

## **Tips & Questions to Ask when buying a horse**

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Search through as many ads as you can find looking for what sounds like a suitable horse for your skill level.

Try to avoid auctions. Unfortunately, there are dishonest people who will try to pass off a horse as something he/she is not using the 'tricks of the trade' in the horse industry. A good example of this is the various drugs that are out there.

Buying privately through an ad or from a breeder is a much better and safer process.

Ask lots of questions (see the list of questions below) in the initial phone call / email to weed out horses that are not suitable, saving lots of miles of traveling and hours of your time.

### **WHEN YOU GO TO SEE THE HORSE**

**Always** see the horse prior to being caught, groomed, saddled and bridled.

If a horse is hard to catch, the seller may already have the horse caught and waiting when you arrive and you would never know until it is too late. If a horse is 'cinchy' (flinches, kicks, bites as cinch / girth is being tightened), the seller may have the horse already saddled. If the horse is hard to bridle, the seller may have the horse already bridled. Insist on seeing the horse without tack and where he normally 'lives'.

#### **The Procedure:**

After arriving at the facility and meeting with the seller, the seller should catch the horse, tie, groom (including cleaning out the hooves), saddle, and bridle. All things you will need to do on your own so the horse should be well behaved and respectful through all handling on the ground.

The seller should then demonstrate the horse's abilities under saddle. Watch closely – does the horse look relaxed and happy? Is the horse responding immediately to the rider's cues? Is the horse focused on the rider or looking around at everything else?

Does the horse go forward easily? Does the horse stop immediately (without taking extra steps) and stand quietly? Does the horse back nicely, straight, and at a steady pace? Does the horse work the same way in both directions?

#### **What to watch for:**

Are the horse's ears forward, or one forward and one back towards the rider? That is good, but if both ears are pinned back, the horse is upset or angry. If the horse's ears are always forward and one ear never moves back to 'listen' to the rider, the horse is probably spooky, concerned about his surroundings, or is not paying any attention to the rider.

Does the horse's tail lay natural and quiet or swish a lot? A horse will show his agitation or sourness by swishing his tail.

Does the horse toss his head? If yes, this is a sign of bit resistance, not properly bitted up, or the bit is hurting him. Does he stick his nose out? Again, a sign of bit resistance or not bitted up properly. Conversely, is his nose pulled close to his chest? A sure sign that the horse is being intimidated or overpowered by the rider. Is the horse traveling with his poll (top of head) lower than his withers (just before his back starts)? A sign that the horse is not moving in a natural way and this will cause soundness issues in future.

Do you ever see the whites of his eyes? If yes, that means he is spooked or agitated. This applies to all horses except Appaloosas – they naturally have white sclera (like a human eye).

After that, the seller will offer for you to ride the horse. Adjust the stirrups to fit your leg length before mounting.

Ask to have the seller explain all the cues:

- how to stop the horse;
- how to cue to go forward from the stand still to a walk;
- from a walk to a jog / trot;
- from a trot to a lope / canter and how to cue for the correct lead.
- how to handle the downward transitions – from the lope to a trot; from a trot to a walk;
- how to slow down in the gait you are in.
- Ask how to turn the horse. Does the horse only direct rein (use the right rein to turn right) or does he neck-rein (use left rein against neck to turn right)?
- Does the horse respond to leg aids? Weight aids?

When starting to ride the horse, I always suggest asking for a halt after the first 5 or so strides at the walk. You always want to make sure that the horse has 'brakes' and you have control.

I also always suggest that you walk the arena (or riding area) both directions at the walk before proceeding to a faster gait. A horse sees differently out of each eye and you want to evaluate the horse both directions to make sure the horse is comfortable with the surroundings and a new rider.

While at the walk, check out the horse's 'steering'. Make sure you can control the direction you are going.

YOU decide on the speed and the direction. If the horse is making the decisions for you, he is not the horse for you.

Transition up to a jog / trot ONLY when you feel comfortable. Again, ride both directions, and perhaps even execute a few medium to large size circles. Always check out 'steering' and the 'brakes' at this gait before transitioning up to the lope / canter.

Put the horse through his paces, asking for all manoeuvres you saw the seller do.

### **After the initial ride:**

Never offer to buy the horse after that first ride. It is too easy to be caught up in the emotions and buy a horse that really isn't suitable – it is real easy to fall in love quickly with a horse. Tell the seller there are many great things about the horse but you will need to think about it / talk it over with your spouse / partner.

Ask if it is okay to have a vet check. Obviously, if the seller is against a vet check, run - don't walk - away.

Ask if it is okay to have a friend come out and see the horse. Hopefully you can find an experience horse person to evaluate the horse for you.

Feel free to contact the seller that night or the next day to make another appointment to see and ride the horse again.

### **After a second (or third) ride:**

If you feel this is THE horse for you (meets all of your criteria), before making the final purchase, get a **vet check**. This is where a vet (who has not worked or seen this horse) will do a pre-purchase exam and provide you with information regarding the horse's health and soundness. The cost is approximately \$150.00 to \$200.00.

## Questions to Ask

### Information from the Ad:

- Age
- Disposition / Temperament
- Height
- Cost
- Sex (geldings are more steady and reliable. Mares have a bit more heat, but come into heat regularly through spring summer & fall. Some mares are great when in heat, but most are 'bitchy', and the odd few are just unrideable when in heat.)
- Training level and abilities
- Experience level of rider needed
- Price

### Questions to ask in the initial call / email:

- Why are you selling the horse?
- Is the horse registered?
- If the horse is registered, what is the breeding? Ask for a copy of the papers so you can research the breeding - genetics plays a huge role in horse's behaviour and attributes.
- How experienced is the horse?
- What training has the horse received? Any professional training?
- Does the horse need an intermediate rider? Experienced rider? Suitable for novice riders?
- What bit is the horse usually ridden in? Has the horse ever been ridden in a twisted wire snaffle (this is a cruel bit and if the answer is yes, the horse is lacking proper training - walk away)

### Questions to ask when seeing the horse:

#### General:

- Does the horse have any conformational faults? If you see lumps & bumps or something that doesn't look right, don't be shy in asking about it.
- What is an average daily routine for the horse?
- Where is the horse in the pecking order? (high up in the pecking order usually means a more dominant horse)
- What is the horse being fed?
- How long have you owned the horse? Where did you get the horse from?
- Is the price negotiable? (unless "firm" is listed in the ad, the seller is usually open to offers).

**Health:**

- Has the horse ever had any injuries. Any illness?
- Is the horse vaccinated, what with and are these up to date?
- When was the horse dewormed last? With what?
- Has the horse ever suffered with laminitis?
- Is the horse shod? Has the horse ever been shod? Who is the farrier? Feel free to get the farrier's number and call to ask about the horse, the horse's hooves, and behaviour.

**Behavior:**

- Does the horse demonstrate any vices or stereotypical behaviours (i.e. weaving, cribbing, box walking, stall kicking)?
- What is the horse like while being ridden - alone, and with other horses? How about with traffic?
- What does he spook at? (every horse will spook at something, no matter how well broke or quiet)
- How does the horse behave with other horses, both when ridden and turned out?
- What is the horse like to load, catch, bath, and clip?
- How does the horse tie? Has the horse ever pulled back?
- How does the horse behave with the farrier and the vet?
- What is the horse like if he had 2 months off from riding?
- How does the horse behave at shows / competitions / trail rides?
- Has the horse ever bucked? Ever reared?
- How is the horse with being handled or ridden by children?
- How is the horse with dogs?

**Training:**

- Is the horse in full work? How often is the horse ridden? When was the last time the horse was ridden?
- Does the horse respond to leg aids? Weight aids?
- Does the horse sidepass? Turn on the fore? Turn on the hind? Neckrein? Collect? Other abilities?
- Does the horse need to be ridden with spurs? A whip?