

How To Prevent Your Horse Becoming A Rescue

By Jessie Barbour

1) - Be prepared to sell. So many horses are 'promised' a forever home and then suddenly she gets pregnant, he loses his job, they have a family disaster, business goes bust, or in some cases a minor drama is maximized because its a great excuse to sell the horse we don't really have time and/or experience for. I don't care whether you have the most secure lifestyle in the world and are prepared to keep your horse forever. Be prepared to sell. Which means in order to rehome your horse to the best possible home you need to keep it in excellent condition, well mannered, well handled and as well educated as possible. Are you prepared and ready in case the worst possible scenario happens to you?

2) Educate. Most horses SC gets asked to rehabilitate are green. Very green. Some unhandled, most off the track that have never had anything done with them since. If you want to prevent your horse winding up as a rescue, educate it as much as you possibly can. If you can't, pay somebody who can. A good, sound education goes a long way to not only raising your horse's value but preventing it ending up with neglectful or abusive owners. Breed? HANDLE YOUR FOALS so they all tie, pick up feet, lead and are used to day-to-day stuff. Got a cheap horse because that's all you can afford? Get out there and put as much training into it as you possibly can. Get it used to as many different 'scary' things as possible. Make sure your sound broodmares are rideable and pretty decent to do at least the basics so they have a chance at finding a 2nd career packing a kid or nervous nellie around at PC or on the trails. Put the work in. Just in case.

3) Consider euthanasia. I know it's heartbreaking, I know its hard. I know exactly how horrible it is because I've been there several times, holding the rope for the sweetest natured, kindest, most lovely horses to handle and cried bitterly about the unfairness of it all. Face it. Who is seriously going to give the best home with all the care and money poured into an elderly horse that has re-occurring colic? Or a 20-something TB with serious arthritis? Or a 7yo OTTSTB with incurable joint issues? Unrideable horses are next to impossible to rehome to reputable, capable owners. Horses with birth deformities, horses with major conformational flaws, horses with an expensive illness or lameness to maintain... the long and the short of it is these horses don't rehome. And when they do, WE are scraping them up out of a paddock full of sand, out of a training-dogs-to-kill pen, out of a paddock they were dumped in like a piece of rubbish... and then WE PAY get them vetted, get their quality of life (or lack of it) determined and then WE PAY and make that heartbreaking decision their owners wouldn't. How is that fair on the horse? It happens, that your find a great home for a horse you don't want to pay for because you can't 'use' it, but that is the rare exception to the rule. Believe me.

4) Sell smart. Market well. Be totally honest about your horse, market it with good conformational photos, good photos that show the traits you're promoting the horse with. Photos of a clean, well groomed horse standing up nicely or moving well with a decent rider up and clean, well fitted gear takes what - an extra hour to prepare? That extra hour goes a long, long way to helping find good homes. Good honest marketing can make all the difference in the sort of home you attract. Be prepared to wait. A good home can take some finding, you can't necessarily sell your horse in the first week or two. Keep the horse in work if you possibly can, so potential buyers get a pretty accurate picture when they come to view them.

5) Vet the new home. Check out where the horse is going, ask for references, invite the interested person to come a couple of times to be sure that they feel that is the horse for them and so you can get a feel for whether you feel the buyer is right for the horse!

6) GET THE MONEY BEFORE THE HORSE LEAVES YOUR POSSESSION. It is very common for horse owners selling up to lose out, and not receive their money for the sale by trusting somebody to pay up after the horse leaves their possession. And if you're leasing, or you're selling on a payment plan have a solid, thorough contract signed before the horse goes anywhere!

7) Take responsibility. If you bought/accepted the horse into your possession and ownership - it is your problem now. Which means that you are responsible for all the training, hoof care, vetting, and all the 'problems' a horse may have. Even if you aren't the cause, it is your responsibility. If you don't like that idea, don't buy the horse.

8) Buy smart. Buy for what you can deal with right now. Get vet checks done. Ride a horse (if it's for riding) several times before making the purchase. Get professional assistance in deciding on your purchase if you're unsure; don't rely on Mary up the road who is so very experienced, she's had horses for years and years. A lot of 'Mary's' are REALLY experienced at all the wrong stuff! Call it concentrated ignorance, if you will.

9) When breeding, consider the horse's entire 30-odd year lifespan. Don't think it's not your problem as soon as its sold in utero, as a yearling, as a 3yo... your breeding choices affect the horse's whole life. Its conformation, its early training, its parents traits, its early care, the mare's care whilst pregnant... all this affects the horse's life and future. So yes, it is in some ways all down to YOU.

10) If you have an unfortunate accident get Professional help. Accidents (and hey, they happen! To everyone) which result in your horse developing an undesirable behavioural trait such as not loading onto a float, not floating well, being difficult to ride in some circumstances, learning to rear or buck or whatever - GET a PROFESSIONAL to help retrain the horse and you! A well reputed professional. Catching these in their early stages, getting the issue sorted by a pro who actually knows what they're doing will go a long, long, long way toward preventing your horse winding up as a rescue later in life.

11) If your horse or Nan's horse is in the care of somebody elderly, visit and check on them often! So many badly, badly neglected horses are in the care of badly, badly neglected elderly people who struggle to provide care for themselves. It is your responsibility not to conveniently forget that ol' Grandad and his neddies don't exist.

12) Don't take somebody's word for your horse's condition and care if you aren't around. If you're leasing your horse out, you've retired your horse off to a friend's farm, your horse is away for breeding or at the breakers... check on them! Don't just rely on the other person's word that they're 'fine'. Visit regularly to ensure your horse is still getting the care it needs. This could save you a lot of heartache and money in the long run.

Taking some time and precautions can prevent YOUR horses ending up like so many of their kind.

