

The "Bright Side of PMU

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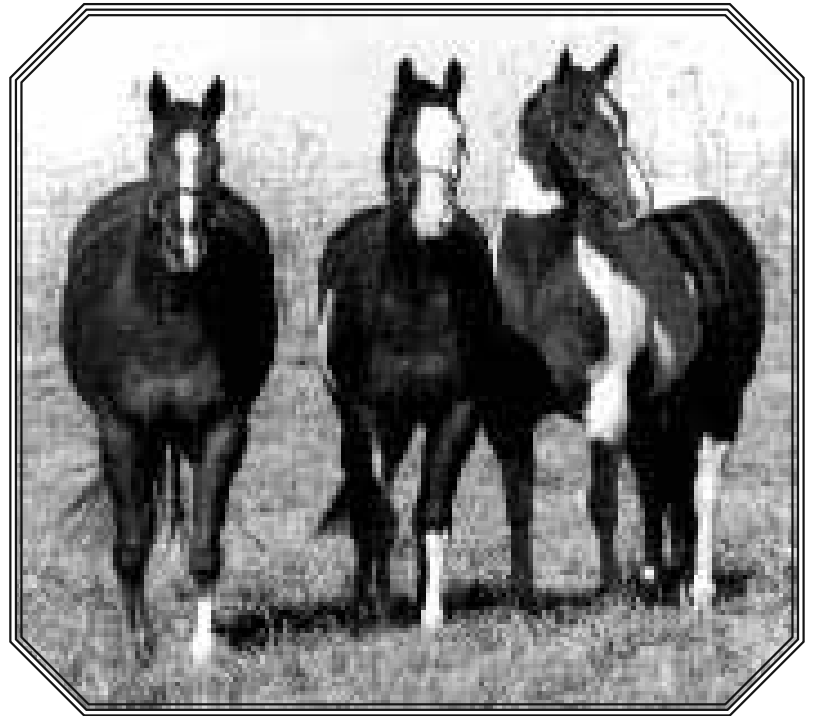
In the spirit of furthering the exchange of horse information, I hope to shed more light from a different perspective on PMU horses with this article. "PMU" stands, of course, for "Pregnant Mare Urine", the base for the manufacture of hormone therapy (Premarin) for women experiencing the negative effects of menopause. As in any type of business, there are/were good and bad PMU operators. And, as usual, it's the bad ones that generate the bulk of the publicity. The animal activists love this negative press so, of course, that's what the media will run. Here are some things to consider.

The PMU operators have strict guidelines imposed by the Wyeth Ayerst Laboratories that holds their contracts. The *Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Horses in PMU Operations* is 18 pages long. The pregnant mares must be turned out for exercise every day, stalls cleaned, stall sizes and the positions of feeders and waterers are precisely stated, the ventilation in the barns has to meet requirements, worming and vaccinations must be current, etc. The pharmacy company inspects ranches once a month each year. Veterinary and animal welfare representatives can come at any time. International vet and welfare groups visit as well. One recent report, "Consensus Report on The Care of Horses on PMU Ranches" states: "Equine ranching is the most highly regulated horse ranching activity in North America."

Hmm, some current non-PMU horse owners with stalled or minimally confined horses don't usually follow anything close.....

There is a group called NAERIC - North American Equine Ranchers Information Council - which PMU ranchers can join. The group dispenses information about the PMU colts produced by the members. This organization will match winnings by eligible PMU colts dollar for dollar in many BIG money events - NRHA, NCHA, AQHA Incentive Fund, APHA Breeders Trust, Appaloosa Incentive Fund - and you could even get other, local events sanctioned if you applied. In Canada, especially, there are a multitude of sanctioned events from dressage to team penning!! This is a direct and concentrated effort to promote the colts as something other than a by-product of the Premarin production. The ranchers have also realized that breeding for a more quality baby by researching bloodlines and public color choices helps increase their profits. Many of the ranchers feature very well bred stallions to cross on their mares, offering the public foals with top cutting, reining, halter, draft bloodlines. Several have stallions with show records.

Since the hormone therapy usage has fallen drastically, many of the PMU ranches have given up their contracts. The drug company has increased the guidelines for maintaining the mares due to the public's ignorance in how the mares are kept and some of the ranchers simply couldn't afford to continue. The mares are kept outside all summer, foal there, are bred there, and are extremely healthy. The colts are allowed to be baby colts, running, playing, soaking up sun and generally learning how to be



Can you tell who's PMU?

L-R: Flamey, Sue, Dandy

horses. Guidelines state how the foals should be introduced to grain and when they should be weaned. In the winter, the mares are housed, fed, watered, turned out and stalls cleaned, again, according to strict guidelines. How many non-PMU horses get that much freedom and scrutiny on a daily basis in summer, let alone in the winter?

Another thing that comes to mind is that for some of those ranchers in ND, SD and Canada, it is/was a great way for income during the time of year that doesn't allow decent weather to do much of anything!! Winter in Iowa/Midwest doesn't come close to the harsh conditions in the Great Plains. It can be totally unfit for man and beast!

The NAERIC website is extremely informational. There are lists of events, a search engine to find whatever breed or color foal you could want, breeders to contact, results of NAERIC horses winnings, lists of NAERIC horses already listed and a simply a huge amount of information.

So, what's my connection with all this?? A stallion I raised that is a third generation of my bloodlines is owned by a former PMU operation. I've had two of his fillies since they were foals. Unfortunately, the mare that I showed very successfully at halter, was killed by lightning this summer. She had several nice babies for us. The remaining mare is in foal to our new Quarter Horse stallion and we can't wait for her baby! Her barn name is "PMU Sue"!

I've been to several sales of PMU foals. Kalona is not the only place that offers PMU sales. Go to Story City next fall and see the Gustafson colts; go to Verndale, MN, to see the Estenson and others production sales - these are colts with lots of pedigree and color. Simon's Twin Cities Horse Sales, Cannon Falls, MN, may still have some sales featuring PMU colts.

Don't always follow the crowd with opinions on controversial subjects like PMU colts - go to the NAERIC.org website and see for yourself!! Your next winner could be there!

*And the answer to the question under the photograph?
It's Sue and Dandy that were the PMU foals.*