind him of the ground work you have done and make sure he still responds to your commands in this environment.

### **Introduce the tease mare.**

Once the stallion is comfortable in the shed and relaxed you can introduce the tease mare in a safe way. We will first just open the door and have the mare handler expose the mare's head in the shed so the stallion sees her. By doing this gradually you can gauge how the stallion is going to react. Some pay little attention while others immediately start to exhibit aggressive stallion behavior and may quickly drop out and get an erection. If he obtains an erection quickly you can remove the mare and try to wash the stallion's penis. If he is less interested and confused then bring the mare into the shed, again pay attention to how he reacts and try to anticipate his sudden movements. At this point place the mare in a position where the stallion can tease her at close contact. We prefer a tease rail that is padded to protect the stallion's legs should he strike or suddenly attempt to mount over the rail. Bring the stallion first to the mare's head, then allow him to move down the neck to the shoulder and then the flank. This is how they will approach a mare instinctively in a natural free mating situation. Be careful about letting the stallion tease a mare in a stock directly from behind as they are more likely to try and mount the mare in the stock which is very dangerous. Young stallions may require a fair amount of teasing to obtain an erection and they should be encouraged to do so. It is important particularly for young stallions that there are few distractions in the breeding shed. People should speak as little as possible and when they do it should be softly and you

should avoid having spectators present. You should limit distractions for the stallion so they can focus on the task at hand. For young stallions many times the owner or trainer has been the one to handle the colt most of his life and likely has reprimanded him for "stallion-like" behavior in inappropriate situations. It is a bad idea to have the trainer or owner present in the breeding shed during this training period as the stallion's are often distracted by the owner's presence and fearful of reprimand for the kind of behavior you are trying to encourage. Once the stallion has obtained an erection and sustains it then the washing process can begin.

### **Washing the stallion's penis**

Most young stallions will be uncomfortable with someone trying to wash them for the first time. Hopefully, they have had their sheath cleaned as part of their routine grooming as a young colt and they are somewhat used to being handled but this is often not the case. Remember that a stallion with an erection in the presence of an estrus mare is in a heightened state of excitement and will react more quickly and unpredictably than normal so everyone has to be alert and try to anticipate the stallion's movements. When the stallion has obtained an erection we will back or turn him away from the mare and position him against a padded wall with the stallion handler gaining firm control of his head and standing on the near side. Next the person washing the stallion should approach him at the shoulder, perhaps pat his neck and shoulder and then slowly and quietly move hands across his back, across the ribcage and to his underside. The washer should establish contact with his left shoulder against the stallion's right side and try to maintain this contact at all times. Try to avoid touching the stallion's stifle as this will almost always trigger a kick. Some stallion's ability to "cow-kick" is remarkable and so the safest place for the washer is close to the side of the horse with left shoulder in the horse's side. Often the stallion will quickly lose his erection during this period and if he does will have to be reintroduced to the mare until he again ob-

tains an erection. Then the same process is repeated until he will maintain his erection long enough for the washer to clean the penis. After rubbing the underside of the stallion the washer should slowly and gently try to cradle the stallions penis in the left hand while obtaining a piece of cotton soaked with warm (37C) water with the right hand. Ring out some of the water so it does not drip too much as stallions may jump forward or kick out if they feel water drip onto their hind legs. While cradling the penis in the left hand, squeeze out some of the water from the cotton onto the stallion's penis. If he tolerates that then you can gently use the cotton to rub the shaft and glans to clean it. Typically we would use 5 or 6 pieces of cotton to clean the stallion's penis making sure that the glans fossa was well cleaned as well as the shaft. With a novice stallion that has not had his penis cleaned before, it may take some time to get him to tolerate the cleaning. If he becomes exceedingly frustrated then we will stop and proceed to the next step and attempt to make further progress at the next session. Our immediate goal is to get the stallion to mount the phantom and the washing procedure should be a pleasant experience that does not create a lot of anxiety. Patience, persistence and consistency with this process will result in a stallion that quickly obtains an erection and stands quietly without losing the erection for washing.

### **Introducing the stallion to the phantom**

After washing, the stallion is again presented to the tease mare in the stocks and allowed to tease to a point where he is extremely stimulated. We then turn and quickly take him to the back of the phantom and position him directly behind the phantom while the mare remains in the stocks. Although rare, some novice stallions will bump the back of the phantom with their chest, perhaps rub on the back of the phantom and mount. If this is the case we will quickly but gently slide the AV onto the stallion without grasping the penis and attempt to collect. In most cases however, the novice stallion has not made the association between the phantom and mounting and will ignore the

phantom and lose his erection while turning back to look towards the tease mare. In this case we will back the stallion away from the phantom and position the tease mare on the right side of the phantom with her hindquarters alongside but slightly forward of the rear of the phantom. The stallion is then brought to the back of the phantom on a slight angle from the left side. The ideal position is for the stallion's chest to be centered on the left rear corner of the phantom with the mare's rear directly opposite. The stallion is then encouraged to tease the mare across the back corner of the phantom. In some cases it is helpful to lower the back of the phantom slightly to a level just below the mare's croup to encourage the stallion to rise up in an attempt to mount the mare. Often times a mount is triggered when the stallion, with a good erection places his chin on the tease mare's back and lifts his front end up and onto the phantom back. When he does this we will quickly and gently slide the AV onto the penis. This will usually encourage the stallion to square up behind the phantom, grip with both front legs and thrust into the AV until he ejaculates. With a novice stallion, getting to the point of mounting the phantom may take 15 minutes or as long as several days. The above scenario is not typical and most novice stallions will take longer before they reach a level of stimulation and frustration to cause them to mount the phantom in an attempt to get to the tease mare. Often novice stallions will try mount sideways or try to rush past the phantom on the near side or around to the far side to get to the mare. They may also mount the phantom without an erection and if they do we do not reprimand but just let them stay there until they chose to dismount and start again. This is where the patience, skill and experience of the stallion handler are critical. He must attempt to control the stallion and continuously reposition him at the correct angle for a successful mount. As the stallion's frustration level increases his attention and respect of the stallion handler decreases. This can be physically demanding and mentally very frustrating for the handler and maintaining patience in this situation is critical.

Some stallions will be reluctant to mount even when stimulated to a very high degree and in some cases we will slide the AV onto the stallion's penis while he is positioned with his chest against the rear of the phantom and trigger a mount. For some stallions turning them away from the phantom and then allowing them to quickly approach the back of the phantom and bump with their chest will trigger a mount. The position of the mare may also be altered to trigger a mount. Some stallions respond to positioning the mare as described above but turning her head back around so that the stallion stretches his neck out to attempt nose to nose contact. We will continue to try these various methods as long as the stallion is showing positive progress and not becoming so frustrated that he starts to act out in a negative way against the handler or the tease mare. You must pay attention to the signals the stallion is sending and as soon as we feel he is not making positive progress

we will put him in his stall for an hour or so and then bring him back out for another session. These training sessions will rarely go for more than 30 minutes and we may do up to 3 sessions in a day; however the vast majority of novice stallions can be collected within the first 1 or 2 sessions.

If we are unsuccessful after 2 or 3 days then we may allow the stallion to mount the tease mare once and collect semen while he mounts the tease mare. Then the next day we will go back to the phantom and continue trying to stimulate him to mount the phantom.

Over the last 25 years we have trained hundreds of stallions to mount a phantom for semen collection and I have only experienced a few that required mounting a live tease mare for reliable semen collection. With the proper preparation, the right team and the right attitude nearly all stallions can be trained to be reliably and safely collected off of a phantom.