

Daily Racing Form
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We have the technology...

It is now 30 years since Steve Cady wrote in The New York Times, "The economics of supply and demand dictate the tight control over Thoroughbred breeding. If artificial insemination were permitted, hundreds of sons and daughters of famous sires could be foaled each year. Presumably, that would dilute the price."

It is 25 years since Whitney Tower wrote, in the late, lamented Classic magazine, "Curiously, the very rule of The Jockey Club that covers live breeding grants leeway for an approved form of AI when it says, 'Natural cover includes, for the purpose of this paragraph, the immediate reinforcement of the stallion's service by a portion of the ejaculate produced by the stallion during such cover.' " He was referring to an artificial insemination practice politely called "incapsulation."

It is six years since a Blood-Horse chart on the pros and cons of artificial insemination listed one of the cons as "Creates over-expanded book," and it is also six years since Jonathon Irwin, a member of the Irish Thoroughbred Breeders Association, wrote, "As none of the authorities are presently prepared to initiate a limit on the number of mares covered by any one stallion, their attitude toward AI can hardly be guided by a desire to, in some way, protect the breed. . . . Why should the breed be restricted to old-fashioned and expensive practices when the number of mares being covered manually is really only in line with the worst fears of the anti-AI lobby?"

It is only three months since John Sparkman wrote in Thoroughbred Times about "the glacial pace of change in the tradition-bound Thoroughbred breeding industry." He concluded: "Sticking our head in the sand is not an acceptable response."

And it is only two weeks since I read that Thunder Gulch, the

leading sire of Thoroughbred money winners in 2001 and sire of the Horse of the Year, Point Given, had covered 371 mares in shuttle service between the United States and Australia.

When I read about Thunder Gulch and eight other Thoroughbred stallions that covered more than 200 mares last year, I called John Gaines, who knows both sides of the artificial insemination argument, having been a major breeder in both Thoroughbred and harness racing, and asked him if Thunder Gulch and his busy counterparts could cover that many mares with natural cover.

"Oh sure," he told me. "In fact, some people believe that breeding a stallion every day helps his libido."

Thunder Gulch obviously is one virile stud. But he is not alone.

David Schmitz, who wrote about Thunder Gulch in *The Blood-Horse*, noted that Honour and Glory covered 292 mares last year; Fusaichi Pegasus covered 273; High Yield, 271; King of Kings, 233; Langfuhr, 218; Spinning World, 208; More Than Ready, 203; and Lion Cavern, 201. And if you add stallions shuttling between Japan and Australia, you will find that Fuji Kiseki covered 308 mares in 2001 and nine other stallions covered 100 or more.

Mr. Gaines, discussing artificial insemination, acknowledged its superiority in mare safety, protection against venereal disease, cleanliness, and efficiency. But he pointed out the tremendous swing it creates between highly successful and established stallions and young stallions, including sons of successful stallions, who would be denied opportunities to cover the best mares.

Aside from shuttling between hemispheres in transoceanic jets, how can top Thoroughbred studs now cover hundreds of mares when formerly their books were 40 or so?

Gaines said the answer is the same as it was when he was breeding studs 60 times and being criticized for it: better management of broodmares. "We palpated the mares morning, noon, and night to determine the precise time of ovulation, and then bred them," he said, adding that scientific and management techniques have improved

vastly since that time. So have artificial insemination skills, which allow for just the precise timing that Mr. Gaines speaks about.

Thoroughbred breeders must know of the health benefits of artificial insemination. Any veterinarian can list them. So the question lingers: If it makes sense to protect mares and stallions from injury and disease, and top studs now are breeding 200, 300, and in some cases nearly 400 mares a year, why not use artificial insemination?

The answer, it seems, is that logic does not spend much time in the breeding shed, while hidebound, stubborn tradition hangs out there round the clock.