

Age Is Only a Number

How much does an early birth date matter?

By Andrea Caudill

WEARLING SALE SEASON IS UNDERWAY, AND the sales are replete with catalog pages dripping with information. As you pore over hundreds of choices looking for your future winner, how much does the foaling date, prominently displayed on every catalog page, influence your decision? How much credence should you give it?

It is generally held that foals born as early as possible in the year have a natural advantage over their peers when they begin their racing careers. A January foal might have as much as six months' advantage

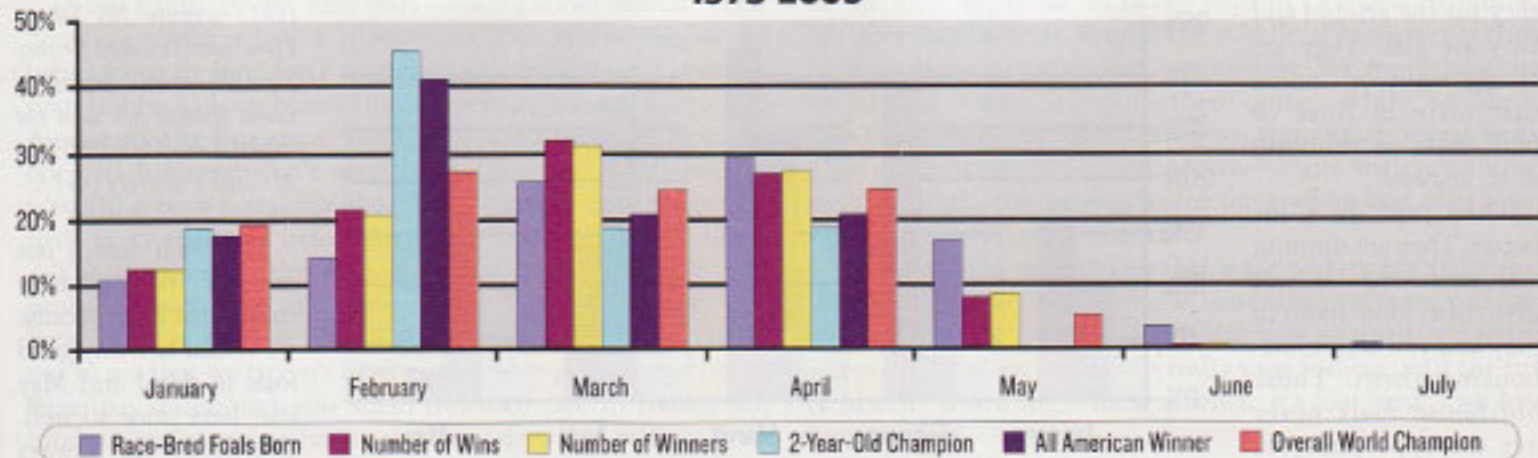
of development time over one of its late-born rivals.

In the history of the sport's most famous race, Galobar – born the first day of 1957 – won the very first edition of the All American Futurity (now G1) at 33 months of age. Three Oh's, however, was a June 3 foal and a mere 27 months of age when he won the 1968 running. Additionally, all-time everything stallion and champion First Down Dash was a late-May foal.

The *Journal* asked several experts for their opinions on the importance of age.

Percentages by Foaling Date

1975-2009



The first step in creating an analysis is to set a base line. We have done so by looking at the percentage of race-bred foals born in each month. Statistically, any random subset of this group should have the same percentages by month. We can look at the variations in each category to see any advantages or disadvantage they may have as 2-year-olds. We have also included overall world champions from those years to get an added perspective of how the birth month is reflected over a foal's racing career.

FOALING MONTH	RACE-BRED FOALS BORN BY MONTH		NUMBER OF WINS		NUMBER OF WINNERS		2 YR OLD CHAMPION		ALL AMERICAN		OVERALL WORLD CHAMPION	
January	157267	10.52%	800	12.28%	654	12.24%	6	18.18%	6	17.65%	7	18.92%
February	200759	13.97%	1365	20.95%	1097	20.53%	15	45.45%	14	41.18%	10	27.03%
March	381911	25.56%	2058	31.59%	1693	31.49%	6	18.18%	7	20.59%	9	24.32%
April	437201	29.26%	1753	26.91%	1457	27.26%	6	18.18%	7	20.59%	9	24.32%
May	248104	16.60%	511	7.84%	429	8.03%					2	5.41%
June	50368	3.37%	24	0.37%	22	0.41%						
July	10617	0.71%	3	0.05%	2	0.04%						
TOTAL	1494227		6514		5344		33		34		37	

ROGER DALY Aubrey, Texas

Veteran sales-prep conditioner Roger Daly has sale-prepped several top yearlings, including All American Futurity winner *Falling In Love* again. Roger Daly Horses Inc. preps racing and cutting Quarter Horses and Thoroughbreds for sales, and offers a number of other services, such as colt-starting.

Typically, buyers like horses with an earlier birth date and a little more size at the sales, but I've learned over the years, it sure doesn't mean they're going to run. When you go to the sales, I think the earlier birth date and a little more growth does help overall. Buyers, particularly the ones going for earlier futurities, typically look for a little older, a little more mature horse. But a good-quality, well-bred horse born later can also do well. I think for some of the people who don't race them as early, it doesn't make quite as big a difference. The guys going for the earlier futurities, I think it makes a difference.

Most of my clients are pretty knowledgeable and study everything when deciding where to sell their horses. They have been doing this quite a while and study the market – breeding trends, where a bloodline might sell best, ages – and we do advise in some capacity, to the best of our ability. But the majority of our clients take care of picking sales on their own, including making some placements by age and size. I think that helps them, and I think that is important.

The earlier, more mature horses might go to earlier sales. Then the later babies, instead of going to Ruidoso, can go to Heritage Place, which is two or three weeks later. That doesn't sound like a great deal of time, but it seems like in the fall, those babies hit a growth spurt. So the extra weeks or month makes a big difference.

When we condition younger horses in our program, it stays about the same. About the only thing we'd do differently is not work the younger babies quite as long. We'd shorten their exercise time a little bit until they get a little stronger and a little older.

From what I read, All American winners come in all months – up to June. It looks like some of those late babies can sure run.

DR. CHARLES GRAHAM Elgin, Texas

A member of the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame, Dr. Graham operates Southwest Stallion Station in Elgin, Texas. The 40-year breeder stands nine stallions. In his own name, he has bred the earners of more than \$1.1 million, including Grade 1 winner *Racin Vike*.

Don't forget Three Oh's. He was foaled June 3, 1966, and he's the youngest horse ever to win the All American Futurity.

It's so psychological about January and February foals. Some people are just convinced that you have to get them in the first month or two of the year.

Those early foals stay so humped up. It's cold and wintery weather, and I think they just don't do as good as a March, April or early May foal. They don't eat well. They don't do well. They stay under cover to get out of the inclement weather. They might get out and run around a little bit, but they don't run, play and exercise like a later foal. They are that way even down here in Central Texas, where winters are short and warm weather comes early.

Those foals that are born in March and on, they hit the ground and they are gone. They are eating right up beside that mare in three or four days, or nibbling at it, anyway.

They just do a lot better. They are running and exercising, if you give them some room to play and you aren't hot-housing them. Those hot-house foals never get the opportunity to develop their bones and muscle structure.

It might be a little questionable if the mare gets down to the latter part of May – but the colt will be good to run in those fall futurities and derbies.

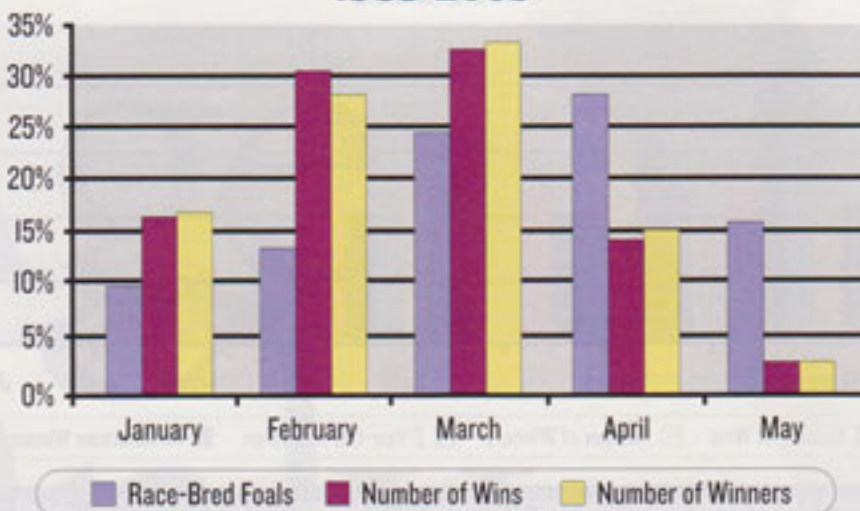
January and February just doesn't shake me up too much. It's just psychological – everybody wants these January foals. They think that's the only time to get them. They think that they run better and faster.

If you'll let the foals out to run and play, they'll do fine. I've raised quite a few foals – maybe 15 or so a year, here in the paddocks. I've never had one turn back because of OCD lesions, and that's because of the nutrition they get and the exercise they get from being outside to run and play.

I'm just not blown up about January and February foals. It's OK; it's good; it's all right. But the foals that arrive in March, April and the early part of May will catch up pretty quick to those early foals. Everybody has a different opinion, but from just watching it over a period of years, my opinion is that you can go up to about the 15th of May.

But don't forget Three Oh's.

Grade 1 Open Stakes Races 1983-2009



Jess BR and co-owner of All American Futurity (G1) winner *No Secrets Here*; and Gianni Franco Samaja, whose homebred *Good Reason SA* won the 2009 Los Alamitos Two Million Futurity (G1).

The birth date is not one of the primary things that I use, because we've had so many good foals in April and May that have done so well. Everybody is always wanting to get those January babies on the ground because at sale

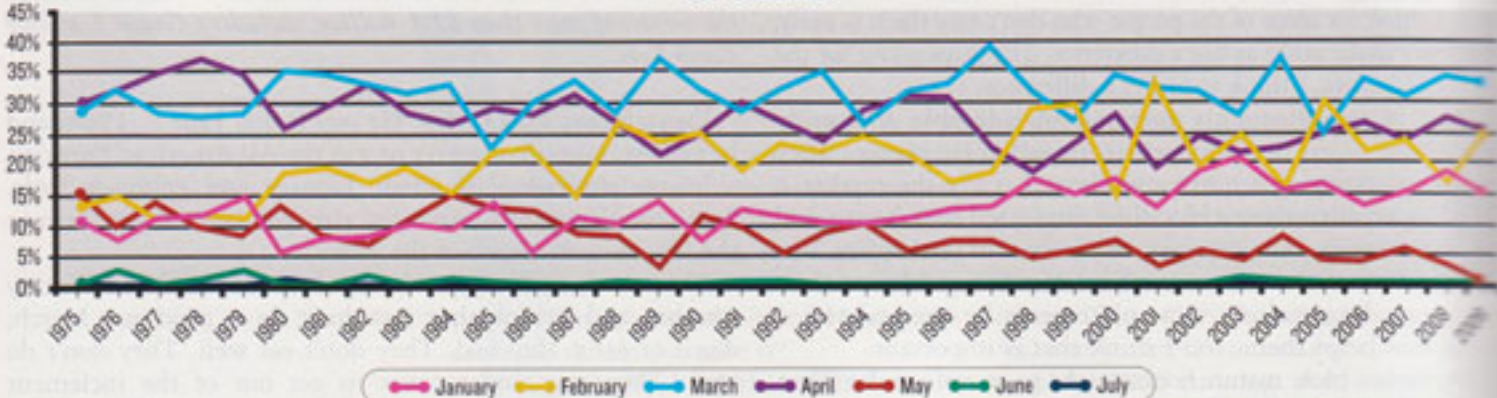
time they are supposedly bigger. But I've seen our April and May babies that are just as big as our January babies, if the genetics are there.

We don't run anything in the early futurities out here in California, like the Kindergarten (Futurity, G1). I've just never believed in it. I guess what I'm saying is, it doesn't bother me to have a later foal, if it's a good-enough individual with a good-enough pedigree. I'm willing to wait on one, anyway, even if it's, say, a late-May foal, and not put it in any of the early futurities but just look toward the end of the year.

Out here, we have a lot of the big races and the big money at the end of the year, and fresher horses kind of do better, like last year with *Good Reason SA*. He wasn't a late foal, but he got injured, we laid him off and brought him back, and he'd only had three races before he won the Los Alamitos Two Million.

Don't get me wrong: I look at birth dates, and if everything is equal – pedigree, conformation, etc. – I'd rather have the older foal, because he is going to be more mature and so on. But we've had good luck with later foals. (Grade 1-winning earner of \$267,723) *Strength In Numbers* was a late-April baby, and at the Los Alamitos Equine Sale, she was kind of small, kind of thin, kind of frail-looking, but she was really correct and I liked her pedigree. It is a real open pedigree. You could breed her to anything, so I picked her as a potential broodmare. She ended up being a pretty nice racehorse, too.

Stakes Wins by Month Foaled 1975-2009



How have stakes wins by birth month changed over time? The purpose of this graph is analyze trends during the period. It shows that January and February foals show an increase in stakes wins, while May and June show a decrease. March and April foals remain fairly constant. One explanation might be that the better mares are getting bred sooner to keep up with market demands.

And I didn't pay a lot of money for her because she was late. So sometimes it can work to your advantage.

In Sao Paulo, Brazil, they start running about March. Their breeding season is July 1 - December 15, more or less, so the babies born in July don't race until March of their 2-year-old year. It'd be like our horses that are born in January starting in August for the first time. The horses down there are typically born in July and don't start until February or March. It's actually a better deal for the horses because they do have a little more maturity before they start pushing them so hard.

The big horses, the ones they pay big money for, will probably stay here and race in the (United) States, just because there is more money to race for up here. But that's not to say that we haven't bred some pretty good horses in the Brazilian season and sent them down to race in Brazil, full brothers and sisters to horses that have done real well up here.

Bill Verdugo (former AQHA president) always told me that if you look in the registry, a high percentage of horses are born in April and May, especially on the ranching operations. Mother Nature has it where, when the days get longer, the mares start to cycle. And everything we do to get a January foal actually is working against Mother Nature. And it's not nice to fool Mother Nature - sometimes it'll bite you in the rear end. So that's my opinion. But opinions are like belly buttons - everybody's got one. My first consideration is the pedigree, secondly the individual and then the birthday.

ROBERT 'BOB' JOHNSON Lemmon, South Dakota

Bob Johnson has trained more than 1,000 winners and the earners of more than \$3.6 million. Last year, his trainees included South Dakota state-bred champions Cbicks Brief Case, Tentation, Dashing Meteor and Proud Royal Shakem. His family's ranch in Lemmon stands three stallions, owns 30 broodmares, and breeds and trains horses for racing, ranching and rodeo events.

You'll notice at, like, the Heritage Place sale, the January and the first part of February colts bring more money. They're more marketable because of the Heritage Place and Remington futurities, those big races, and people like to have those more mature colts.

Age doesn't really affect my opinion of a horse, but it affects what races and where I'd start that horse first. It affects a lot of other things - what futurities you're going to pay into, say races at Remington Park as opposed to something later on, and how late you'd want to start racing him.

March foaling dates don't bother me; first part of April

doesn't bother me. I don't start racing them as early as some people do. A lot of it depends on the colt himself and how fast he matures. We break all of our colts in October, November. We give them a break around the middle of January, get them back up again and start getting them fit. We're creating that foundation - we like to lope them quite a while, we like to ride them about 90 days before we start much speed work. That depends on the individual, too - those with open knees we'll back off, maybe quit them for a while and start them again at the end of the month.

At the ranch, we used to foal a lot of January colts, but it's really hard to do up there. When babies are born, you have to keep them in the barn until March or so until it starts to warm up. Now we don't even really start foaling until the first of March. We've cut it back to where it's just hard - we have long winters!

With my clients, I don't recommend or discourage them from a horse based on age. It's what my client wants to do with them. I've bought horses that are May colts, and I bought a horse several years ago that was born right at the first of June. We didn't plan on running him until the fall out in California, so it worked out good. The horse was fine.

If you're selling horses or breedings to other areas like barrel racing, the birth date really doesn't affect those horses. They don't put the pressure to the horses until the latter part of their 3-year-old year and, a lot of them, not until they're 4. So a lot of the barrel horse people I know aim for April to start foaling.

So basically, the earlier they're born, the earlier they tend to mature. But if you're not going to start running them until June or July, a late birth date shouldn't affect them. I have a lot of horses in my barn right now that are April, mid-April, even first of May colts. They're training fine and have even started already. But we're real careful and keep a good eye on their knees. ■

FOALING MONTH	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH	FOALING %
January	17.57%	12.63%	9.96%	15.41%	10.52%
February	23.78%	21.38%	19.82%	21.99%	13.97%
March	32.97%	32.12%	31.33%	30.90%	25.56%
April	23.51%	27.24%	28.54%	23.68%	29.26%
May	2.16%	6.24%	9.78%	7.78%	16.60%
June	0.00%	0.39%	0.46%	0.24%	3.37%
July	0.00%	0.00%	0.11%	0.00%	0.71%

FOALING MONTH	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
January	19.51%	25.00%	14.69%	15.68%	11.51%	11.57%	8.33%	11.03%	10.91%	13.04%	18.41%	16.07%
February	19.51%	25.00%	24.08%	24.72%	20.24%	20.16%	20.26%	18.62%	20.45%	21.91%	24.04%	19.29%
March	41.46%	25.00%	34.29%	32.66%	32.54%	31.34%	33.21%	31.72%	28.64%	30.61%	27.62%	36.07%
April	19.51%	23.81%	24.08%	23.25%	28.84%	28.48%	28.49%	27.59%	29.55%	24.00%	24.04%	22.50%
May	0.00%	1.19%	2.86%	3.51%	6.48%	7.93%	9.34%	10.34%	9.77%	10.09%	5.63%	6.07%
June	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.18%	0.40%	0.52%	0.28%	0.57%	0.57%	0.35%	0.26%	0.00%
July	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.09%	0.11%	0.11%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

This chart (and the accompanying chart above broken down by quarter) show foals' percentage wins by foaling month. One might expect to see the early foaled horses to lose their advantage sometime during their 2-year-old campaign. In fact, the races later in the year have comparable percentages to the early races. The statistics reinforce the opinions of our experts.