

Buying Horses – The Smart Way



Second Chance Horse Rescue Inc. actively promotes responsible and compassionate equine ownership practices and care. This document is provided to assist you with sound and good information on purchasing horses.

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Purchasing a horse;

The long awaited day has come, it is time for you to look around to FINALLY buy a horse of your own! A day that brings a high of joy to horse lovers everywhere, and a day of celebration and excitement! But before you begin hunting through the classifieds and emailing owners of every horse that takes your fancy please read this document.

Purchasing horses can be a minefield of traps and pitfalls ready to snag the unwary buyer. For those new to horses, or getting back into horses after a long hiatus, you may as well walk into a property with “SUCKER” tattooed to your forehead. Unscrupulous and desperate sellers LOVE people like you, real horse lovers on the high of being able to buy a horse of your own who will believe what they’re told and who wear their hearts on their sleeves.

This document is designed to give you insights and tricks of the trade to help you negotiate the purchase of your horse or pony successfully and happily with the best outcome for you and the horse; the right match and a long and happy relationship.

Which horse?

The first step, selecting your personal criteria. It is advisable before you start to have in mind what you want. It is your horse, you need to be happy and comfortable with it. What do you want? First decide on what you want to do with a horse. Do you want a Pony Club mount for a child? An all-rounder Adult Riders mount for yourself? A show horse? Just a paddock/bush hack for weekend trail riding? Something you want to do dressage on or are you an aspiring showjumper? Western? Campdrafting? Team Penning? Knowing what your plans are will help with your selection criteria.



Next HONESTLY self assess your capabilities. Speak to your riding coach about what they believe you need. Don't have a coach? Get one and start having lessons whilst you save up for or are looking for your own horse! Nothing is as good as having a coach on hand to offer honest opinions, years of experience and help to smooth out any bumps in the road as you commence horse ownership for the first time.

Then you should write a list of criteria. You want a horse suitable for your own build and height. A cuddly middle aged lady that is quite short might want a cobby build horse around 15hh for example. A tall athletic and confident teen might be better suited to an educated Thoroughbred with some pizzazz and a small child who is a bit nervous would more benefit from a proven, quiet and kind pony than they would on a big-striding off the track Standardbred.

What do you want? Have a list containing preferred age, height, build, temperament, education level etc. Know what you are looking for before you start and use this as your guideline. But don't necessarily stick to it rigidly, you may find the perfect match for you comes slightly outside your own guidelines. Go into every advert open minded.



Buy for NOW!

We cannot stress this enough! Buy for what you need NOW. Many, many injuries, losses of confidence, and heartache comes of people buying horses completely unsuitable for what they are needing at the time.

Don't fall into the trap of buying something for the future. OK so you want to get into competitive showjumping. The horses that would be suitable for advanced competition will be full of fire and pep, and be way too much horse for the novice rider with the aspirations. If you want to get into showjumping, buy a well schooled lower level horse with heaps of experience and kindness to novices. You can buy your firebreathing World Cup winner later on down the track, but right now it could certainly injure you or cause a complete loss of confidence for somebody who isn't ready or prepared for that kind of horse.

If you are a nervous rider, don't go for the fancy coloured foal, he will soon learn to boss you around and develop a lot of unwanted behavioural traits further diminishing your confidence. Go and get a sweet natured patient Standardbred who will GIVE you confidence, not take it from you. If you are a novice, forget the green-broke young filly, forget the fresh-off-the-track

Thoroughbred, forget the hot headed, flighty and sensitive fancy horse. Go and buy an older, schooled and beginner-proof plodder who will allow you to completely enjoy every moment of horse ownership. A horse who can teach you, not a horse that you have to teach.

There is a well worn saying amongst horse circles; "Green on green makes black and blue" and it is a very appropriate adage. Novice, inexperienced, unconfident riders and those who have ridden for a couple of years but do not continue to improve their horsemanship through lessons and clinics should avoid green, untrained horses. Training horses comes of many, many years of experience, many thousands of dollars worth of lessons, many hours of hard work and sacrifice.

It is very, very unsafe to buy a foal or young green-broke horse for a child to 'grow up with'. Children are not capable of disciplining or training these horses. Teenagers don't have the skills, savvy, timing, feel or patience to do this work. Please avoid injury, pain, and possibly death by purchasing the well worn, proven kiddies pony for your offspring. And please don't fall into the trap of keeping your horse-crazed young daughter a really cheap (or free) horse just to shut her up. It's most likely that the free or cheap horse will not be safe for her to ride... what price would you put on your child's safety and life?

Everyone wants to buy a Ferrari but few can afford the maintenance or handle the power!

Questions to ask;

When you email or call the seller on a horse you like the look of, here are some questions to ask. Don't be afraid to ask them, and indeed it may be better that you do before wasting time going to view a horse that is unsuitable for your needs.

- Why is the owner selling the horse? The answers to this will help give you an overall picture of the situation... is it a genuine sale due to outgrowing the horse in either ability or size? Have they run into financial trouble or a family disaster or is the reason a little darker – has the horse thrown somebody or have they caused a problem in their horse and now want to pass that problem on?
- Ask again for the information on the horse, age, height, gender, education level and what sort of rider they would be suitable for. If there are inconsistencies with the advert and the answers you get this can be an early warning sign that all is not as it seems.
- Ask about the horse's history in riding, has it competed, what competitions has it been to? Ask about medical history, does the horse have any arthritis that needs managing, has it foundered before or had colic? If the horse has colicked has it been often?
- Ask about the horse's diet, is the horse allergic to or reactive to any particular feeds? Is it a good doer or a poor doer?
- Does the horse have any stable vices such as weaving, windsucking, cribbing?
- Does the horse have any under saddle vices or has it had them and been retrained out of habits such as bucking, bolting, rearing?



- Is the horse prone to test out the rider, does it pigroot or nap, has the horse got any issues? Most horses will test out a new rider/handler to see who will be leader but you need to know how much they will test you
- What is the horse like to shoe, trim, float, truck, clip, rug, lead, handle? How does the horse behave out and about, does it get nervous? Is the horse girthy? Cold backed? Have any quirks that need to be managed?
- How sound is the horse? Does it have any old injuries that could affect its way of going?
- Describe what you want in a horse and what you wish to do with the horse. Explain to the seller your riding and handling history, what experience you have and what experience you don't have. Does the seller think their horse would suit you?
- Is the seller happy for you to have a pre-purchase vet check done on the horse? (these are always at the buyer's expense)



Viewing to Purchase – things to consider.

So you have found a horse or two that looks as though they could be suitable. Print the adverts and keep them safe, arrange a time and day and go off to view the horse in the flesh.

Now is the time to start exercising caution. Many sellers are honest, genuine people who care about getting the right home for the horse they are selling. Unfortunately there are just as many people who are uncaring, out for as much money as they can make, dishonest and sometimes just plain desperate.

- Be prepared. Do you have an appropriate place to keep a horse lined up? Have you investigated appropriate agistment or have you prepared

your property to be suitable for housing horses? Many sellers will want to know that the buyer is organised, has a suitable place to keep their new horse and is prepared.

- Take along your coach or a very experienced person whenever possible. Your coach knows your riding capabilities, they know what will suit you and they will have been through the mill of buying and selling often enough to know what to look out for, how to spot small signs that all may not be well and will know what questions to ask. It is in your best interests to pay your Coach, or to even hire a highly reputable and professional horse trainer to come along with you if you are very interested in a horse. The more outside, unbiased and above all highly experienced horse people you can get advice on a horse from, the better.

- When you arrange to view a horse you intend to ride, ask before the day that the seller can ride the horse for you, or arrange for a rider to be there so that you and your coach can see how the horse goes under saddle. Be wary if the seller is unable to do this, there may be a genuine reason for this, or there may be a very dodgy one!

- Avoid impulse buying, or buying just to 'save' a horse. Some people will deliberately thin down a horse, or threaten to send it to the knackers just to emotionally blackmail people who genuinely care for horses into buying the horse quickly. Most often these horses are COMPLETELY unsuitable for the buyer and their situation, or have a bad issue such as damaged legs, or arthritis, or some sort of medical or huge behavioural issue hence why the seller was having trouble selling the horse to start with.

- Even if the equine is a freebie or very cheap, get it pre-purchase vet checked!! We can never stress this one enough to people buying horses! This will save you a lot of grief, a lot of expense and a lot of heartache in the long run. Many unsuspecting people have got the horse of their dreams for free or very cheaply only to find it was drugged when they viewed it and often when they picked it up or it was delivered to them, the horse had a permanent soundness issue which meant it could never be ridden, the horse was older (or younger) than they were told, the horse had advancing blindness or another major medical problem which meant the horse could never be suitable for what the buyer needed. All these problems can be picked up with a pre-purchase vet check.

- When arranging a Vet check, go with your own Vet, or a vet of your selection. Select the Vet for your Vet check yourself and ask for the report to be posted, emailed or given to you. You paid for this report, you own it. The Vet cannot give the seller the results without your express permission. You can go with the seller's usual or recommended Vet if the vet has a good reputation and is also recommended by a party not related to the seller and therefore not trying to help sell the horse!

- **If the seller refuses to allow a vet check or makes it very hard to get one walk away.** They do this if they're trying to hide or cover something up, there is no legitimate reason to refuse a Vet Check.

- **Get a trial if you can.** Most sellers don't like to trial horses because many bad buyers take advantage and often return the horse with behavioural problems or neglected! You can negotiate a trial by offering to have a strict lease contract drawn up, offering to pay the full amount for the horse when you take it on trail with it ***IN WRITING*** that the amount will be returned to you when the horse is returned within a certain timeframe if it doesn't work out. You can also win the genuine seller's trust by taking photos of either side of the horse (rugless and standing up nicely on a flat surface - have somebody holding the horse still!) and from the front and back and both parties to have copies as evidence of the horse's condition at the time the trial started, and you can also sign off on a statement that you are happy with the horse's condition and the horse 'as is' at the time of purchase. Also have the seller sign off on this too with both of you to have copies.



- **Its a good idea to offer references to a seller,** this helps show you're genuine and will take good care of the horse. As much as you are interviewing the horse to be suitable to enter your home, the seller will also be interviewing you to ensure that their horse would be the best match for you and your family. References such as your riding coach, employer if you work with horses, family vet who is willing to vouch for the care of other animals you own and people you may volunteer with such as Riding For The Disabled groups etc all make ideal references.

- **Be prepared to pay for professional help.** If you purchase a horse that begins to act up after a few weeks, get professional help from a good, experienced and reputable coach and/or horse trainer immediately. The longer a problem is left the more entrenched the behaviour comes and sometimes it will get worse over time. If the horse has problems before you buy it they will show immediately. If the problems don't occur until a few weeks in then they are most likely to be somehow induced by the purchaser (perhaps through inexperience, or nervousness, or not knowing how to handle or prevent a certain issue).

- **Keep everything you can including the advert (print it out) and emails/messages/txt about horses.** That way if you get done over by an unscrupulous seller you have the evidence required that the horse was misrepresented to you in case you need to take them to court to have your money back and the horse returned to the seller.

- **If you plan to ride the horse you are purchasing, or you plan for your child to ride, ensure you do ride or your child rides before purchase.** It is advisable (and often welcomed by responsible sellers) that you try the horse a couple of different times on different days. Most good sellers will be happy for you to take the horse to a show or to an instructor's property for a lesson so you can see how the horse behaves away from its familiar environment. This also gives you the chance to see how the horse travels and reacts to different places, different people and different environments.

- **Make sure that, even for a free or cheap horse, you ALWAYS get a signed receipt for purchase.** This will prevent the old owner causing trouble and trying to get the horse back after you've put time, effort and money into it getting it going nicely and getting the condition up!

- **Is the horse's conformation appropriate to what you want to do with the horse?** Many horses develop bad behaviours under saddle or 'won't' work on the bit or perform a certain movement. Most often this is because the horse's conformation means they physically are unable to do the required work. Faults such as rotated cannons, upright shoulders, long weak pasterns, a downhill build etc can seriously affect a horse's way of going, performance and soundness.

The right start goes a long way;

Unfortunately due to unscrupulous sellers, dodgy horse dealers and plain uncaring people purchasing horses is not a simple matter if you wish to purchase right. Also going into purchasing a horse by unprepared and unknowing buyers who do not seek the appropriate advice and information they need is also a hazard in itself.

Taking these steps will go a very long way to protect you from nasty con artists trying to con you out of your money for a totally unsuitable horse and will go a long way toward you having the best start (or re-start!) into safe, successful and enjoyable horse ownership!