

PMU (Pregnant Mare's Urine) Foal Adoption

by Bonnie Calkins, Iowa City

I was asked to write an article for *Apples 'n Oats* on PMU adoption because I am currently riding and training a PMU foal. My foal, however, was not technically adopted. I bought her at a sale in Kalona. This particular auction happens every fall and Bryant Horse Farm in North Dakota rents the Kalona facility to hold their PMU foal auction. Either way, the end product is the same—ownership of a PMU foal.

The Dark Side of PREgnant MARE's urine (Premarin®, or PMU)

Menopause is a condition faced by nearly all women. A popular drug used to treat it is Premarin®, a Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). Premarin® remains the third most-prescribed drug in the world (just behind Tylenol), even though, as the consumer becomes more and more enlightened about its production, its usage is dropping dramatically. The manufacturer of this drug has brought over one billion dollars per year to its manufacturer. But on the flip side, over one million horses have lost their lives because of it.

For some women, the menopausal phase of life can be torturous, and they will do whatever it takes to ease the symptoms. Menopause maladies may include (but are not limited to) hot flashes, heart disease, weight gain, anxiousness, night sweats, dry mucous membranes, mood swings, incontinence, poor memory, sleeping problems, and osteoporosis.

Premarin® often seems like a miracle therapy. But to those women who know how the product is developed, the drug is most likely shunned, especially if those women love horses.

PMU foals are the by-products of the manufacturing process of Premarin. PMU stands for "Pregnant Mare's Urine" and is made from the urine of pregnant mares. PMU farms are mainly located in Canada and the Dakotas of the U.S. Some people fear PMU production will increase because of the baby boomers reaching menopausal age, while other people feel PMU production will decrease due to alternative methods of relieving menopausal symptoms.

The physical process of PMU production is far from humane. The mares are impregnated and spend the next 6-8 months in a stall attached to a mechanism that collects the mare's urine. They suffer from lack of exercise and extreme boredom. Right before the mare is to deliver the foal, they are turned out into the open pasture to give birth. Here they remain until the foal is 2-5 months old, at which time the foals are rounded up, and moved to auction. If the foals are not lucky enough to be adopted, they are sold to slaughterhouses for their meat. Then the whole process begins again. The horses used in Premarin production (and consequently their foals) can be almost any breed. The majority are draft or draft crosses because the bigger breeds produce the most urine.

Recently, as women are beginning to shun the use of this HRT, PMU farms are going out of business. On the surface, this seems like a good thing, but the result is that there are many, many horses, both mares and foals, left "in excess." Way too many are simply ending up at auction.

I wanted a PMU foal because: A) It would be cheap to buy a foal, and B) I wanted a draft cross foal. There are several web sites that offer PMU foals for adoption. I will include a list of these at the end of this article. Most do a fairly thorough job of investigating the adopting party. Fees vary, but typically run around 600\$-800\$. Many adopting agencies let you request the type of foal you want, based on gender, coloring, and discipline. Some let you choose your foal based on pictures available on the web. The foals are delivered to a dropship point where the adopting party picks them up for transport to their new home.



Bonnie & Roxie competed in a dressage schooling show at Shenandoah Riding Center on May 14th, 2006, and came away with a BLUE RIBBON!

PMU foals are different from other foals in that they have had very little human contact and are quite wild! My PMU foal, Roxanna Bell, was very wary of humans at first and had some bad habits, such as kicking, that had to be overcome. Can you blame her? Look at her life for the month prior to my ownership. She was yanked away from the herd, given shots, loaded into a trailer with a bunch of other foals, carted to a strange place, and run into an auction ring.

Once I had my foal in her new home, I started very slowly gaining her trust. She is now a very trustworthy and inquisitive 3-year-old. She is being trained in dressage and surpasses my greatest expectations as a reliable mount. I have taken her on many overnight camping/trail-riding trips and she has been wonderful. She continues to be eager to learn and please. I only hope I can be the best owner for her and a considerate rider. Whatever your reason for PMU adoption, you will save a foal's life and gain a trusted friend in the process.



Roxie and Bonnie show great form as they participate in an Iowa Trail Riders Association (ITRA) and Great River Classical Horsemanship Association Trail Trial held this spring at Shimek State Forest.

- Denise Schieffer photo -

