

Need to breed?



WorldHorseWelfare



Visit www.worldhorsewelfare.org
or scan the QR code to find out more

What is the problem?

Horses are wonderful animals and they bring such joy that it can be tempting to want the experience of breeding your own foal. Breeding can be hugely rewarding and bring great success, but a number of problems arise when lots of people all decide to breed a foal...

Sadly, in the UK there are now thousands more horses than there are good homes. Prices can fluctuate and when prices are low this can lead to many horses being abandoned or neglected. This may be because horses may be seen as an additional expense to their owner which they can no longer afford, or due to breeders continuing to breed in the hope the market picks up but they end up running out of space and resources to take care of number of horses they have produced.

Every day we are asked to take in horses that owners are unable to keep, or which did not turn out the way their breeder expected. With so many neglected horses in urgent need of our help, we are rarely able to offer private owners anything more than advice. It simply isn't possible for us to take in all of these horses. Because of this we are asking owners to consider if they really need to breed.



Owners who are struggling to provide essential care to their horses can contact us through our Help for Horse Owners support service. Scan the QR code or visit: www.worldhorsewelfare.org/help-for-horse-owners



The greater the number of horses in the UK, the harder it is to find them all safe, loving homes.



Every horse born increases the chance of neglect: either to that horse directly at some stage in its life, or by indirectly shunting another horse into an awful situation.

Some horses that are bred are of little monetary value, this often leads unscrupulous people to take advantage of the situation. Many of these horses may be illegally exported for slaughter or fraudulently re-passported with key details changed such as their age and name, making it near impossible to find out any details of their past. The greater the number of horses in the UK, the harder it is to find them all safe, loving homes.

Why is this happening?

Undoubtedly there are a number of different groups contributing to the breeding of horses in the UK:

- Racing is often blamed for producing too many horses.
- Dealers are also frequently blamed, and again, they almost certainly have an impact.
- The Gypsy, Romany and Traveller (GRT) community have been perceived as allowing horses to breed indiscriminately.
- Professional breeders play their part, with many continuing to breed simply because they always have even though the market has changed.
- Small-scale or one-off breeders also add to the number of horses bred each year.

With all these different groups contributing, it is tempting for each to blame the others and take no responsibility, and therefore no action, themselves.

Thoroughbred foal numbers reached a peak in 2008 with 5,920 foals born.

Since then, numbers have declined, in 2023 there were 4,510 foals born – an average 24% decrease from 2008-2023.

With the costs of passports and microchips on top of the day-to-day costs associated with owning and breeding horses, many breeders are spending more money on each foal than they make from the sale.

It is vital that every group acknowledges their contribution to the problem and takes steps to rectify it.

Breeding one foal a year, or even just one in a lifetime, might seem to have little impact. This isn't the case. With thousands of people all doing the same, these foals add up to a huge number of extra horses every year.

Whilst all sectors should take steps to reduce their breeding, it is important not to underestimate the impact of your own choices.



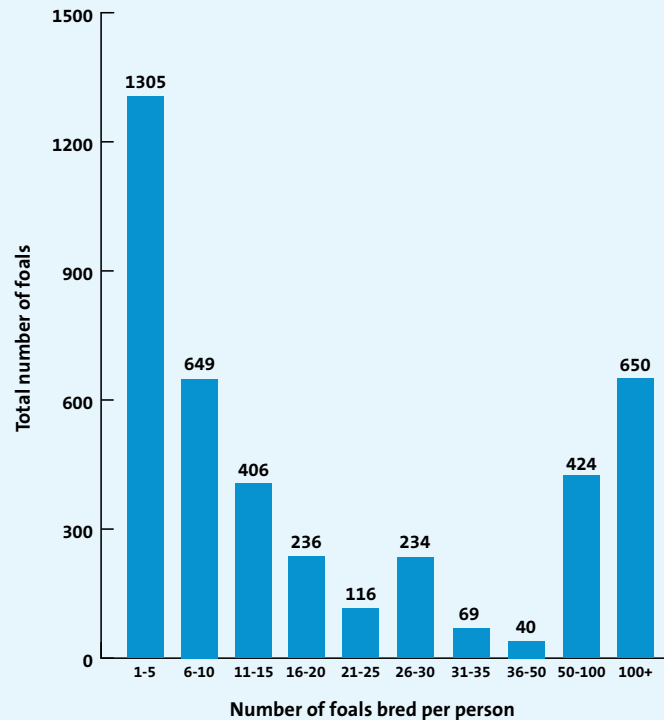
What difference can you make?

Whilst all sectors should take steps to reduce their breeding, it is important not to underestimate the contribution of individuals – those people who perhaps breed because they have a much-loved mare, because they want the experience of producing a youngster, or to give an out-of-work mare a role.

Having a foal may be very appealing, but do any of these reasons really justify bringing yet another horse into an already crowded country, particularly when no one can genuinely guarantee a horse a secure home for life?

It is very easy to think that people who only breed a small number of foals are having very little impact. This just isn't the case.

Collectively, twice as many foals are produced by people who will only breed 1 to 5 foals than by people who will breed over 100 each.



(Figures from World Horse Welfare survey).

We have a short, animated video about the impact of breeding. We hope you'll watch and share it with others.



Visit www.worldhorsewelfare.org/advice/breeding-horses-do-you-need-to-breed or scan the QR code with your smart phone.



Why do you want to breed?

Breeding with a view to making profit?

Crunch the numbers thoroughly first. Even if it all goes to plan and you can sell the progeny, you may well find you spend more than you make.

Breeding to give your out of work mare a role?

Does the reason she is out of work also mean she shouldn't realistically be put in foal? Even if there isn't a cast-iron veterinary reason why you shouldn't breed, that doesn't automatically mean it is right to do so. If your horse is lame or recovering from an injury, or if she is retired, should she really be expected to go through the strain and stress of pregnancy and foaling, along with facing all the associated risks?

Does the reason your mare is out of work also mean she shouldn't realistically be put in foal?

It is also worth considering whether she is on any medication and if this can be continued throughout the pregnancy. If not, will the mare be comfortable or is there any alternative medication which can be used?

Breeding to continue your horse's bloodlines?

With so many horses in the UK, it is important to consider whether this is truly sufficient reason to breed a foal. If you are thinking of breeding to promote a rare breed, research it thoroughly first.

Breeding to compete in the future?

Among other reasons, people often breed a horse in the hopes of competing it in the future because they feel they cannot afford to buy a horse already competing at the level they are aiming for. However, if you work out all the costs associated with breeding, keeping and training a horse to the same level, you may well find it's more expensive.

4 year old competition prospect



16.2 hh stunning Reg WB by proven competition stallion out of well bred mare. Professionally backed and ridden away and now ready to begin fulfilling his potential.

£10,000

It is likely to cost you around £14,000 to breed and produce a ridden four-year old, regardless of standard. Consider that purchase prices are often much lower for an equivalent horse. Would it be a better option to save a set amount of money each month which will allow you to buy a horse capable of what you want within the same time period?

Bear in mind that you cannot insure potential, so if your youngster has an accident before reaching its full competitive capabilities, you are unlikely to be able to claim as much on loss of use insurance as you would if a proven competition horse had the same accident.



Breeding for the experience of raising a foal?

If you simply want the experience of raising a foal, can you find an alternative way of doing this without bringing another horse into the world? Many rescue charities, such as ourselves, rehome youngsters from soon after weaning. You would be giving a rescue horse a second chance in life, as well as having the pleasure of training a youngster.

Another added advantage is that most charities rehome on a loan basis, meaning that should the youngster not turn out to be the right match for you, the horse can be returned with the knowledge that it has a secure future:

www.worldhorsewelfare.org/rehome



Anyone contemplating breeding from their horse must accept the possibility that the mare, foal, or even both, could lose their lives during foaling.

What can go wrong?

Foals require a lot of time and commitment even if everything goes to plan, but if something goes wrong, that time could increase dramatically. For example, will you be able to cope if your foal needs bottle-feeding every hour or so, day and night?

Although it is important to say that the majority of foalings happen without any mishap, they are not always straightforward and there can be serious consequences which must be considered. Anyone contemplating breeding from their horse must accept the possibility that the mare, foal, or even both, could lose their lives during foaling. Although not common, it is vital to consider this and decide whether the risks are worth taking.

Even if the pregnancy and birth go well, both still place a huge amount of stress on the mare. It can be difficult to assess the pain and discomfort a horse is experiencing, so it is easy to underestimate just how much the mare goes through. Many people choose to breed from their mare because she is very precious to them, but this in itself may be a good reason not to breed, particularly if she hasn't foaled before and therefore you have no way of anticipating how she might cope.

What will it cost?

Breeding is expensive. On top of the routine care that any horse requires, you must also allow for extra veterinary visits and treatment (such as scans, blood tests, swabs, vaccinations, etc.*), covering costs, stud fees and livery, additional insurance, feed, and standard emergency preparations (such as having a source of frozen colostrum available in case the foal doesn't suckle within the required time).

Then there are the unforeseen costs if anything goes wrong. This could include additional stud fees if the mare doesn't take after the first covering or stays at stud livery longer than anticipated (pregnancy can last as much as a month longer than standard in some cases), additional veterinary costs either for the mare or the foal, transportation costs, or even the costs associated with finding a foster mare if the mare dies or rejects the foal.

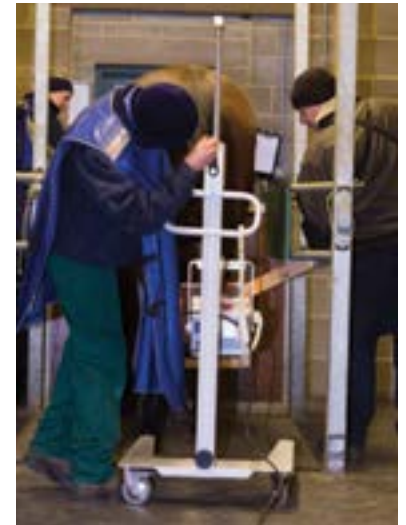
It is worth noting that most insurance policies only cover foals from 30 days onwards, so problems encountered at an early stage may not be covered. Consider if you are likely to lose your livery place whilst the mare is away at stud or if you will need to budget for two lots of livery fees. Many livery yards will not take foals, so you need to check this before having your mare covered.

It is likely to cost a minimum of £6,000 from covering to birth or £14,000 to breed and produce a ridden four-year-old, if kept at livery. Costs to produce from covering to the age of four could easily reach in excess of £28,000, with the possibility for significantly more in the event of any problems.

Bear in mind these figures are in addition to all the routine costs associated with your existing horse.

You can find more detail on our website.

**See HBLB Codes of Practice at <http://codes.hblb.org> for veterinary breeding recommendations.*



Routine costs from covering to the age of four could easily reach in excess of £20,000.



It is likely to cost a minimum of £6,000 from covering to birth – in addition to the regular costs of keeping your mare.

The future

No matter what steps you take to produce a healthy foal, it is always possible it could be born with, or develop, a problem.

Whilst having a dam and sire with perfect conformation, temperament and ability will increase the chances of producing a foal with the same qualities, there are never any guarantees.

Genetics is a very complicated area, which we still have a huge amount to learn about. Remember that a mare or stallion could have a genetic predisposition to something they do not display themselves. You cannot assume any offspring they produce will not inherit a problem from either or both of them simply because they show no signs themselves.

If your foal is born with less-than-perfect conformation, this can lead to a wide variety of problems. This might restrict their career, mean they can't be ridden at all, or predispose them to the development of certain problems.

Even a top quality mare and stallion can produce a foal with conformational, developmental or behavioural problems, and it is important to consider how you would deal with this before taking the decision to breed.

If the foal turns out to have a long-term problem, would you be prepared to keep it for life even if it can't be ridden? Or would you be prepared to have it put to sleep if a secure future can't be guaranteed?

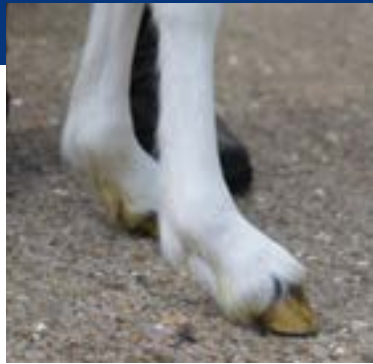


Even if your foal is happy and healthy, there is always the possibility that you might not gel, or it may not excel in or enjoy the same disciplines as you.

Does the reason your mare is out of work also mean she shouldn't realistically be put in foal?

If you have bred from a horse because you hope to have a foal with the same temperament, it is possible this may not be inherited. In this case, are you prepared to keep the foal for life, even if it means not being able to have the type of horse you really want?

On top of inherited traits, how a foal is handled, trained and weaned will have lasting implications throughout their lifetime. Can you be assured that your foal will be trained and weaned using ethical methods?



There are a lot of common beliefs about breeding, but they aren't always true...

- Myth 1: Breeding is always profitable.** It has become increasingly difficult to make money from breeding, and there are certainly no guarantees.
- Myth 2: It costs less to produce a foal for competition than to buy a competition horse.** This isn't necessarily the case – see page 8 for more details.
- Myth 3: Breeding a good mare with a good stallion will always produce a good foal.** Although good parentage is essential, there are still any number of problems the foal could have.
- Myth 4: You can breed out any problems in the mare by choosing the stallion carefully and vice versa.** This might reduce the chances of problems appearing in the foal, but isn't a guarantee and may actually be contributing to the wider continuation of these problems.
- Myth 5: Pregnancy reduces the chances of laminitis.** Although it was previously believed that pregnancy reduced a mare's chances of getting laminitis, experts now believe that it can actually increase the risk.
- Myth 6: Having a foal is easy for the mare.** Although it is a natural process, this doesn't mean it's easy or stress-free. In some cases, it may unfortunately be fatal to the mare. Even in a straight-forward pregnancy and birth the mare is still put through a lot of physical stress.
- Myth 7: Breeding is a good thing to do with an out of work or retired mare.** If the mare is retired, or out of work due to injury, consider whether it is right for her to carry the extra weight of a foal. Is the injury due to a problem that could be inherited?
- Myth 8: Horses must have a 'role'.** Because keeping horses requires time and money, it is easy to think, or to be persuaded by others, that they need to do a job of some kind in order to 'earn their keep', such as being ridden or used for breeding. Many owners enjoy keeping their horse even if it doesn't have a 'job' to do, and most horses are happy just to be horses.
- Myth 9: I am guaranteed to find a good home for the foal.** Whilst there are a lot of good homes out there, it is increasingly difficult to be certain where a horse will end up. There are currently more horses than there are good homes and sadly it is all too easy for horses of all types to end up with unscrupulous people.
- Myth 10: I can guarantee the foal a home for life.** You can have the best of intentions, but unfortunately, no matter how many plans you put in place, no one can give this sort of guarantee.

Blakey's story...



Imagine yourself as Blakey's breeder...

You bred him from your own mare so you could event him in the future, but have since had a car accident and are unable to ride.

Although you love him, you can't give Blakey the care he needs or allow him to fulfil his potential, so you sell him to an experienced horse owner.

Things start off really well, but, unknown to you, a few months later he goes lame. They call their vet out and it turns out to be a permanent problem and he needs to be retired. This is bad enough, but now imagine their situation changes and, try as they might, they are unable to keep Blakey.

They manage to find a home for him as a companion and are happy his future is secure. But the new owners decide to ride Blakey. He goes lame so they sell him on. The next owner tries to ride him and he goes lame again. This cycle continues until eventually Blakey ends up in the wrong hands, half-starved, with a dead horse in the stable next door.

We take in about 300 neglected horses every year, every single one of which started life somewhere.

Sadly, Blakey isn't fictional...

Although we can only imagine the beginning of his story, we know the ending. Blakey was one of the horses that came into our care following the infamous Amersham case in 2008, where over 100 horses were found in an appalling state. He received rehabilitation from the specialist team at our Hall Farm Rescue and Rehoming Centre, but despite restoring him to the stunning horse you see pictured above, those lameness problems couldn't be fixed. Tragically it was simply impossible to get Blakey pain free, even just standing in a field. Despite our best efforts, our only choice was to have him put to sleep.

We don't know how he came to be at that yard in Amersham, but it is easy to imagine the story we have just described. The reality is this isn't an extreme example. We take in about 300 neglected horses every year, every single one of which started life somewhere.



Your choices as a horse owner can make a real difference, not only to reduce the amount of neglect, but also to make it easier for horses to find good, safe homes in the future.

If you or anyone you know is thinking about producing a foal, please stop and think. Breeding a foal can be a wonderfully rewarding experience. However, it is important to consider all the potential problems, and whether there may be a better option, before making the decision.

Ask yourself: do you really need to breed?

Your choices as a horse owner can make a real difference, both in reducing the amount of neglect, and making it easier for horses to find good, safe homes in the future.

Whether you breed one foal a year or just one in your lifetime, it is important not to underestimate the impact your choices can have.

The greater the number of horses in the UK, the harder it is to find them all safe, loving homes. Right now there are thousands of horses without good homes.

Every horse born increases the chance of neglect: either to that horse directly at some stage in its life, or by indirectly shunting another horse into an awful situation.

We rescue about 300 neglected horses every year, every single one of which started life somewhere.

Do you need to breed?

This leaflet outlines just some of the areas you should consider before putting your mare in foal, and we hope you will take the time to read and share them with people you know who are thinking about breeding.



Get involved with the Need to Breed? initiative at:
www.worldhorsewelfare.org/advice/breeding-horses-do-you-need-to-breed or scan the QR code with your smart phone.



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