

Buying Your First Horse

Last week a woman came to look at a horse to buy for her daughter. We usually have several horses for sale, and the woman wanted to see everything. That's usually my first clue that a person has NO idea what they want or what they are doing. We clearly try to indicate on the website and over the phone that some horses might work well for some situations, and others are not suited for the same purposes but would do quite well for other owners. It's not hard to narrow it down to one or two horses, three at the outside!! On the phone, the woman had said her daughter rode, could walk, trot and canter a horse, and was looking for something she could take on and show and jump.

While we were saddling the horse, she was looking around our tackroom ~ not AT anything, but just looking. She asked my daughter a question. Tammy later heard her ask the same question to me and was insulted that the woman didn't trust her answer. I noticed she had a clipboard in her hand with ad clippings of my horses. Being curious, I asked what she was doing. She had a questionnaire from a book she had purchased on buying your first horse and she gave me a copy.

We saddled a nice hunter pony, but when we showed the mare, the girl refused to try it. We saddled a quiet horse we give lessons on all the time. The girl could barely post and couldn't get the horse into a canter in spite of the fact that he is easy to canter and we have taught several people to canter on him. In fact, she couldn't control him at all! When I told her to go into the center of the ring and back him a few steps before taking him out of the ring (we do that with all of our horses so they don't get into the habit of just walking out of the ring) the girl burst into tears because she couldn't get him to move.

I started giving the girl a lesson on steering a horse and she finally stopped crying and started riding a little. The mother seemed annoyed that we were taking up time when it was plain to her that the horse wouldn't do, but the girl looked like someone had just given her a Christmas present!

Before they left, the mother said she had been spending hours and hours a week going to see horses. She drove three hours each way to see our horses, and had driven four hours each way to look at a horse the day before. I couldn't help thinking that she should have been spending the time and gas money getting her daughter lessons so she enjoyed riding, and put the money for a horse in the bank until her daughter could ride one. Within two years no one will be able to DRIVE this poor girl onto a horse and the mother will wonder why she lost interest. The fact is, anyone is going to lose interest if they are afraid and when you are out of control on a horse, you are going to be afraid. A horse is a big animal to sit on and PRAY that he wants to do what you want him to do!!!!

Later that night, I read the questionnaire. It had all kinds of fluff questions that were really irrelevant. Some favored private individuals, some favored large barns, in fact the questions were such a hodgepodge that it would have been impossible to get a perfect score, or even a strong one. It asked things like "Is the tackroom separate from the feed room?" That's nice if you can do it, but often people don't have the room and what difference does it make to the horse that is for sale? It asked if the tackroom was neat. Again, I've known good, even great riders, who were just bad housekeepers! If you are looking for a roommate, or a place to board the horse, it matters. If you want to buy a horse, concentrate on the horse.

I suppose the assumption might have been that if a person was sloppy about their tack they would be sloppy in the care of the horses, but I have never found any correlation. One of

the greatest natural horseman I have ever know was Harold Farren. Harold trained great kids (Including multiple ASHA National Stock Saddle Seat winners ~ termed the “National Finals”) and great horses and he had the win record to prove it. I never saw a horse that was poorly cared for at his barn, and he worked hard, he wasn’t one of those trainers that took the clients money and didn’t ride the horse. Harold rode most of his horses every day. But when he wanted a saddle or bridle he would rummage around in the pile on the tackroom floor until he found what he wanted!!!! Nothing was ever on a hook, and there was way more equipment than there was racks, which didn’t matter because most the saddle and bridle racks were empty!

There is a great working barn in MO where I buy a lot of horses ~ and they are some of the best horses I have ever sat on. Two brothers run it and they are wonderful horseman; and their father before them was a great horseman. I never go there that they don’t have some \$20-30,000 horses in the barn. They have some of the best, quietest, most well trained and honest horses you will find. They don’t have a tack room that I have ever found. The tack is sort of spread around the saddling area and in front of stalls!!!

The point being that the book probably just added questions so the reader would feel that they were getting something important from their book purchase!!! It would have been impossible to buy a good horse at a fair price using the thing. And it quiet missed the point that you should be PREPARED to buy a horse BEFORE YOU START LOOKING!

Prepared doesn’t mean you have a place to keep the horse. While that is certainly important, it isn’t the only consideration.

Learn to Ride

Learn to ride first. Save the money you would spend on a horse, put it in the bank and spend the money you would pay to board or feed, and use it to take lessons. If you know how to ride, you will understand what horse will suit you, and what purpose you want it to serve.

When people are first learning to ride, they have poor balance, their hands move around, their legs creep up a horses sides. It takes a VERY tolerant, quiet, and somewhat numb horse to put up with that. This ISN’T the kind of horse that will go out and jump a hunter course next year when the rider has learned more!!! I HATE it when someone calls and says, “I want a nice quiet horse for my daughter to learn to ride on, she has never ridden but really wants to learn. And, oh, her dream is to jump, so we want it to be able to jump too!” Think about it. If a horse is going to jump a course, it has to have a lot of steering. It has to have a good, soft mouth, so the rider can rate it to fences. You have to be able to move a horse from side to side with your legs so you can get into the fence at the right place. It has to have the impulse to get over the fence. Does that sound like a horse that is going to safely have a beginner bouncing all over it, trying to find balance????

So, go to a place and learn to ride. When you or you child KNOWS how to ride, THEN buy something that will take them the next step. A beginner horse is just that ~ for beginners. A

good rider will outgrow that horse. Accept that and don't try to make the horse into something it doesn't want to be!

Decide What You want the Horse to Do

When you have ridden enough to decide what you want to do with the horse, than you can look for a horse, which will fill that need. Do you want a horse to trail ride? Great...there are judged trail rides, endurance trail rides, trail riding groups that go out every weekend, riding across your own fields, or trailering to a state or national park. Ranch horses make great trail horses: many ranch horses don't think they are going on a trail ride, they just go to work every day across perhaps several hundred acres. For the flighty home raised horse, a trail ride is an event, a recreation. For the ranch horse it is his job. No wonder there is a different attitude!

If you want a jumper, where do you want to show it? You can get a local show winner for \$5,000-12,000, but if you want to show on the "A" circuit, be prepared to spend 6 to 10 times that much.

Don't try to get a horse that will do everything. My daughter Tammy had an Anglo Arab for many years. She did dressage, rode western, went on long trail rides, rode English (both saddle seat and hunt seat.) and would jump almost 4 feet. The problem was that she didn't do any of it well! She was a fun horse for a kid because Tammy could play with her, but she couldn't win in the shows with her. So when she started to show heavily, Tammy got another horse. Casey is a nice hunter, but she isn't a trail horse. In fact, Casey will show Cross Country on a course, but she HATES just riding down the road with a group of other horses. She gets bored, then mad, and the last time we tried it, she ended up backing into a ditch!!!!

Horses have to LIKE their job to be good at it. When they get tired of it, it's time to let them quit because they aren't going to do the job as well as they once did. Sometimes you hear people talk of horses being "sour" and they are like grumpy workers who have just gotten sick of their work. Other horses will find a job and do it happily all their lives. Sounds like people doesn't it?

So, if you don't know what you want a horse to do, how can you find one who likes doing it?

And there are hundreds of things to do with a horse. Every breed has it's own shows with classes from halter to performance. There are literally thousands of different "point" systems across the country where people "run" for high point awards. There are therapy horses, square dancing on horses, parade horses, native costume classes for many breeds. There are race horses, not only for Thoroughbreds, but for Quarter Horses, Paints, Arabians, steeplechases, trotters. You can show carriage horses through a course, go foxhunting, ride your horse in civil war reenactments, camp out with your horse or take it to camp. And of course a "trail" horse might do competition in shows, as endurance, in judged trail rides, or just go out. They may go out alone, in a group, across your own land, or down a street with traffic. So, at least get some idea of what you might want to do with a horse before you buy.

Be Careful Where You Buy

There are really very few horses who are truly packers, although you will find a LOT of sellers who will say they are "bombproof" or kid safe. In fact, there is one stable I used to deal with that claimed almost everything they had was child safe, and half of it scared ME! They sold

me a school horse that had supposedly been a “camp horse for kids.” It took 5 of us two days to catch it, and when we caught him and tried to saddle him, it took three of us to get the saddle on him. No one wanted to ride him. I am well known in the horse industry and so is my brother, so we had a little more clout when we insisted on returning the horse. The seller agreed to take the horse back, although I have heard that this stable has refused to take back horses from private individuals.

The next horse he sent home with me (after I paid additional money) had been in a “Christian” camp horse. I’m sure it was great ~ those kids learned to pray hard when they were riding it!!! The kids may not have learned to ride, but they certainly became believers when they rode this horse. He would go along quiet for a while, then suddenly grab his tail and rear and spin. One day he threw me when he did that, so we went back again!!! In all, I had 7 horses from this stable. Three were good. Three were returned, and one I’m still working on!!! If you are a private individual, you really can’t afford to make that kind of mistake. (And yes, I do consider it a mistake, even after the trading and placing of the good horses.)

If you are buying your first horse, find someone you trust. Ask around for references. Talk to the people, ask how they train, and follow your instincts. **WATCH THEM RIDE.** If their horses look happy, go quietly, if their hands are quiet and they look comfortable on a horse, they probably have good horses because that is the kind they pick. Those that aren’t quiet when they arrive, are trained and conditioned to be good. If they bounce and flap and jerk and kick, the horse is not going to be quiet and happy. What you will get is a skiddish, scared horse.

I’ve seen good horses come from backyards, but that isn’t the place to start. ***Chances are the person doesn’t know any more than you do and the horse probably hasn’t had quality handling since it has been there.*** Quality handling makes quality horses. Ignorant handling makes horses with bad habits. Most of the time these horses are either as ignorant as their owners, or have developed bad habits because they have learned that they are in control, not the rider.

Look for a horse that has been used in a sensible way on a regular basis. People who make their living with lessons and training are much more likely to KNOW what the problems of a horse is and to have the knowledge to fit the horse to you or your rider. They don’t HAVE to sell you the horse if it doesn’t fit you, because they have other buyers who will fit the horse. And they have a reputation to protect. Most of all, they have experience.

You are looking for that fit which is a very personal thing, not a product out of a catalog. You will sometimes find a “gem” in a backyard, but it has been my experience that more often than not you will spend hours driving to find something that the person may really THINK is what they represent it to be, but they don’t have the knowledge to know the difference. I’ve seen lame horses represented as sound because the people just couldn’t SEE that it was lame. I’ve seen a LOT of horses with bad stable manners and bad riding habits. And I’ve seen a lot of people trying to sell horses that scares them, and they are just hoping you will buy it before it can scare YOU.

Another problem with riding a horse at a private home is the riding facilities. It is much safer to try a horse in an enclosed ring than just out across the field. (When we buy horses, no matter WHERE we buy them from, we always bring them home and ride them the first day in the round pen. It is 60 ft. around and has 6 ft. chain link walls. They CAN’T run off.) Don’t get

on a horse in a rocky field or someplace that isn't safe looking to you. If a person doesn't care about where he rides the horse, he probably didn't ride it very often. If he did, it would soon become apparent to him that he needed a better place to enjoy his mount. But more than that, if you get on the horse, and it decides to do something or run off, how are you going to stop it. If you get thrown, landing on a rock is no fun and it is dangerous. Don't compound your risk just to try a horse.

Always make the owner ride it first. Beware when they have brought in a kid from down the street, or a neighbor. They bought it, apparently for them to ride. If they no longer ride it, chances are there is a reason. Sometimes it was for a child, and the child is no longer around, has grown up, or no longer rides. But in that case, who has been riding it since the child left? Although it SOUNDS like a good reason for the horse to be for sale, ask WHY the kid lost interest (They were scared of the horse or got tired of being thrown or run off with?) and HOW OFTEN the horse has been worked recently.

NEVER GET ON A HORSE THAT IS SADDLED WHEN YOU ARRIVE, AND NEVER RIDE ONE FIRST! If you have to, come back another day or inquire BEFORE you come who will show the horse.

A saddled horse may well mean that it is 'soaking.' This is an old technique used to calm edgy horses. Standing with a saddle on relaxes a horse and especially if it is a hot day, the horse will be calmer when you ride him than if you just took him out of the stall or pasture. You also have no way of knowing if a horse is difficult to saddle or "chinchy." Being chinchy, sometimes called "cold backed" means that the horse takes a while to get adjusted to the saddle. Many of these horses are fine to ride once they are saddle and adjusted, but if it is your first horse, such traits often make inexperienced riders dread riding. Watch carefully how easy the horse is to work around and saddle.

Irrelevant Questions

One of the great questions new people ask is who the previous owner was and why did he or she sell the horse. Don't bother to ask WHY they are selling the horse, it is my experience they wouldn't tell you the honest answer. And the reasons why they are selling it often have no bearing on your use of the horse.

Maybe it doesn't fit their style. My brother has a horse he cannot ride, and I ride it fine. I have horses I don't get along with, but my daughter rides them without any problems. Horses are like people, they like some people and don't like others. Sometimes personalities clash. And riders like different styles of horses. Maybe this one just didn't "fit" the owner.

One of the great answers that seem easy to accept is that the child who owned the horse is no longer home, or riding. Again, what has been happening to the horse since the rider left, and maybe the child lost interest because the horse isn't sound or isn't fun to ride.

Sometimes people don't give you the real reason because it is personal. A husband or wife bought the horse without the other's consent or approval and it has been a sore spot in their marriage. How many people feel comfortable burping up THAT gem to a stranger?? Sometimes they simply can't afford to keep it. Who wants to talk about finances with a stranger and are some of these personal problems any of your business? They don't affect the horse. It is like buying a house, it is more important what the horse IS than why the seller is letting it go.

Another irrelevant question is how many owners a horse has had. In grade horses, you don't know, but with registered horses, you can check the papers. Although registration associations require that papers be switched with every owner, people don't always do so. Often the horse will have had several owners before the papers are changed. Associations are slow and it ties up a lot of time and money when the buyer intends to resell the horse. So, the papers wouldn't always reflect all of the owners. But multiple owners don't mean it is a bad horse. For example, maybe a foal is very pretty and is sold to someone who can spot a good one early. It grows to be a yearling and still looks good, so that person realizes they can make some money on it and resells it. That person keeps it to a two year old, but they don't want to spend the time and money to have it broke, so they sell it to someone who specializes in breaking nice saddle horses. They break the horse and it is nice and they sell it as a show prospect. It now has had five owners by the time he is three, but it is NO reflection on the quality of horse, because every owner has been pleased with the horse and has moved him along to where he needed to be ~ and made money on him.

Horses are not dogs; they are sometimes pets, but often they are working members of their society. There are literally hundreds of ways to be "in" the horse business. Each person specializes in one area because you can't be all things to all horses. It is a multi billion dollar business, and many people are making all or part of their living from "playing" with horses. It is a form of gambling where you bet your eye and experience on being able to spot a good one. It is a matter of limited time and money. None of it has any relevancy to whether this horse is good for you.

Some people like to raise foals, but you have to do something with them or you can't raise more foals! Some people like to break colts. Once they are broke, they want to move on to other colts. Many people speculate on horses at various levels buying one and training it, hoping it will become what they want it to be.

Because a horse is for sale doesn't mean he is a bad horse and because a person has a horse for sale, doesn't make them "traders."

For example, I work with a woman a few states over. She used to train and is a good hand with horses, but she now has three kids and can't work horses and run a barn. She still loves it. She goes to people's homes and finds horses she thinks are good. She has to look at twenty sometimes to find a good one, but she can drive along and take the baby with her, and it is a flexible time schedule for her. She is making a small business on traveling from individual owner to individual owner, and buying the horses inexpensively and hoping they will sell for more to people like me who don't have time to chase down private individuals. I run a training barn, and I give a lot of lessons. That takes time and I don't have a lot of time to drive all over the state. She is taking the risk that she will be able to sell the horses she buys and that they will turn out to be good horses.

I will go to her place and sometimes buy several at a time from the ones she has selected. Sometimes, I make the trip and don't buy anything. When I bring them home, I work with them, increasing their training and therefore their value. I put them in different situations, give lessons on them, see how they react to different types of riders and evaluate them and match them to people who are looking for horses.

Sometimes I make a mistake and buy a horse that looks good to me, and isn't. If I've bought it from someone I do a lot of business with, I return it. They don't want to lose me as a repeat customer. If I have bought it from an individual, I usually have to find a way to get rid of the horse. I will often put it in a local sale and take whatever I get for it. I lose money, but the

horse is off the food bill, and I can concentrate on horses that will improve with training instead of those who fight it. I count the money I lose as a cost of doing business. When you are only buying one horse, you have to deal with someone who can help you evaluate the horse and how it fits your needs and personality because you can't afford to make a mistake.

What Makes a Good Horse?

There are three things that make a good horse. The physical structure, the temperament, and the training. God has to do the first two, man can only change the training. That is one reason why people like registered horses. They have been selectively bred to do a specific job. By studying bloodlines, there is a greater probability that the temperament and aptitude will be better suited to a specific job. For example, the National Cutting Horse Association does not require that a horse be a registered Quarter Horse in order to compete. And over the years, there have been some winners who were Arabians, Thoroughbreds, or Morgans. But by far, the HUGE majority of the top winners have been AQHA registered ~ because they have been bred to do the job. Not only are they registered, they come almost exclusively from certain bloodlines. So, a registration allows people who know bloodlines to predict to some extent what a horse will look like, what he will have an aptitude to do, and even what kind of temperament it will have.

The physical structure makes a difference on how the horse will travel. If the neck comes out of the shoulders high up, the horse will have a much harder time learning to carry its head low, then if the shoulder slope is straighter and the neck comes out of the shoulders lower. A Tennessee Walking Horse, for example, "Walks" because the rear legs are relatively straight and the croup is sloped.

Making the Buying Decision

Many new buyers want to look at everything before they buy. This is really a mistake. First, the more you look, the more confused you become.

Second, you will not get the best service from a seller if they think you are just a "lookie loo." Especially if you are going to a sale barn, which is often the best place to look, they will try much harder to find the right horse for someone they believe will be a serious buyer than if they think you are going to spend the day "trying" horses and then, no matter what you see, go down the road to see everything at the next barn. Don't go to any place just to get a free ride. Horses aren't self-serve commodities and it takes time on the part of the seller to have you look at and ride a horse.

Third, the really good horses, at good prices, will go fast. By the time you spend a month looking, the good one you saw at the beginning of the month is sold to someone who knew a good one when they saw it!

No horse is perfect, so don't try to find one that has everything. And parts aren't interchangeable. I remember the woman who came out to look at a horse. She loved it. But the front feet had several cracks in them. (Some horses just get cracks in their feet ~ the mare wasn't

lame and never had been.) Finally she looked at me and said, "I love the horse, I just don't like the feet."

"They come with the horse." was all I could say.

Find a horse who makes you feel comfortable, and a place to buy it where you feel comfortable with the people who are helping you find a horse that fits. It may not be the most beautiful facility, it may not be the prettiest horse. But it has to feel comfortable for you. When you find it, buy it.

Time of Year

I come from California, where we ride all year round. There is no ice or snow, so there is no bad footing. It doesn't get too cold and we work horses year round, show horses year round, and sell horses year round. The same is true in Florida.

In Virginia, that isn't true. For years we rode until Thanksgiving and then didn't ride again until March. If you own your own horse, and you have purchased him in the summer, be prepared that you may have a different horse if you are riding in the winter, or when you start to ride him in the spring. Almost all horses are fresh in the winter and spring and will behave differently in some ways.

The advantage of looking at a horse in the winter is that

1. You see him at his worst and can decide if you can handle it.
2. You will usually get a better price, because horses are frequently less expensive when fewer buyers are looking.

BUT DON'T EXPECT HIM TO LOOK LIKE THE QUIET, PERFECTLY TRAINED HORSE HE WILL LOOK LIKE IN THE SUMMER.

If you go to a large barn where they work horses year round, ~ usually in an indoor arena ~ the horse will be better, although he may be more energetic in the cold air. But, if you take the horse home and lay it off, it may be much more energetic in the spring than you expected.

I had a grey mare who was very nice. I broke her as a 3 year old, and she packed a totally novice rider all over the trails all summer long. I laid her off for the winter and the next spring she spent a week kicking up and bucking before she settled into being a nice horse again. The next year it was the same thing. By the time she was six, I just sent her out to a young guy who is more athletic than I am any more, and he rode her for two weeks. Once you got past that initial two weeks, she was so push button she would carry a dog down the road. I finally sold her to a novice rider who kept her horse in a barn where the trainer rode the mare once a week through the winter and she was fine.

Most horses aren't that bad, but you need to be prepared for more horse in the spring than you had when you laid him off in the fall.

There are some things to consider if you are looking for a horse in the winter.

1. How much riding is the horse getting? Often people DON'T ride and work their horse in the winter, so you will see them as they will react when you take them home and don't ride them. Don't expect a horse in the winter to be a perfectly trained as they are in the summer. Take that into consideration. Horses which are

not ridden every week will be more inclined to spook, balk, or have bad habits than the same horse will when it is being ridden every day.

- a. For example: I had a quiet paint horse who has been a good lesson horse throughout the fall. In December, a family came out to see him. They rode him and loved him. They put their young daughter on him, and he was great. But they wanted their trainer to see him. The trainer couldn't see him until January. The footing was bad and we hadn't worked the horse since they had seen him. He balked, and when we first cantered him, he kicked up a little. The trainer didn't mind, she realized this was typical. He didn't kick high, or continue to buck, or rear. He just wasn't smooth. But the family was very alarmed and they were afraid of him. They will continue to look all winter, and when spring comes and horses are worked and the ground isn't frozen. . .they will find the perfect horse. Not because it is any better than the ones they have looked at in the winter, but because they are seeing it at a time of year when ALL horses are better!
2. In the winter, it takes more feed to keep a horse in good condition during cold nights than it does in the summer. Many horses are in stalls in the winter and even those that are outside don't move around and play like they do when the footing is good. So, a horse is getting fed more and moving less and they are "hot." That means that they are not as quiet and gentle as they will be when it is warmer.
3. It is cold and most of us that make a living with horses have to be out in the weather a lot. If you are just shopping because you are bored, but aren't really interested in buying until spring. . .wait until spring to shop. It isn't fun to have to get a horse out and show it with cold feet (mine), so don't make owners do it unless you are seriously considering buying.
4. Unless the facility has an indoor arena, the footing may not be good. Don't try a horse on frozen or snowy ground, you are just asking for an accident. A horse can slip and fall easily on snow or icy footing. If the owner hasn't got the sense not to show the horse, you need to have the sense not to try and ride it, even if the day is pretty ~ look at the footing.

Here is one interesting note. If you DO know what you are looking at and can see past a few typical problems, you can buy a horse for less in the winter. Prices go down because horses don't show as well. So, don't expect to see a horse as well trained as they are in the summer, but do expect to pay less. The same horse in June will ACT much better than he will in January, and will LOOK better than he will in January, but he is also going to COST more than he would in January!!!

To Bring a Friend?

If you don't know about horses, should you bring a friend? Maybe, maybe not.

If you have a trainer, let the trainer find a horse. Most trainers know what they want and many of them will make money on your purchase. You can go look at a horse and your trainer may not like it because they know what they want and you don't. They may not like a horse

because they want to make some money on it and if they find it they can make arrangements with the owner before you see it. There really isn't any problem with that, they have taken their time to find you something and they should get paid a finder's fee. Some trainers are up front about that. I have sold a LOT of horses to trainers who are looking for horses. We can talk, I can answer their questions and tell them if the horse is worth them coming to take a look at ~ that is, if it will fit their needs. But I seldom sell a horse to someone who is coming to look at a horse and then will return with their trainer. Sometimes the horse is sold while the trainer is trying to find time. Sometimes the horse isn't what the trainer is looking for. Sometimes trainers simply don't want the client to feel like they know more and can find something on their own. So, if you have a trainer, be prepared to pay a finders fee and let them find you something.

Not all trainers are sensitive to what the rider needs. They find a horse THEY like, or they reject a horse that doesn't suit THEM, but it may not be what the client needs. Recently a family came out to look at a nice horse. He went western, English and had a lot of training. He was priced very reasonably and was safe. The family consisted of a mother who had ridden years before, a father that was just learning, a young girl who was not a bad advanced beginner and a second sister who was TERRIFIED! They all rode the horse and liked it. When the trainer came back, she rode the horse. She was an excellent, accomplished rider, but she rejected the horse because it moved behind the bit. All good western horses move behind the bit, or "give" to the bridle. It makes them safe, quiet, and easy to control. Dressage riders and eventing riders like a horse "into" the bit. But most of those horses are much more forward, harder to ride, and require a more accomplished rider. This family needed to learn to ride BEFORE they worried about a horse being "into" the bridle. And the type of horse the trainer was looking for, if it WAS quiet enough for them, was going to cost about twice as much!

If you don't have a trainer, and want to bring along a friend, this is tricky. Sometimes I find that these "experts" really don't know much more than the people who are buying the horse. Sometimes they don't like the same things in a horse. **Their level of riding is often different and they don't have experience in fitting a horse to a rider**, so they tend to choose what is right for them. And then if you LIKE the horse, how do you buy it if they don't think it is suitable? Most often, these "experienced friends" want to show how experienced they are. Finding faults is easier than finding good points, so they tend to be hyper critical ~ as a form of demonstrating their knowledge. And think about it from the standpoint of the friend. If you are critical of a horse, and the person buys it, and it throw them, it isn't YOUR fault, you told them all the faults before they bought it. If you say it is a good horse, and they buy it and it turns out bad, how do you keep your reputation ~ or your friendship. So these so called experts tend to be negative for the most part.

A couple of examples: I had a man in his mid-50's who wanted to learn to ride. He tried a nice, quiet, responsive horse. However, the horse didn't canter on one lead. This was fine, because the gentleman who was looking at him couldn't have stayed him at a lope in ANY lead. And, he just wanted the horse for a trail horse. This horse had miles on the trail and like a lot of trail horses, he had only ever been asked to canter and HE got to pick the lead, so he only picked one. The man loved the horse, felt confident on him, and then decided to come back with his friend. The friend was really a good rider, but he was very concerned about the fact the horse didn't take the other lead easily and advised the man against the horse. They eventually ended

up buying a horse for a lot more money. It did take both leads, but I doubt if the new owner will ever ASK it.

Another time a woman came out with friends. She had a stressful job and wanted to relax. I showed her a nice, quiet, not too bright paint. She liked him and put a deposit on him. But on the way home her friends talked her out of the horse because they said she would get bored with him. She ended up backing out of the deal, then later came back and leased the horse. She still loves him six months later.

Taking a Horse Home on Trial

Most places will not let you take a horse home on trial. It has nothing to do with the fact that they are hiding something. You don't get to take home a car or a boat and try it, you don't get to move into a house or an apartment and see how you like the neighborhood. This is a major luxury item and there are no free trials.

- + The horse is a big investment. What happens if it gets hurt or sick? Who is responsible if it is in an accident.
- + The owner does not know HOW the horse will be handled, or WHAT it kind of riding you are doing when the horse is out of sight. Bad handling is often hard to correct.
- + There are an unfortunate number of people who want to do "trials" as a way of having something to ride during the summer. They take a horse on a 30 day trial, and then send it back. They pick up another horse, and then send that one back. By the end of the summer they have not spent a dime and they don't have to winter a horse!
- + Especially new owners, who have not fully appreciated what a commitment a horse is, may decide they simply don't like horse ownership, the commitment of time and money may be too much.
- + But the biggest reason is that if it is a good horse, priced right, it will sell to someone else. Before you got to the horse, the owner invested time and money in advertising. They cannot really collect names of people who come after you with the idea that if you bring the horse back they can see it. How do they explain that you brought it back, even if the horse simply didn't fit. If the owner lets you take the horse home, he has risks. If you don't like the horse, and bring it back, the owner must now start advertising all over again which means that he has more expense and time in the horse. He is in a worse position than if you hadn't tried it.
- + I also find that people who want a trial are more interested in picking apart a horse and finding what is wrong than they are in looking at what is right. For example, we price our horses at good prices and we have nice horses that are well represented. We seldom advertise a horse and fail to sell in within a month. Why not just wait for the next person to come by and appreciate it?

But you will find horses that you CAN take home on trial. They often fall into categories you DON'T want.

- + The owner cannot handle the horse, or can't afford it. They don't ride it and when you take the horse, it gets it off their property for a while. If nothing else, they get free riding, feed, care and work for the horse for a month.
- + The owner is a friend. This usually works out, but it is often hard to send it back and say you don't want it.
- + The horse is high priced. Or, overpriced. It will not sell fast, so if it is gone for a month, there aren't a lot of buyers standing in the wings.

Going to a Sale or Auction

Auctions are very tricky. There are people who make a living just buying and selling horses as auctions. And, there are some very nice horses going through auctions. There is a wide range of reasons why an owner will put a horse through an auction. The advantage is that you don't have to have people come to your ranch or farm and try the horse out, you don't have to spend money on advertising, and on the day of the auction, you come home with a check.

A lot of good trainers and breeders use auctions as a way of getting their name out in the public. They sell good horses and people see them. This is true even for local auctions. Sellers develop a reputation. Auctions allow them to move many more horses than they could making individual sales. The prices at auctions are generally lower, but the horse sells. Maybe the horse simply didn't suit the rider, maybe a child has lost interest, maybe the person can't afford the horse any longer. (This happens at all levels. People who are paying high priced training bills for a horse that isn't going to win, feel they can't "afford" to keep it. The horse may win fine in your area, or at the level you will show it, but it isn't good enough to win at the level they are showing. It is cheaper for them to sell the horse at a low price, then to continue to pay expensive training bills.)

However, people also drop junk into auctions. If I get a horse that I don't want to stand behind, I have several auctions where the prices aren't high, but I will be happy to get it off my feed bill. You have to know what you are looking at and be willing to make a bad buy once in a while to shop at auctions. If you are new to horses, you are better off going to someone who will represent the horse honestly. If they have bought the horse at an auction, they have taken the risk, not you.

There are also a lot of different kinds of auctions. Local auctions have more junk than the big catalog sales where prices are higher, entry fees are higher, but the quality is also higher.

If you have a horse, and it scares you to ride it, put it in an auction and get rid of it before you get hurt. The next owner may be able to cope very well with the horse. You are better off losing money on it than you are trying to sell it, or keeping it, feeding it, and perhaps getting hurt. Losing money is cheaper than hospital bills. If you are trying to sell it privately, you will have to continue to ride it and show it to prospective customers. If you are afraid to ride it through the auction, you can almost always find someone to do it for you. Lots of riders pick up extra money riding horses through a sale. The going rate is usually \$25, and these people are good riders, with a lot of experience, and usually a "lot of glue" which means that they have the seat and balance to stay on something that is tough to ride.

Vet Check

Most horses will sell with a vet check. This means the new owner has the right to vet the horse, and refuse to buy it if something turns up. Be sure to ask the vet to vet check the horse **for your purposes**. A horse with a blemish that doesn't cause a problem is fine. If you are looking for a quiet, gentle horse and you aren't going to ride it hard, you should consider that those horse may be older and may have a problem or two which will not be a problem with light riding. Just like people, the older you get, the more aches and pains you have, but you can still get the job done. My best lesson horse is a little arthritic, but she has taught dozens of kids how to ride!

A vet should always ask what the horse will be used for. "Servicably sound" is a term which means that the horse may have a problem here or there, but he will still be able to do the job for which he is being purchased.

Athletic, winning show horses are like well trained athletes ~ they have stressed and strained their bodies to get to that level. Many top winning reining horses, cutting horses, jumpers, dressage horses and gaited horses have ailments. Like athletes, owners and horses will work through the problems with a variety of methods. Just go to the locker room of any college or professional sports team and see how busy the team doctors are! If you want a high performance horse, be prepared for some problems. If they are manageable, buy the horse. The best, most winning horse I ever owned was a reining horse who had been diagnosed with Nevicular before I bought him. He had been nerved in both front legs. He won numerous championships for me at big ASHA "A" division shows.

Not all vets agree. I have seen a lot of horses fail a vet check under one vet and pass from another. If you like a horse, consider a second vet check before you reject the horse. Even the AMA recommends a second opinion! Veterinaty Medicine is NOT an exact science. Much of it is a matter of opinion. I have literally seen dozens, probably hundreds of vet checks over the years and almost no two are alike. Often they reflect the personality of the vet. Some are alarmists, looking for scary things to be wrong. Some are very lay back and practical. And some are just off the wall. I have seen vets totally disagree on their evaluations of the same horse, within days of each other. A vet check is not a black and white thing. I have seen two vets look at the SAME SET OF X-RAYS AND DISAGREE ON THE IMPORTANCE TO THE SOUNDNESS OF THE HORSE.

One vet in our area is famous for always seeing something that concerns him so he needs to take X-rays ~ which runs the bill up considerably.

Vet checks are also expensive. They can be done at various levels. A basic vet check may not find everything, but one with complete x-rays may run hundreds of dollars. The more expensive the horse, the more detailed the vet check you may want ~ you may buy the horse anyway, but you will want to know what the existing conditions are and how manageable they will be. But an inexpensive horse may not be worth putting almost the price of the horse into the vet check. All vet checks are paid for by the buyer, so consider whether you want to put the money into it If you are using the horse for light purposes and it is apparently sound, that may be fine.

Also realize that any vet check is for that day only. A horse may be sound today, pass the vet check, and be lame or ill in a month, so a clean vet check isn't a guarantee that you will not have any problems later. I had a woman who bought a horse from us and wanted a full blown vet check because she "had bought an unsound horse." When I started talking to her, I found that she had bought a horse that had turned up with Nevicular a year and a half later!! Even if

she had HAD the horse X-rayed, the condition wouldn't have shown up, because it probably didn't exist at the time she bought the horse. Don't expect a vet to have a crystal ball ~ Horses are like people. Just because you pass a physical doesn't mean you might not have a health problem in the next year or two.

Leasing a Horse

If you live close enough, you may want to consider leasing a horse. There are some distinct advantages to leasing if you are new in the horse business. It gives you a way to "try on" horse ownership, and to try the horse before you buy.

We offer leased horses for pleasure and show. We want you to enjoy yourself with horses, and learn how to ride, and we understand that it is sometimes difficult to purchase a horse.

- Perhaps you will not be in the area long, but want to ride frequently while you are here
- Perhaps you can afford the upkeep, but not the cash purchase price of a good horse.
- Perhaps you want to see if the child will maintain interest before making a large purchase,
- Perhaps you want to start on one horse and be free to move up to another level as you learn.
- Perhaps you are an adult who is learning to ride, or returning to ride and you want to see if a horse will fit into your schedule.
- **There are dozens of reasons why leasing a quality horse makes sense.**

Many of the horses we offer for sale are available to lease and part of the lease payment will go toward the purchase price of the horse. There are many different leases, but most of them include the following:

The horse remains at the farm where you leased it. You pay the board bill and you usually pay a lease fee. You assume all costs such as vet, shoeing, worming and vaccinations. These are costs people often overlook, but they may make a difference in your budget.

You can use the horse any time you want to, just like you would if you owned it. Since most places that give lessons consider part of the lesson money goes to the purchase and upkeep of the lesson horse, if you take lessons on your own horse, either you trailer in, you own or lease the horse and board it at the farm, lessons on your horse are usually cheaper than if you are using a school horse. Therefore, if you are serious about learning to ride, you will pay for the lease horse, but you save money on lessons and you can ride in between lessons and practice what you have learned. Like anything, the more you ride, the faster you will become a horseman.

If you are considering buying a horse, leasing is a good way to begin. You can learn while you are looking.