

ECAHS Learning Center

Correct Terminology

By Carol W. Mulder © 1986

Many people have asked me about the subject about this month's column-correct horse terminology, or nomenclature.

In today's horse world, we see continual incorrect usage. This is probably because we have so many relatively new people who do not know correct nomenclature since they've never heard or seen it, and because there is so much incorrect usage – even among people who have been breeding Arabians for many years. In this column, this month I'll just run over some of the most common misunderstandings.

Foaled. Horses are foaled, not born. The only time “born” might be used is if a writer has an occasion to use “foaled” so repetitiously that it makes a tiresome reading problem, but in ads and /or general, ordinary usage, horses are foaled – not born.

Produce. The progeny of a mare, only. Stallions never produce. Only mares can be producers. Examples are “produce of dam” and the mare is an “excellent producer”. This is one of the most common errors made today and many people use the words “produce” or “producer” incorrectly in their ads. Typical was a recent ad in another publication which termed the stallion being advertised at stud as an “excellent producer”. At first in the ad the subject was referred to as a stallion, but his owner wrote of him as though he were a mare. The proper wording, in the case of the described ad, would have been that the horse is an “excellent sire”.

Get. The progeny of a stallion. An example is “get of sire”. However, one does not say the stallion is an “excellent getter”, rather, one says he is an “excellent sire”. Never use the words “produce” or “producer” in connection with a stallion.

Family Line. The tail female line – only. This refers to the lineage of the tail female, or bottom line of the pedigree, and can mean all the way back to the founding mare. It does not mean the strain, although it is sometimes misused in that way.

Tail Female. The bottom line of the pedigree – same as family line.

Bottom Line. Same as family line, or tail female.

Dam Line. Same as family line.

Female Line. Same as family line.

Strain. Traditional Arabian horse strains stem from the desert days before stud books when use of strains was the only way of keeping some loose knowledge of breeding. Today strains have only romantic, historic interest to most breeders. The strain name always follow through the dam, or family line, which is why strain and family are often wrongly used interchangeably. Strain names are sometimes even called “family strain” because of the name coming down only through the family lines. However, “strain” used alone is sufficient, less confusing, and more correct.

Sire Line. The top line of the pedigree, only. It follows top sire lineage from son to sire to grandsire, and so on back through the generations to the founder of the line.

Top Line. Same as sire line. The top line of the pedigree.

Tail Male. The sire line lineage.

Family Group. A group of horses representing a specific female lineage – only. I have been to important exhibitions – big international exhibitions where people ought to have known better – where exhibits of groups of horses were billed as “family groups” when they were no such thing. “Family group” refers only to bloodline connections through the female or family bottom line lineage.

Sire Line Group. This term refers to a group of animals representing a connected descent through the top line, or sire line. At some of the big exhibitions I’ve attended several of the groups billed as “family groups” were actually sire line groups. Such misuse of terminology is very unprofessional.

Lineage Group. A group of animals of specific connected bloodlines which may be scattered throughout their pedigrees – not necessarily by family or sire line connections. Many of the groups at exhibitions I’ve attended, billed as “family groups”, were actually lineage groups.

Bloodline Group. Same as lineage group.

Five Generation Pedigree. The usual pedigree – the sort we see most often – is the five generation pedigree. This means five generations back from the subject animal, whose lineage is being charted, and who does not, for some odd reason, count as a generation. A five generation pedigree has 32 ancestors listed down to the last column back from the subject animal.

Second Dam. The second generation back tail female mare in a pedigree; the dam of the subject's dam. This continues back as THIRD DAM, FOURTH DAM, and so on until the pedigree ends – but always refers to the tail female mares only.

Grandsire. Refers to the top line grandsire of the subject animal and corresponds to second dam, as counterpart.

Grandam. Refers to the dam of the subject's sire.

Maternal Grandsire. Refers to the sire of the subject's dam.

Half-Sister or Half-Brother. Refers to animals who share the same dam, only.

Maternal Half-Siblings. Refers to animals who share the same dam, the same as half-sibling, above, but is more precise than the age-old and increasingly (in Arabian circles) obsolete meaning of half-sister or half-brother. Even though maternal half-brother and maternal half-sister is not traditional, it is correct and is in common usage among Arabian horse people.

Paternal Half-Siblings. Animals by the same sire. This is not traditional usage, but is becoming more and more prevalent, and fills a needed niche.

By the Same Sire. Paternal half-siblings.

Three-Quarter Siblings. Three of the four grandparents in the pedigree are the same animals; three-quarter siblings are usually by the same sire or out of the same dam, with the other parents being either maternal or paternal half-siblings.

Seven-Eighth Siblings. One more generation of relationship on the same format as for three-quarter siblings are usually by the same sire or out of the same dam, with the other parents being either maternal or paternal half-siblings.

Blood Siblings. Animals who have the same four grandparents.

Sister in Blood. Same as blood sister.

Own Son, Own Daughter. A direct son or daughter of a particular animal; this becomes significant when the particular animal is long dead and there aren't many sons and/or daughters left alive. For example, I hear people today saying such things as "my Abu Farwa mare" when they mean their mare is of Abu Farwa lineage, and not that they have a daughter of that famous horse. However, when someone says they have an "own daughter" of Abu Farwa, they mean they have a direct daughter, which is quite a different thing from having a mare of Abu Farwa breeding.

Crabbet Bred. Bred by Crabbet Stud, only. “Crabbet bred” does not mean the subject thusly described is simply of Crabbet breeding – it means that the animal was actually bred by Crabbet Stud. This is a common usage error which is very misleading.

Of Crabbet Breeding or Lineage. This means the animal has Crabbet bred animals in its pedigree, but was not itself bred by Crabbet Stud. There are very few animals left alive which were actually bred by Crabbet Stud – who are actually Crabbet bred – but there are multitudes of Arabians of Crabbet breeding or Crabbet lineage.

Bone. People today don’t use this word very often, but it used to be important. However, when I do hear it used its meaning is sometimes garbled. For example, not so long ago I was talking to a breeder who has been raising Arabians for a number of years and was startled to find this person thought “bone” meant the length of the cannon bone. It does not. “Bone” means the circumference of the cannon midway between knee and the fetlock. In general horsedom eight inch bone is considered good, but many Arabians have slightly smaller measurements which are usually acceptable because Arabian bone is frequently of greater density and so stronger for its size. Of course, there are some Arabians whose bone is so light as to constitute a serious fault, but fortunately such individuals are rare.

Bench Knees. This term seems to mean something different to every person who uses it. Some use it to describe buck-knees, some to describe off-set cannons, some to describe knock-knees, and all sorts of other things as well. The result is that “bench knees” doesn’t really mean anything and is not correct terminology. To avoid such confusion, it is better to use the specific age-old descriptions mentioned.

Swan Neck. Some Arabian owners do not seem to understand the meaning of “swan neck”, it is not rare to see incorrect usage. I have seen “swan neck” used in ads to describe a neck the owner of the advertised horse thinks is beautiful. The term is used as though a swan neck were a badge of merit. A swan neck is a faulty neck. A swan neck is just what the term says – it is shaped like that of a swan, and not at all like the ideal of what an Arabian neck should be. A swan looks lovely with this sort of neck, but Arabian horses look better with the lightly arched neck the breed is supposed to have. With proper biting and training a swan neck can be made to look pleasing, but it is still not a good Arabian neck. To say one’s horse has a swan neck is to say nothing good of the subject’s neck – it is proclaiming the hoarse has a faulty neck.

There are certainly other terminology problems but these are the most common, and are all we have space for in this column at this time.

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