

Heart and Soul

By Sarah Duryee

Jordana was a red roan quarter horse mare, who was 12 years old when this story begins, and she had already had three healthy foals. When she was younger Jordana had been an award-winning show horse, then she sustained an injury that meant she would no longer be as fit as she should be to succeed in the show world. After that, she had been turned out to pasture and her owners had decided to try breeding her. Her first foals were all big and beautiful and showed promise in the show ring, then came a little colt called Soul.

March 29

Today we bred Jordana to a handsome black stallion who is an up-and-coming champion and everyone is excited to see how the baby turns out. With two gorgeous parents, the foal is sure to be a showstopper. It is my plan to keep the foal and train it myself, which makes it all the more special for me.

April 13

It is now fifteen days since Jordana was bred, which meant that it was time for her first ultrasound. The vet inserted the probe rectally to get a good view of the uterus while we waited in anticipation to see if she was indeed pregnant.

Thankfully she was and it's just one baby so we didn't have to worry about eliminating a twin (2). Unlike humans, mares don't handle twins well, while there is less than a ten percent chance of twins in quarter horses there is an eighty percent chance of abortion when they are present so we always make sure to check (5).

April 28

The second ultrasound for Jordana went well. This one was to check for a heartbeat on the fetus and make sure it was alive (2). There were no surprises, the baby had a strong heartbeat and it all looked good. Everything usually goes to plan but it's always reassuring to know that everything's ok with the mare and her baby. She is only a month into her nearly yearlong pregnancy and I already can't wait for this kid to come out.

July 22

Jordana is now into her second trimester and my excitement has settled down for the moment. Horse pregnancies usually last around 340 days so we still have a long way to go (6). Jordana is

doing well she looks great and her summer coat has finally come in, meaning she is a sleek shiny girl. Only 225 days left until her March 3rd due date.

October 31

Its Halloween now and I managed to weasel Jordana into a costume. She was a mouse and I was a cat. I got on her bareback to take pictures and looking at them now, I'm not sure I've ever seen a fatter mouse. Jordana is just getting into her second trimester and she is huge, way bigger than she normally is at this stage in her pregnancy. This baby must be massive.

Only 101 more days now.

December 13

We had the vet out to check on Jordana, she won't stop growing and we are starting to get worried that we missed twins. It does happen sometimes if they're very close together or if one is way off to the side and hard to see. We were reassured when there was no sign of anything abnormal today and the vet could only see one baby on the ultrasound.

Twins happen when a mare double ovulates. In mares, there are two uterine horns only one of which usually becomes pregnant. The problem occurs when there is one egg in each horn allowing for two babies. Because of a horse's build, the fetuses can end up very close together or even on top of each other making it easy to miss one (4).

January 20

Jordana has started showing signs of foaling, she has been rolling a lot and her udder is filled out. I should be happy but I'm getting worried because this is too early for her to be foaling.

Foals born before 320 days don't make it and are considered abortions (2).

February 12

Well, we made it past the 320-day mark but there is still cause for concern. Jordana is huge and there is still a possibility of twins, ultrasound isn't always accurate. Mares aren't meant to be carrying two babies and if there are twins the likelihood is that they won't survive due to their small size and lack of nutrition in the womb. Even if they do survive there will likely be physical defects because of how cramped the uterus is with two babies in it (1).

February 22

It's going to be soon. Jordana started waxing today, which is when a small amount of milk builds up on the tip of the teat (6). It's a sure sign that it won't be long until the baby gets here, or babies. I hope it's just one, things would be much less complicated if it was just one big foal.

February 26

Jordana finally foaled, even though it was a few days early it still feels like forever. At around 8 this morning she went into labor taking her time to push the baby out. We knew right away it wasn't alright. It was very small and did not develop correctly. It never even took a breath. We lost heart, even if there was another foal the chances were slim that would it would live. She kept pushing and out came another foal. It was small and wet but there, amazingly, didn't appear to be anything wrong, then it took a breath and we all cheered. Once we made sure the baby was alive and fully formed, we stepped back and let Jordana take care of her new foal. The baby took a while to stand, we were starting to worry but then it managed to prop itself up on spindly legs and take a few shaky steps. It found Jordana and milk without much problem and began nursing soon after standing. The babies are always so cute when they're this small, all legs and fluff.

We had the vet out that evening to check on both the mare and the baby. Jordana hadn't expelled her placenta and he had to give her some oxytocin to help restart her contractions. This is fairly common with twins and was no big deal (1).

Soon she expelled her placenta and the vet said there shouldn't be any more problems. We were relieved to hear that everything was ok and that the baby should make it. Also, it's a boy who has already shown a big personality. We checked on them both throughout the night just to be sure he was still ok as nobody could quite believe all the odds he had beaten. It was as if he might vanish if we went too long without seeing him.

February 27

It's morning now and the baby is still here. All he does is eat and sleep right now but I still love watching him. Jordana really beat the odds. When a mare is pregnant with twins there is an 80percent chance, she will abort five to eight months into her pregnancy (4). Of those who do carry twins to term, there is only a thirty five percent chance of a live foal, that's an overall seven percent chance of what Jordana did (3).

March 10

The baby is growing fast. Last week we opened up the door to the run behind Jordana's stall for the first time since he was born and he has been having so much fun running around. Sometimes I stand out there for hours just watching him play, and sleep.

It's still hard to believe that he's here and he's healthy. We've taken to calling him Soul because he has to have a strong one to have made it to here. At first, we wanted to call him Spirit but Soul just fit better.

April 20

We've been struggling to come up with an official registered name for Jordana's foal and today we found the perfect one, Heart and Soul. When the first foal was born, we could see his heart and this little guy has more than enough soul to go around.

Four years after Soul was born, he was well on his way to becoming a handsome full-grown quarter horse. His coloring was a combination of his dam and sire's coloring that was a beautiful blue roan. He had entered the show world the year before and was already winning prizes. In his downtime, he still enjoyed running around the pastures as fast as his long legs could carry him, the same as he had done when he was nothing but an undersized miracle.

References

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- 5) Scone Equine Hospital, Scone Equine Group, www.sconeequinehospital.com.au/risk-information/Twins.
- 6) Severn Edge. "Pregnant Mares and Foaling." *Severn Edge Veterinary Group*, www.severnedgevets.co.uk/blog/pregnant-mares-and-foaling.