

IQHS Update on HERDA!!!

The Australian Quarter Horse industry is currently buzzing with talk and fear regarding the genetic disease HERDA! It appears most people are concerned about another round of compulsory DNA testing of ALL stallions regardless of whether or not they carry the POCO BUENO bloodline, plus the potential of deregistration of horses, imported horses not being able to be registered in Australia and the concern that HERDA carriers (**not affected in any way**) will be worth nothing, and some peoples livelihoods may disappear before their eyes.

This feeding frenzy is costing the Pleasure Horse industry thousands of dollars in lost sales, association memberships and new interest in the Quarter Horse breed throughout the country. Let's take a step back, catch our breath, and consider the true picture and some viable options!

1. Reports of HERDA in Australia go back to the mid seventies and early eighties and in the US back to the early seventies, when no one even recognised the disease. We would benefit to understand that possibly hundreds of thousands of horses carrying the infected bloodlines have been bred, and line bred for the last five decades without any genetic testing. Some of these horses carry a very high concentration of POCO BUENO blood. So ask yourself how many infected horses showing the HERDA disease have you seen or even heard about?
2. As science develops DNA testing across every aspect of human and animal genetics to fill our hunger for perfection, and ease our fears, does that mean we have to avail ourselves to all these tests? With reports of between twenty to thirty genetic diseases in Quarter Horses, are we going to test for every possible one, before we can register our horses? If this is the case, how much will these tests cost the industry in another twenty years???

Science is a tool for our benefit, to use to manage our horses and make informed decisions, but it is not meant to be used as a rod on our backs that restricts our businesses, reduce our incomes and isolates the industry!

The scientists that have developed the HERDA tests should be congratulated for providing the tools for astute breeders to properly manage the breeding and future development of the Quarter Horse industry. It would be good to consider that scientists and universities, also need income to sustain their facilities, and services, and this income is derived from developing tests like DNA parentage verification and HERDA status. Just because there is a test for something does not mean we HAVE to use it, or that it needs to be used! Has anyone asked how many HERDA cases there have been in Australia in relation to the number of horses in the registry? Should there be a considerable amount of positive cases to justify the cost of compulsory testing?

In reading both the recently printed material and that posted on industry web sites, it's obvious that HERDA cannot be controlled without knowing the status of BOTH the

stallion and mare. Compulsory testing of stallions only, is not in any way a step to managing HERDA! The mares need to be tested before being bred, and logic would suggest this will be the next enforced step regarding HERDA. There are already HERDA carriers in this country, and more can come in over the next few months that will continue to pass on the gene. Why discriminate against those that will be imported in 2008, and beyond? If it is really an issue why not immediately restrict importation of all HERDA horses?

Responsible industry leaders like Richard Bull of Tamarang, Tamworth, owner of 'Acres Destiny' and 'Tassa Lena' have made the decision to test his stallions and to also test his mares before breeding. This is an example that needs to be followed! Richard said that "breed associations should continue to record HERDA carriers within their Stud Books as some of the best horses in the world were, and are carriers, and these horses will still be bred regardless, the disease will continue to spread but can be controlled". Richard went on to say "I'm all for the control of genetic diseases as long as these controls are in line with how the disease is transmitted". If you don't have the suspect bloodlines in your horses, there is NO NEED to be doing any testing for HERDA. HERDA is a recessive gene and will not breed on! HERDA is easily managed and controlled, by responsible breeders like Richard Bull and others.

The AmQHA have a program regarding HERDA. The AmQHA have made an investment into the development of the HERDA test at UC Davis. The AmQHA have not made any rash decisions on how they may deal with HERDA. The Cornell University test for HERDA, to date has not been published. Before the AmQHA imposes any compulsory testing, it MUST go through AmQHA normal rule making process. That is, all changes to, or new rules, go to the membership for discussion and voting at the AmQHA annual Convention. If the AmQHA Equine Research Committee does make recommendation to the Stud Book and Registration Committees that a test be required, the decision will be presented to the membership at the 2009 Convention. Should compulsory testing be passed at the Convention, it appears the opinion of those in the know, is that it would be highly unlikely that deregistration of previously registered horses would occur. It is also highly unlikely HERDA carriers would be denied registration into the AmQHA Stud Book!

Owners and breeders of Australian bred Quarter Horses can rest assured horses they breed in Australia will be eligible for registration into the AmQHA Stud Book through the facilities of International Quarter Horse Services, under current American regulations regarding HERDA and other genetic diseases.