



FUTURITY Foals

Why not raise or buy your own futurity foal and have fun showing it? First in a periodic series.

By Christine Hamilton

SEPTEMBER 2011 WAS "BIG HALTER FUTURITY" MONTH IN THE American Quarter Horse industry. The month saw the Big Money Halter Futurity in Jackson, Mississippi (Page 128), and the Iowa Futurity Extravaganza – three futurities in one – in Des Moines (Page 110). Among the four events, exhibitors competed for close to \$500,000 in purse money.

The success of these events is good news for the halter industry – both the decades-long success of the Iowa Quarter Horse Association Breeders Futurity and the promise of new programs like the World Conformation Horse Association futurities.

The basic futurity format – nominating an eligible young horse to a program and competing for a jackpotted purse – is a mainstay of the American Quarter Horse industry in almost every discipline from racing to reining, and halter is no different.

"When I grew up, almost every state had its own (show) futurity," recalls AQHA Professional Horseman Luke Castle of Wayne, Oklahoma. "You showed horses as babies, brought them back as yearlings, and then there was a western pleasure futurity for 2-year-olds and a maturity for 3- and 4-year-olds, all in that program within that state.

"For all of us in the horse industry – AQHA, horsemen, all of us – I would like to see that come back, get people showing in their state and involved with their state associations."

For many who love American Quarter Horses, there are good reasons to find a halter futurity to "play" in if you never have before.

Why Play?

PATTY BRUNNER OF RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA, HAS BEEN RAISING Quarter Horses for more than 30 years, most of those alongside her late husband, Don. She listed two main reasons why Brunner Quarter Horses showed in futurities: manners and promotion.

"We participated in halter and weanling futurities because it taught your babies manners and got them out and exposed to life," Patty says.

"Our stud (Talls Executive by Tall Tailwind), we promoted from a baby all the way through to an AQHA Championship," Patty says. "It was a progression for him from kindergarten all the way through college. The halter was the kindergarten, the handling."

They were also raising horses they wanted to sell, and futurities gave them an outlet to show off their own horses and promote their stallion's foals.

SUCCESS IN GERMANY

The Deutsche Quarter Horse Association Futurity awards more than 100,000 Euro in prize money annually, and is the most successful program of its type on the continent.

Begun more than 30 years ago by a small group of breeders wanting to promote German-bred horses, it was eventually opened up to breeders across the continent.

"The idea was to help the halter classes to develop," explains AQHA Past President Johannes Orgeldinger of Grosswallstadt, Germany, and one of the organizers of the original program. "In Europe, there was never a (strictly) halter horse market. We showed our good-looking performance horses. The idea was to give horses a chance to be shown for many years at our main show (including as younger horses in the halter)."

Stallion owners donate a breeding to the DQHA (German Quarter Horse Association) that is auctioned off for a minimum of 50 percent of the service fee. The stallion owner and the buyer of the breeding have a chance to show a resulting foal in DQHA Futurity classes.

"The weanling halter classes are always a highlight at the futurity," Johannes says. "They draw the biggest audience and breeders are always curious to see how certain mares or stallions produce.

"If you like to show your horses and handle them at a young age, halter is the only class you can show them in, since the German longe-line class allows no yearlings. And we do not show our horses in performance classes before they are 3 years old."

Again, manners and promotion are the biggest pluses.

"Your horse first shows in halter and gets some show experience before it gets ridden," Johannes says. "Horses that just get shown in halter are seldom seen in Germany.

"The futurity has a big impact on our industry," he adds and ticks off the reasons why: "The stallions get advertised in our annual breeders' directory and yearbook; the prize money makes a good headline; horses are eligible in futurity and maturity programs for up to six years; and we have a pretty good international participation.

"It is one of the best established programs in the German western horse industry. It is a great advertisement for the American Quarter Horse in Europe."

“It helps create a market for a young horse; it gives people an incentive to buy a weanling,” Patty explains. “If I can go to a sale and buy a weanling, work with it, and then am able to come back and recoup some of my money (in a futurity) and educate my baby at the same time, it’s a win-win.”

For herself and many of the people she and Don sold foals to, it was also the joy of showing a foal you’d handled yourself.

“It’s hard to convince today’s society to start at the kindergarten level with horses,” Patty says. “Everybody wants one that’s ready to go ride today. But there are those who realize that if they bring up a horse the way they want to bring up a horse, they know what it knows.

“We need to encourage more people to not be afraid of raising their own and starting their own under saddle. We need to encourage more people to do that and feel like they can do that.”

A futurity weanling or yearling can be a great way to get your feet wet.

How They Work

THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF PROGRAMS OUT THERE WITH PURSES OF all sizes, successful at the regional and national level – programs limited to foals by nominated stallions, some for foals eligible through sales, through specific shows, big and small, through AQHA state affiliates as well as through the WCHA, including a halter claiming futurity format that debuted in 2010.

The Iowa Breeders Futurity is a good example of a classic halter futurity program.

“Our first Iowa Breeders Futurity auction was held in 1974, and it included divisions for halter and racing,” says Bill Horton, president of the Iowa Quarter Horse Association. “Today, we have halter and performance futurity.

“The IBF operates as a closed futurity. We have a stallion auction in January to which stallion owners donate a breeding. Mare owners purchase a breeding through that auction and the resulting foal is eligible for the futurity. The stallion owner also gets a futurity berth with the donated breeding.”

Of the stallion’s foals, only those two associated with the stallion auction are eligible for the breeding – hence, a closed futurity. Because the program limits the foals that can be shown, Bill thinks it helps to increase the value of those foals, and increase the prices brought for those donated breedings in the auction, which helps beef up the futurity purse.

“Our babies can show as weanlings in halter, yearlings in halter or longeline, and they can go on to show as pleasure horses as 2- and 3-year-olds,” Bill adds. “The stallion owner has the option of designating his stallion’s fee 100 percent to the halter division purse, 100 percent to performance or split between the two.”

In other programs, all foals by a stallion in a given year could be eligible, as long as the stallion owner nominates the stallion to the program.

The Mississippi Quarter Horse Association Holiday Classic Weanling Halter Futurity is another typical format. To make a stallion’s foals eligible, the stallion owner must pay the futurity one half of the stallion’s advertised breeding fee by mid-October – 90 percent of those fees are jackpotted to the futurity purse. By mid-November, foal owners must nominate their eligible foals and pay the fee, which also goes toward the purse. The futurity is then held at the MQHA Magnolia Classic in December, with junior (foaled on or after March 16) and senior (foaled on or before March 15) divisions for fillies and colts. The purse and how deep the payout goes depend on the final entries and number of stallions nominated.

The Brunners began a futurity three years ago through the Ranchers Quarter Horse Breeders Association, for foals purchased through the annual RQHBA sale. Sale graduates can compete in a yearling halter futurity and then in a subsequent 2- and 3-year-old performance futurity. The futurity classes run alongside the AQHA show at the South Dakota Central States Fair in August.

“It’s been growing each year,” Patty says. “It’s a start.”

Find a Futurity

THE KEY IS FINDING THE FUTURITY THAT MATCHES THE FOAL YOU want to produce – the stallion that fits your mare and pocket-book, and the program you want to play in.

“I would head to the AQHA state affiliates first to find local or regional futurities,” Bill says. “A lot of state affiliate futurities have struggled recently, but there are still successful ones like Iowa’s. And there are still a lot of smaller, what I call ‘neighborhood’ futurities around, with horsemen’s associations and such.

“And stallion owners know. If you have a particular stallion you are interested in, call the owner and find out if he’s nominated to anything, closed, open or sale programs.”

You can also contact an AQHA Professional Horseman for what he or she would recommend: “A good trainer can help you decide whether to breed one or buy one, fit it yourself or get help and how much help,” Luke says.

“Go to breeders who raise foals you like, and get their advice,” he adds. “So many breeders have helped people get started and do well.”

“We’ve been involved with open futurities and select (closed) ones,” Patty says. “The biggest thing to keep in mind is the integrity of the futurity and the people involved. If there’s no integrity there, it won’t have any duration at all.”

Make a Plan

“THE BIGGEST THING TO DO IS TO FIGURE OUT WHAT YOUR GOALS are,” Luke says. “Write down what you want to accomplish and go from there.”

Show and sell? Fit it yourself? Raise one and start it yourself? The sky’s the limit.

Pick a program and where you want to get your foal. If you are going to breed one, pick a stallion for your mare.

“When you decide to breed, you still want to match the right mare to the right stallion, and breed quality to quality,” Bill says.

Make sure you understand the rules that will make your foal eligible. There will be nomination deadlines and fees that you must meet to maintain your foal’s eligibility at several points in the futurity program. It doesn’t hurt to confirm with the futurity that a stallion is indeed eligible for the year you want to compete.

Luke points out the most important thing to remember.

“Yes, there is a financial reward to showing in a futurity, and that’s great,” he says. “That gets people enticed, but I don’t know how much that actually really helps people stay involved with horses.

“You have to enjoy the horse. Most people that show horses, when it comes right down to it, it’s the camaraderie, the fun of being around horses and horse people, that’s really why they do it.”

He pauses and you can hear the smile in his voice as he adds: “There is nothing more rewarding than walking into a futurity with a baby you’ve raised and gotten ready yourself.

“That is a lot of pride in ownership right there.”

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