

It isn't the Color of the Horse...By Tracy Porter

Buying a horse is the easiest part of the process; if it doesn't meet your needs, selling it is the hardest part. Nothing is worse than waiting an eternity... finally fulfilling your dream of owning a horse and ending up disappointed. It doesn't matter how much knowledge you have or don't have...it is still your responsibility to be informed. You are the buyer...*caveat emptor!*

Many good horses are passed up because of people's inability to make a decision based on what would be the 'best horse under them', not their 'appearance up on the horse'. It's not the color of the horse that is important! Appearance, yes if one is considering conformation. Remember that horse in the plain brown wrapper might be the one you're overlooking.

How about this ad I ran across? *If any members of your club has a SMOOTH GAITED horse, any breed, color – anything but a lot of white, no sorrels or bay.*

A great match is a horse with these ingredients: training, soundness and looks. If you have all the ingredients and the color, too, GREAT! But don't make a decision based solely on the color, breed or sex of a horse. That's like buying your dream car - a great body, but the engine doesn't run.

How does one begin to look for a horse?

Make a check list.

- **Find a good vet** before you start to look.
- **Find an honest, knowledgeable horseperson**; perhaps one that does not have a horse to sell. Or one that values his/her reputation and the future welfare of his/her horse.
- **Size**: How large or small do you really need your horse to be? It might sound cool to have a 15h horse...but can you mount without a mounting block?
- **What temperament and characteristics are you looking for in a horse?** What is important to you?
- **Do you have a breed preference?** Gaited, trotting?
- **Write down your goals.** Why do you want a horse and what do you want to do with it?
- **Honestly evaluate your ability and past experience.**
- **At what pace are you comfortable riding?** Slow, medium, fast?
- **Age.** When buying a horse for a child, when one adds the horse and rider's age – it should be between 25-30.
- **Amount of experience/training.** A solid foundation is invaluable! There are exceptions, but what is important is that regardless of the training and how well you click with it...learning never ends. It is important to get and stay in a program with someone that will make you a better horseperson/rider.

Start your list with these major categories: Soundness, Training and Looks. The looks of the horse are the least important, but you do want a horse that pleases you. Under these headings, make a sub list with the most important considerations on top and the least important at the bottom. Under training, everything is important! A new, first time horse owner should learn on a horse that has good ground and saddle manners rather than trying to learn/teach a green horse or one that needs to be retrained.

Several years ago a parent stopped out wanting to buy horse for her child, a young horse so they could bond and grow up together... "If you want your child to grow up (i.e. live!) – Buy an older, well trained horse". Recently a lady stopped out looking for a place to board; although, she'd never ridden, she was planning to buy a green broke 2-year old (a very flashy paint). I suggested this was probably not a good idea, her response was "but I've trained dogs". I really wanted to ask how many thousand pound dogs she'd trained!

Never shortchange training/learning... a bargain horse might not be a bargain. There's no such thing as a free ride. Horses are expensive, high maintenance critters. Whether it is the daily care or what you need to learn to keep him in peak training performance...even if it's just trail riding. With every ride you take, you're training...be it positive or negative. Yes, you must consider yourself a "trainer".

What kind of bit is he ridden in? If it's a super stopper...he may not stop without it (or even with it)! And you should be asking yourself...why does he need the super stopper anyway? How about if tosses his head or can't keep his feet still? These are all red flags telling you to find another prospect to look at. What has he been up to...has he been ridden consistently or is he a pasture ornament? Where's he been ridden? Ring, trails, pasture, parades, in traffic, the remote wilderness near Jatai in Brazil? Where will you ride your new horse? Where are you WANTING to ride in the future?

Does he have any specific health needs? Require special living conditions? Medications? If he is an easy keeper...is he really... or does he have Cushing's/thyroid symptoms? What condition is he in? If he's unthrifty, you can beef him up but that quiet old nag suddenly is a souped up Jag a few groceries into your new relationship. Does he have good sound feet...What is a good sound foot? His hoof should have nice concavity, low heels and a

short toe. His hairline should be at 30 degrees. The bars and sole should not be dead or overgrown. The bars should be neat and uniformly slope down to the mid point of the frog. The frog should be healthy and robust. If the toe has a dish, the hoof has been allowed to overgrow, tearing the healthy lamina attachment of the hoof wall away from the coffin bone.

If the horse has high heels...the coffin bone is stressed making the tip (or toe area) of the coffin bone the weight bearing point instead of spreading the weight through out the entire lower portion (ground level coffin bone) as intended by nature.

Any vices: chewing wood, wind sucking, pawing, weaving all are as bad as biting, kicking, striking, bucking, head tossing, rearing, bolting and jiggling. Do you really want to deal with a cribber, a horse that's more than part beaver? Best to move on to another prospect.

Buying a horse is an event that should not be rushed. There is much to consider, doing research, finding knowledgeable, honest help and having a list of requirements will help you find the RIGHT horse. It takes just as much time, effort and money to feed a good horse as it does a bad one.... so make sure that the total package works for you and fills YOUR needs! AND don't forget, you should like him and he should like you; however, you have to earn his respect and trust by being consistent in your handling and riding skills.

HORSE BUYING CHECK LIST!

LOOKS

Size
Age
Temperament
Discipline/use
Breed
Color

SOUNDNESS

Vices
Soundness issues
GOOD FEET/No shoes
Thrifty, easy keeper
Vet history
Deworming/vax history
Past owners what did they use the horse for and why don't they own him now?

TRAINING

Can you do these skills on both sides of the prospective horse?
Can you do it without the horse having to be tied up?
Can you do it without restraint devices such as twitches or chain leads?

YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO!

Walking up, catching and haltering in a field with other horses.
Leading next to you without lagging or rushing.
Stand by quietly without being a bother, distracted or rude.
Standing still while: Mounting and next to objects (just in case you have knee surgery or break your leg)
Grooming, Tacking, Bridling, Blanketing.
Clipping
Trailer loading
Bathing
Vet care
Hoof care
Is he responsive to you while being lead?
In the saddle is he responsive to leg cues?
Does he have soft transitions in his gaits?
Starting, Stopping and Turning with ease?

A few RED ALERTS:

Does he:
Rip the reins out of your hands?
Run over you when being lead?
Seem pushy, aggressive, unimpressed with your presence?
Do you feel pressured by the seller?
Have to be lunged before riding to "take the edge off"?
Seem reluctant to let you touch his face, neck or other part of his body.
Have pinned ears or a sour look?
Seem to have a little too much "Extra Energy?"
Have a tube of "Calm & Cool" in his grooming box?