



## Horse Care

# New Mare Milking Device

by **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**

A new invention by Buck Wheeler (who created The Stableizer about eight years ago) is making life easier for people who milk mares to obtain colostrum. A simple idea, the Udderly EZ mare milker is easy to use and easy on the mare's udder.

Norman Umphenour, DVM (resident veterinarian at Ashford Stud, Versailles, Kentucky) has tested the prototype of this milker, using it on a large number of mares during the 2005 foaling season. "It works very well. A person just has to learn how to use it. We've used it here continually, this foaling season, since we always have a good colostrum bank. We keep pints of frozen colostrum on hand in case we get a mare that doesn't have any milk, or doesn't have good colostrum, or if we lose a mare. We have a colostrum meter to check every batch to see if it's good. We check the colostrum on all the mares that foal, and if a mare doesn't have enough IgG in her colostrum, we supplement her foal with some of the stored colostrum," he says.

"We take about a pint from each mare when she foals, and label it with the mare's name, date and the strength of the colostrum. We have a little syringe that goes with each batch; they drop about five cc's of the colostrum into that syringe and tape that to the pint container of colostrum." When they get a foal that needs colostrum from the bank, they take that small amount (in the little syringe) to thaw out and check—to cross match to make sure it's compatible with the foal's blood type. That way you don't have to thaw out the whole pint until you know that it's going to work for that foal," he explains.

"The thing I like about the milker is that it works very well when trying to get a little colostrum from a maiden mare—or any mare, for that matter—because it doesn't make their teats sore. The old way, we used to try to milk with thumb and finger, and in trying to get the milk it often irritates the teat. But with the pump, you just slip it over the teat, and with the suction there is no irritation to the teat," says Umphenour.

"One person can milk a mare this way, without needing an extra person to hold the mare. You can use The Stableizer that Buck invented, putting that on the mare's head to get her to relax, and then milk her with the pump. One person can milk a mare this way without needing someone to hold the mare. The Stableizer tends to have a tranquilizing effect on the mare, causing her to relax and let her milk down," he says.

Petra Caster (from Australia) is spending the foaling/breeding season in Kentucky, managing one of the foaling units at Ashford Stud. She has been using the mare milker on the mares she has to milk and is very pleased with the way it makes her job easier. She has used it a lot, milking colostrum both out of nurse mares and the mares in the foaling barn. "Once I get the milker over the mare's teat, if the

mare doesn't want to let her milk down I just bump her a couple of times on the udder, like a foal would do, and then the mare relaxes and the milk flows right out," says Petra.

The mare milker is handy in several ways, besides the times you need to get colostrum from a mare right after she foals. "If you have a mare that's NI positive (her milk contains antibodies that will be deadly for the foal) and you want to milk her out, this gives you an easy way to do it—to get rid of the colostrum that contains the harmful antibodies and to hasten the production of regular milk. This saves having to milk her out by hand a number of times. Milking by hand is when a mare tends to get really sore, when you are trying to milk them often and strip them out," says Umphenour.

With the milk pump a person is able milk the mare out easier and completely, with less irritation to the teat, to get that antibody level down to where the foal can safely nurse the mare again. This device is easier on the teat and less apt to bruise it or set the mare up for a mastitis infection.

"There are a few changes Buck is making right now, before the milker goes on the market. He's changing the curvature of the top—where the flange fits up against the udder. He's adjusting its shape so it will fit tighter, and is also changing the rim to a softer rubber around the top. It won't be abrasive and will have a tighter connection, to produce a better vacuum," adds Umphenour.

"This is a really good device for use at the foaling barn, and something we will continue to use. It's also going to be handy for people who milk goats—obtaining milk for people who are allergic to cow's milk, or babies who are allergic to their mother's milk or can't handle cow's milk. This device will work very well for goats as well as mares," he says.

"There will also be a couple different sizes. As Petra has mentioned, some of our nurse mares that we get colostrum from are part draft or draft mares, and some of their teats are much larger than those of the Thoroughbred mares, or an Arabian mare. There will be different size adapters that can be attached to the reservoir or bottle you are milking into," says Umphenour.

The milker also makes it safer to milk a mare. "When you are milking by hand you almost have to get down underneath the mare. With this, you just reach under. It's also very durable and doesn't look like something you'd have to keep repairing." Even if it gets dropped or kicked, it is quite resilient.

It's also easy to clean. There's not much chance for any kind of bacterial buildup, or transmission of something from one mare to another or one baby to another. To clean it, the container can be rinsed out with warm water and a little chlorox. Petra Caster says "It's all plastic and you just detach the container from the pump, put the container in a bucket with a little bit of bleach and let it soak a bit, and

it's clean. Then you let it dry out and it's ready to use again. It's very simple! I wondered why I hadn't thought of something like this myself," says Petra.

She uses the milker every time she has a mare that has a foal and needs to collect any colostrum, and also for any NI babies. "I collect milk for them from the nurse mares. It's very easy to use. Rather than trying to bend down under there to milk by hand, I just attach it onto the nipple and give a bit of a squeeze, and it just gushes. You can quickly get two or three bottles full. Milking by hand, your hands get tired and the mares get sensitive. They don't mind so much with the milk pump; I think it gives more of the same sensation as the foal nursing the nipple. It has the same sort of suction when you pump on it. You sometimes have the odd mare that doesn't like anything touching her, but that's just the mare. Most have been fine about it," she says.

"You hold this milker with one hand, and up it goes onto the teat, and boom, boom, boom, you get as much milk as you need. It's been wonderful to be able to use it," she says. For a nervous mare, being able to obtain the milk quickly and safely is a plus, and the mare doesn't have to put up with the length of time it would take to milk her by hand.

"Once you get this up around the teat and start pumping, the suction pulls the teat down into it a little bit and makes a good seal. Then the vacuum pulls the milk out—it comes streaming out and you can hear it hit the bottom of the container. When that teat is milked out, you just reach under and across to the other one; you can milk the mare from the same side. You don't have to go around from side to side. It's a marvelous little invention."

It's nice having larger attachments for the nurse mares that have bigger udders. "It's been really easy to milk them, because they have a lot of milk and this saves me time. I had two NI babies here at once and had to run back and forth and collect a lot of milk for them. This takes five or 10 minutes instead of 15 to 25 minutes to milk one of the big nurse mares," says Petra.

Before milking, it's important to make sure the udder is clean. "I just use a little warm water and cotton wool to wash the udder off a little. Then I put the milker on, give a couple of pumps, and wait for the milk to stream out. If the milk isn't coming, I just do like the babies do, and give the udder a nudge or change the angle

slightly with the pump and squeeze the trigger again, and then it comes streaming out," she explains.

"It is very time saving, and I feel a lot safer doing it. I am often here on my own and have to milk out a lot of mares. With the nurse mares, I often don't know them. With the mare milker I don't have to get down on my knees; I can stay on my feet and hold the mare with one hand and reach under and get the milk," she says.

"The bottle that attaches onto the pump can be detached when it's full, and poured into a bigger container. Then you just click it back on and go again. I think it will become very, very popular. It saves me a lot of time and energy, and that's very important when I'm trying to get everything else done with the foals. It's very handy!"