

PURCHASING A HORSE OR PONY~Things to Consider.

Every year PHHWV volunteers see many horses purchased by unsuspecting buyers. The purpose of this educational material is for potential buyers to think about what sort of horse they actually need and to ensure they ask the right questions and make the right choices.

Introduction

Before you begin looking at a horse you need to make sure you have both the time and financial resources required to own a horse. It is a good idea to read the PHHWV Equi Info Notes titled "Cost of Owning a Horse" to get you started and put things into perspective. This publication outlines what financial and time commitment is required to look after a horse; the types of keep available, feeding costs and other essential care costs.

Once you have ensured you have the resources to look after your horse you need to set a limit on what you can spend on your new horse. You will need to consider the long term responsibilities, especially if you are looking at buying a pony for your child, as your child may quickly form a close bond with the pony and/or grow out of the novelty of caring for a pony very quickly. If your resources limit you to one horse it may be a good idea to consider leasing a pony initially.

Remember; never feel pressured into buying a horse. Take your time; if the sale is meant to be it will happen.

The right horse for you

Be realistic from the beginning. If you have been having regular riding lessons ask your instructor for their advice if they think you are ready for your own horse. There are many things you will need to consider when putting your horse "wish list" together.

Wish List Considerations:

1. What are you planning to do with your horse?
2. Do you have a liking for a particular breed and is this important to you?
3. What is your level of experience?
4. What height do you need? – Do you really need that 17.0hh Thoroughbred?
5. What age should the horse be? – If you only can ride once or twice a week an older horse may be more suited.
6. What sex should the horse be? – Geldings tend to have more even temperaments.
7. What previous experience has the horse undertaken in your chosen discipline?
8. How are you planning to keep your horse? Will this horse be suited to this?

You may need to revise this list along the way as your search begins, but once made, stick to it! Don't even bother looking at horses that don't meet your criteria.

Where to begin your search

Word of Mouth

Many horses and ponies that owners have grown out of are sold by word of mouth. Useful, reliable horses and ponies that have attended

pony clubs and competitions are always sort after and generally someone in the club or another local group will snap these horses up very quickly. Visit your local pony/riding clubs and ask around for horses that might be for sale. You might also find someone that has an older "been there, done that" pony at home that they are happy to lease out to the right person.

Print Publications

There are many forms of print publications from the local riding club newsletter, Weekly Times, Trading Post, local paper thorough to the monthly gloss magazine known as Horse Deals.

Web Sites

There are countless websites that horses are advertised for sale.

Wanted Ads

You could place a wanted advertisement on a local community noticeboard or one of the print publications listed above.

Horse Dealers/Riding Schools

Riding schools and horse dealers have horses come and go all the time. They make a living by buying and selling horses. You need to be very careful when buying horses from these places; they have a very high turnover of horses and you need to know what you are getting.

Sale Yards

There are many horse sales held though out the year in this state; in places like Echuca, Pakenham, Bairnsdale, Colac and Kyneton. Many horses are brought on impulse at horse sales as the person felt sorry for them, or the "meat man" was going to buy it. Remember horses are sent to the sales for a reason. Your time spent with the horse assessing it is very limited, you can't ride it or have it vet checked and you won't be able to get a full history of the horse. It is best to avoid buying your horse from the sales unless you are a very experienced horse person.

Rescue Centres

When looking at obtaining a horse from a rescue organisation make sure they are registered organisations. Make sure you are familiar with their re-homing policies i.e. do they sell the horses they take in or do they lease them? Do they have a return policy if the horse does not work out? What are your ongoing obligations to the organisation? How long have they had the horse? Where did it come from and what have they done with it? Beware of organisations that have only had the horse for a short period of time i.e. under 12 months, especially if it is being sold or placed as a riding horse.

Looking for horses

Now you have your "wish list", know where to start looking and have found advertisements that sound like the horse meets your criteria; you need to make contact with the owner and ask a few questions over the phone – make sure you write the answers down.

Here are some questions you should ask the owner (even if it means confirming what was in the ad)

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1. Name, Breed, DOB or Age. Height, Sex, Colour
2. How long have you owned the horse?
3. Why are you selling/re-homing the horse?
4. Does the horse have any vices i.e. Windsucking, Crib Biting, Weaving
5. Is the horse in good health i.e. no ongoing illnesses or injuries?
6. Is the horse currently in good body condition?
7. If rideable when was the last time ridden?
8. When was the last time the farrier and dentist visited?
9. Does the horse float?
10. How long since the horse was last floated?
11. Is the horse easy to catch?
12. Is the horse easy to handle i.e. lead, tie up, wash and rug etc?
13. What have you done with the horse since you have owned it?
14. If there was a photo with the ad how long ago was it taken?

Any other questions specific to your needs e.g. if you want a horse for trail rides ask what is it like when out riding with other horses and alone? If you want a show horse you might want to know if it has any scars or blemishes that may go against it in the show ring. If you plan to breed with it you may ask if it has relevant papers?

Finally, ask if the owner is happy for a veterinary suitability check to be conducted?

If you are happy that all your questions are answered, thank the owner and let them know you will think about it and if you are interested you will call them back. Consider your notes and consider if the horse meets your criteria. You may need to discuss this with your instructor or an experience horse friend. Call back and make a time with the horse you think meet your needs, if the horse is kept at a long distance you may like to ask for the owner to send you DVD footage of the horse being ridden; many owners are happy to do this.

Viewing potential horses

Take your instructor or experienced horse friend with you. If possible arrange with the owner to see the horse being caught. It is good idea to see the horse without being tacked up. Watch how the owner handles the horse. During your visit confirm what the owner has already told you on the phone. Inspect the horse before it is tacked up. Run your hands over it to see its response and look for signs of any old injuries. If the horse is for riding ask to see the horse ridden; never get on a horse without seeing it ridden first by the owner or trainer. If you are unsure ask the person with you if they are happy to get on first or if you should get on and ride it. Take your time when riding it, remember the horse has a new rider on its back and may not be used to this.

Now you have confirmed what the owner told you over the phone, you have seen it being ridden and you have had a ride. It's time to go away and discuss the horse with your instructor or experienced horse friend you took with you. Don't make a decision there and then, unless you know the horse is not for you; then its best to let the owner know as to not waste their time. If you think this horse could be for you, it meets you "wish list" criteria and your budget contact the owner and ask to come out and have another ride or two. You may like to ask to ride the horse out with the owner if that is possible or see it being ridden away from home, at a local club ground or equestrian centre. Some owners are even happy for you to have a week or two trial where the horse resides. Remember never be pressured to make a decision, even if the owner says they have others wanting to look at the horse. Most owners are happy to take time and find the right home for their horse.

Proceeding with the sale

Once you are sure this is the horse for you it is strongly advised to have a veterinarian carry out a pre-purchase inspection of the horse. This is an additional cost but a very important one. This inspection should be conducted by a veterinarian that has not seen the horse before or worked for the owner of the horse. You will need to advise the veterinarian what you are planning to do with the horse and they will determine if the horse is physically suitable for this purpose. On occasions there may be a need to X-ray a particular area of the horse if the veterinarian feels there could be a problem. You need to keep in mind there are very few horses that are scar free and whilst the examination is by no means a guarantee, it is peace of mind that you have not overlooked something. If the owner is resistant to having such an inspection being carried out reconsider proceeding with the purchase.

Once the horse has had the pre-purchase examination done and you are happy to proceed it is advisable to have a contract of sale to protect both parties. You can purchase ready made ones from your larger saddlery chains or you can draft up one yourself. If you are unsure you should seek your own independent legal advice.

Make sure it includes:

1. Date of sale
2. Purchase price
3. Name and address of both parties (vendor and seller)
4. Full description of the horse (Name, Breed, DOB or Age. Height, Sex, Colour, markings, microchip number and brands)
5. If the horse has any underlying injuries or illness that does not affect your intended purpose still have these stated in the contract of sale so there is no confusion what the horse is being sold for. An example of this might be a broodmare sustained an injury to her leg that renders her un-sound or suitable for ridden work but perfectly alright for breeding purposes
6. Note any vices the horse may have
7. Conditions of Sale if any

Summary

It is very easy to fall in love with the first horse you see. Just remember it costs just as much to keep an unsuitable horse as it does a suitable one. It may take several months to find the right horse and the more you look at the more you will know when you have found the right one for you. Yes, the one you really want may get snapped up before you make your decision but there are thousands of horses out there and you need to make sure you get the one that is just right for you.

Just as buying a horse can be a long process selling a horse can be just as drawn out especially if you have purchased someone else's problems. Should you make a purchase and feel that the owner totally misrepresented the horse despite you following the above process, you do have recourse via the Department of Consumer Affairs Small Claims Court. This can be a very stressful and costly process for all parties concerned and sometimes with a disappointing outcome, but may be a worthwhile option.

Resources

PHHWV Equi Info Note "Cost of Owning a Horse"

Horse Force company that produces legal contracts for Equine Industry
www.horseforce.com.au

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**The information provided is not intended to replace the professional advice you may receive from your veterinarian.
Please seek veterinary advice if your horse requires specific attention.**