

## **MINIATURE DONKEYS – PURCHASING BREEDING STOCK**

**By**

***Rhetta McAlister – Country Music Miniature Donkeys***

Before putting together a breeding herd, breeders should define their goals. They should predetermine the breeding criteria and decide on the color, size, and type of Miniature Donkeys that they would like raise. A uniform herd is very appealing to the eye and improves marketability.

The first step should be to research through Donkey Publications to determine which breeders have a solid reputation and a track record of producing fine donkeys. Donkeys with pedigrees from herds that are of excellent quality, are well known and strongly promoted will be of great benefit in the future when selling young donkeys.

Jacks and brood jennets from a bloodline that produces show winners and strong breeding stock improve the probability that the offspring will be quality animals. The purchase price of breeding stock becomes small over time when considering the income difference in producing quality animals for sale vs. average animals.

A breeder would start by visiting as many of the selected breeding operations as possible. This would give him the benefit of seeing the breeders operation, the cleanliness of the facility and the quality of the herd. The overall quality of the young donkeys could be observed. The breeder would have the opportunity to see the dam and the sire of any foal he might be interested in purchasing and could examine their health records and their pedigrees.

Breeding age jennets, of exceptionally fine quality are rarely for sale. By the time a jennet is producing, the owner will realize a far greater profit from raising and selling her yearly foals, than from selling her. Generally, one's choice is to purchase the available, average quality jennet, or to purchase a top quality jennet foal. I would recommend purchasing the best quality jennet foals available that meet the predetermined criteria. An average quality jennet will rarely produce an exceptionally fine foal.

There are many benefits to purchasing a future herd sire, as a weanling. The breeder can work with the jack from a very young age to teach him good manners, discipline and respect. Pasturing this weanling jack with the herd jennets helps him to know and respect jennets, long before breeding.

The jack should be of the very best quality that meets the breeders predetermined criteria. He will be the breeders most important and valuable investment. He will be half of every foal that is raised. The jack should be smaller than the jennets, to help eliminate birthing problems. The jack should be sired by a proven producer.

If the jack foal being considered has a sire who is a great individual and possibly has a strong show record, and if this sire has produced other donkeys that are great individuals and have strong show records, the breeder will be purchasing a foal with a strong genetic possibility of producing other outstanding animals. The probability is further enhanced if the dam is also a strong individual that has produced outstanding donkeys in the past.

Many very good looking donkeys do not have a strong gene pool that passes on their fine traits. This makes having access to the breeding history extremely important. Knowledge that the specific jack and/or jennet, that produced the foal being considered, have previously produced outstanding breeding and show quality foals should give the breeder confidence that the bloodline has a high probability of producing outstanding offspring. This will also be a very strong selling point when selling foals from their bloodlines.

When looking for individuals to be used as breeding stock, look for bright eyed, alert, friendly, well disciplined donkeys that appear to be in good body condition and in good health. Look closely for unfixed feet, runny noses, eye and skin infections and coughs in both the individual and the herd from which he is being purchased. One should avoid purchasing a sick donkey or one that comes from a herd that shows signs of poor maintenance or illness.

Look for good, sound conformation, pretty heads, well developed, rounded rumps and strong boned straight legs. It is important to check the donkey's teeth for a good bite. An under bite or an overbite of over 1/8" is unacceptable to the registry and can be an inherited conformation fault.

It is invaluable to select donkeys with good dispositions and who are affectionate and trusting. A herd with these characteristics is easy to handle and will save many hours when training, worming, giving vaccinations, filing hooves and imprinting foals.

Many breeders imprint their foals. It will be to the breeder's advantage to purchase a foal that has been imprinted. These foals will be very trusting and affectionate. They will not object to having their feet picked up, and their ears, eyes and mouth handled. They will stand quietly to be caught and haltered and will be used to the sound and feel of clippers. Most breeders who imprint their foals will also have taught their weanlings to tie. All of this is the result of many

hours of work with the foal. The buyer will greatly benefit in many ways from having a young donkey that has been trained in this manner.

When at a breeding operation, take advantage of looking carefully at the sire and dam of the foal you are considering. They should be of the size and body type consistent with your predetermined criteria. Examine the pedigrees of the sire and dam to know the color and the size of all registered ancestors. Examine the show records of the dam and the sire.

It has been our experience at Country Music Miniature Donkeys that the majority of our customers plan to enjoy raising foals and to make a profit from their Miniature Donkey breeding program. Most of our customers require extensive pedigrees and come to us because of the strong breeding record and show record of our herd sire, Country Music's George Jones. George Jones is the 1994 National Champion Halter Jack. In 1999 and 2000, his offspring began to be shown. They have now won over 25 National and World Championships in the U.S. , Canada, Europe and New Zealand. Our program is based on carefully select jennets in combination with a great individual jack with a strong pedigree of proven breeders.

The selection of a donkey whose size, color, conformation and disposition is appealing and who has a strong pedigree of donkeys with the required characteristics enhances the probability that it will produce extremely marketable breeding and show quality foals that are in strong demand throughout the United States, Canada and Europe. The extra bonus of a strong show record by the sire or dam or by their previous foals can be a confirming factor for the purchaser and will add to the stability of the offspring.

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