

BORROWING FREEDOM

A GUIDE TO PURCHASING YOUR FIRST HORSE



*In riding a horse, we borrow freedom.
~Helen Thomson*

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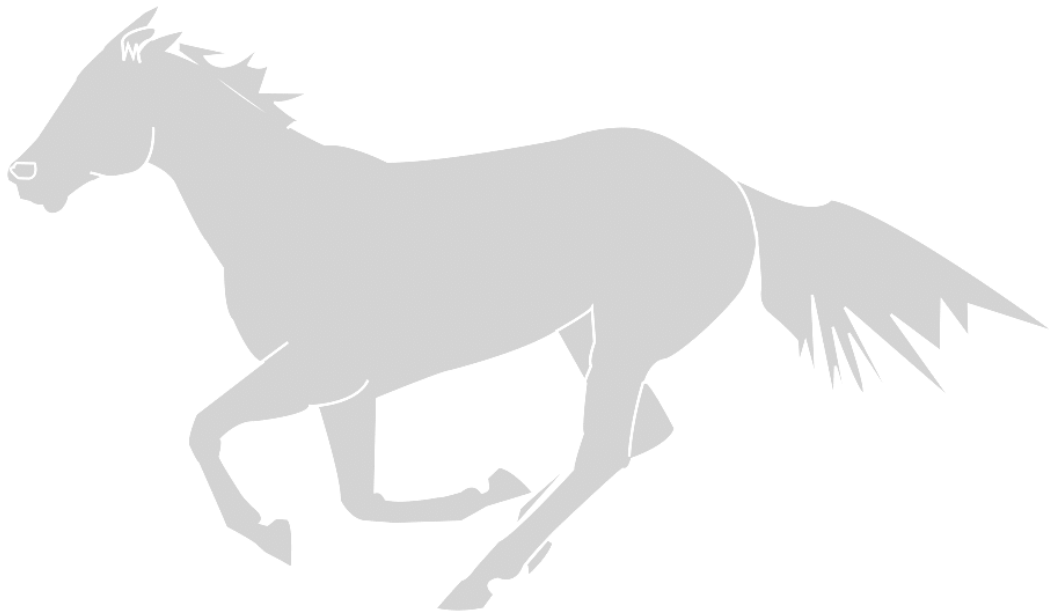
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In riding a horse, we borrow freedom.
~Helen Thomson

INTRODUCTION

Ah, steeds, steeds, what steeds! Has the whirlwind a home in your manes? Is there a sensitive ear, alert as a flame, in your every fiber? Hearing the familiar song from above, all in one accord you strain your bronze chests and, hooves barely touching the ground, turn into straight lines cleaving the air, and all inspired by God it rushes on!

~Nikolai V. Gogol

The relationship between humans and horses is unique. For centuries, people and horses have forged incredibly close unions, working and playing with each other.

The relationship between humans and horses is inspiring.

From the words of Gogol in this introduction to the numerous other quotations and observations sprinkled throughout this guide, we can find many examples of how people's love of horses has moved them.

The relationship between humans and horses is ongoing. We no longer rely on horses as a primary mode of transportation or as working draft animals in most parts of the world.

Nonetheless, the desire to continue our interaction with horses continues unabated. That desire brought you to this guide, as it has brought many others into the arena of horse ownership.



The relationship between humans and horses deserves facilitation. That's what this guide is all about. We want to provide you with

information that can help you to experience the magic and majesty of owning a horse and developing a connection with one of these very special animals.

The topic of horse ownership covers a great deal of terrain. We don't hold out this volume as being the "one and only" comprehensive answer to every question you may have about horse ownership.

What it **is** designed to provide is a measured, step-by-step look at how you can go from being interested in horses to owning and caring for one of your own.

An unknown author once wrote, "A dog may be man's best friend, but the horse wrote history." We hope this book helps you to join in the rich historical tradition of horse ownership.

SHOULD YOU BUY A HORSE?

The horse through all its trials has preserved the sweetness of paradise in its blood. ~Johannes Jensen

You may be interested in adding a horse to your life. You might be attracted to the romance of horse ownership and experiencing an age-old tradition.

You may be a naturalist, a dyed-in-the-wool animal lover, or just feel some sort of inexplicable connection with horses that makes you feel as though you are the kind of person who should be a horse owner.

No matter what your motivations are, the first thing you should do before considering horse ownership is to take a close look at yourself, your life and your objectives to make sure horse ownership is a fitting decision for you.

You should reflect upon a number of different considerations before starting down the path to horse ownership. Here are a few questions to ask yourself before making the decision.

Consider them carefully, answer them honestly, and use the insights you glean to make a wise determination of your suitability for horse ownership.

Why are you interested in owning a horse? That might seem like a simple question, but a bit of reflection should give you a good idea of whether your interest is based on core sentiments and deeply held feelings or more shallow reasoning or whim.

Horse ownership involves a great deal of effort and responsibilities. Your motivations should be strong.

Do you need to own a horse to meet your objectives? Think about what you want to achieve from the experience of horse ownership and decide whether you need to have your

own horse to meet those ends.

Would it be possible to occasionally ride at a stable or elsewhere to capture the experience you are after? Alternatively, is owning and caring for your own horse important to you?

Will you make time for your horse? We all live hectic, fast-paced life. For many of us, the rapid clip of modern life is one of the reasons we seek relief by revisiting older ways of doing things and traditional experiences like horse riding.

However, not all of us are ready to carve out the time necessary to be a horse owner. Are you prepared to spend time with your horse and on the various activities associated with horse ownership?

Where would your horse go? Is your property suitable for a horse? If not, are you prepared to make the necessary arrangements so it would be? Alternatively, if you are planning to stable a horse are realistic options located within a reasonable distance from your home?

You don't need to have definitive answers to all of those questions, but they should give you a good idea of some of the things you will need to confront as a horse owner.

Is a horse financially realistic? This guide operates on the presupposition that anyone pursuing horse ownership should be sure they have the financial means necessary to properly care for a horse and that they should be capable of meeting necessary expenses without feeling tempted to cut corners or to compromise the quality of care provided to a horse.

The guide does include a chapter on budgeting for a horse that

will give you a better idea of your financial obligations.

For now, concentrate on whether you feel as though you are already in a financial crunch or if you do have room to add a horse and the expenses associated with it to your budget in a more general sense.

The answers to those questions should give you a good idea of your suitability as a horse owner.

If you have some questions about whether or not you are the right person for a horse, don't surrender the idea immediately.

Instead, consider the matter as you continue reading and revisit your sentiments as you learn more about horse ownership.

THE STABLE

OVERVIEW

You know horses are smarter than people. You never heard of a horse going broke betting on people. ~Will Rogers

Long before you start the process of choosing your very first horse, it is important to deal with some critical preliminary concerns. One of the most important is finding an appropriate stable that offers quality instruction.

As a new horse owner, you will have a great deal to learn.

Although asking others and reading helpful information will supply you with much of what you need to know, there is no replacement for quality hands-on instruction from a professional.

That's why choosing a good stable is so important—the stable will become the locus of your horse experience. It will be where you learn how to actually deal with and interact with your horse.

Finding a great instructor is equally important. In fact, the next part of this guide will address that subject in greater detail.

However, we will begin by looking at how you can choose a stable that will meet your needs.

FINDING A STABLE

If you want a stable friendship, get a horse. ~Author Unknown

You could pull out your trusty copy of the yellow pages and begin making a list of area stables to investigate.

That approach will supply you with numerous options and, with a little work, you might just find the right spot to get acquainted with your new horse. However, there is a more efficient and productive way to find a quality stable.



Start by asking people who are directly involved with horses and who have a great deal of personal experience.

Consulting with knowledgeable individuals should give you an assortment of quality leads upon which you can then follow up.

Who should you ask? There are many different options.

Some great potential resources for direction include:

Veterinarians specializing in the care of horses. Top local horse doctors will have a great idea of which stables one should consider and may be able to give you an idea of which outfits to avoid.

They see horses that have spent time at a number of different stables and should be able to provide some unique insight.

Local tack and feed stores. If you want to find out about the best stables, why not go to the same places other horse owners and stable operators go? By asking the management and informed personnel at horse-related stores, you should be able to find out which stables get high marks from those with a vested interest in healthy and happy horses.

Horse clubs. Many communities boast a number of equestrian clubs. Members of these organizations are dedicated to quality animal care and are excited about bringing new horse enthusiasts into the fold.

You can get some great stable recommendations and you just might find a community of like-minded people with whom you can share your new hobby.

After generating a list of promising area stables, it will be time to let your fingers do the walking. You will need to call each of the

stables and arrange a visit.

Recommendations are great, but nothing can replace a personal, on-site visit.

VISITING THE STABLES

*Somewhere in time's own space
There must be some sweet pastured place
Where creeks sing on and tall trees grow
Some paradise where horses go,
For by the love that guides my pen
I know great horses live again.
~Stanley Harrison*

Don't approach the stables as if you are a tourist. Although you may be very curious and excited about your impending horse ownership, you must approach these trips like a prospective employer interviewing job applicants.

Don't be afraid to assert yourself and to pay close attention to important details.

What details should you be noticing? There are several things to consider as you visit each stable. If you don't feel as though you will remember all of the important considerations in choosing a stable, you may want to bring a notepad with you on each "inspection."

Here are some critical considerations to keep in mind when checking out the recommended stables on your list.

Cleanliness. A clean, organized property is evidence of a commitment to quality care. Although there may be great stables that look a little "rustic," even those that lack "bells and

whistles” should be neat.

Stay away from stables that don't look well tended.

State of repair. Notice the various structures, fences and other physical aspects of the stable. Are they in good repair? A serious stable will be firmly committed to keeping their operation in tip-top running order.

If buildings appear dilapidated, fences are sagging or other obvious problems exist, you may want to consider the next stable on your list.



Water. There should be a ready supply of clean water available to horses both in paddocks and their stalls. Like all animals, horses need water for both survival and comfort.

If a stable doesn't seem to have water at the ready for all of its equine guests, it may be a sign of trouble.

Horse health. You are a first-time horse buyer, not a professional veterinarian. Thus, you aren't expected to perform full physicals on the horses you see. This can annoy some sellers (and horses) so be careful, leave the vetting to the

professionals.

However, you should look for signs of overall health. Do the horses have nice shiny coats? Do their eyes seem soft and focused? Do they appear to be well fed?

If the horses at the stable look less than healthy, there may be a serious problem afoot.

Horse disposition. Obviously, at this stage of the game, you are not a horse expert. However, you should be able to get a sense of whether the stabled horses look happy. Horses should appear to be relaxed.

Look to see if their ears are pointed forward (a good sign) and that their tail isn't rigid.

If something seems "wrong" about the disposition of the animals, you should probably trust your guts and look elsewhere.

Employee disposition. The best stables have happy horses and happy staff members. Remember, you will be spending a great deal of time at the stable with your horse and an important part of your experience there will involve your interaction with the stable staff. Make sure to note how you feel about the people you meet at the stable. It is important to select an outfit with whom you can get along.

Student disposition. The horses should be happy. The stable personnel should be happy. The students should be happy, too! If the folks at the stable don't appear to be having a good time, think twice about the facility.

This is where you will be going, and you certainly want to enjoy yourself, right?

Student/staff interaction. Observe lessons and how instructors are conducting lessons. The stable will be your “horse college,” so you want to make sure you will be attending classes with “professors” you’ll enjoy and from whom you are likely to learn.

If you aren’t comfortable with the attitudes or teaching strategies, avoid the stable. It is possible to find instructors who make learning the ins and outs of horse ownership and riding fun.



Safety. Make a point to notice whether it appears as if the stables are safe for the horse owners. Notice whether riders are dressed appropriately and are wearing protective helmets or hard hats.

Also, look at the tack and equipment used. Does it appear to be in good shape and treated with respect? If it looks as though the stable is playing fast and loose with safety, it probably isn’t the best place for any horse owner—especially a first-timer.

SPEAKING UP

A man on a horse is spiritually as well as physically bigger than a man on foot.
~John Steinbeck

As you tour stables, don't be nervous about making inquiries. There is no such thing as a stupid question, and even if your queries do sound as though they are coming from a real greenhorn, you can still learn a great deal about the nature of a stable and its staff by the kinds of answers you receive.

Remember, you are interviewing these stables. You want to make the best possible decision. That means you will need to understand what it done there and why.

You will also want to spend your time with instructors and stable personnel who are friendly and competent. Asking questions is a great way to establish whether those two important traits are present.



MAKING A CHOICE

A Hibernian sage once wrote that there are three things a man never forgets: The girl of his early youth, a devoted teacher, and a great horse. ~C.J.J. Mullen

Based upon the information you have uncovered while searching out recommendations and touring various stables, you should be prepared to make a decision.

There will be many factors at play, and weighting them to come

to the best possible decision is more of an art than it is a science. That is because different factors will have different value to individuals.

Some of the things that may influence a decision include:

Distance of the stable from home. If the stable is hours away from your home, it might be less attractive than a closer option. Think about how the stable's location will impact your ability to enjoy the experience.

Cost. We haven't discussed the issue of cost at all. That's because anyone entering horse ownership should be prepared for the associated financial expenses and should not let a desire to cut corners influence important decisions affecting the care and well being of a horse or the safety of its riders.

However, if there is a huge price disparity, this may weigh in your decision-making.

Recommendations. You will want to take the advice you gathered from other seriously. If you discussed stable options with professionals who are intimately involved in the horse world, you should value those opinions.

Tour information. Obviously, the information you gathered while visiting the stables will be a primary force in determining which stable is right for you.

If you took careful notes and paid attention the factors outlined above, you should be well positioned to make a great call.

Intangibles. Sometimes we just have a "sense" about a certain place or decision. That might be the case with stable selection, too. If your gut instinct is telling you to choose one stable over

another, don't disregard it.

You want to make sure your attraction to a particular stable still meets all logical requirements, but it is okay to let the "feel" of a stable influence your decision.

As you take all of those factors under consideration, make sure your final decision is consistent with two critical guidelines.

Choose a stable that will offer your horse the best possible care.

You can't compromise on those two factors. They are just too important to short-change. Don't let any attractive features or slight "side benefits" allow you to make a decision that doesn't comport with those two essential standards.

MOVING SLOWLY

A horse is the projection of peoples' dreams about themselves - strong, powerful, beautiful - and it has the capability of giving us escape from our mundane existence. ~Pam Brown

Once you've selected a stable, it will be time to start learning. That will involve spending time in the barns watching and paying close attention to how the horses are treated and what goes into the care of a horse.

It's also an opportunity to ask questions of experts and to "pick their brains" to increase your own knowledge base.

This kind of real-world study is irreplaceable. Even the best texts on horse ownership or riding can't give you the same feel

and understanding, as will personal observation and involvement.

In addition to spending time in the barns, you will need to learn how to ride a horse. You will want to master basic techniques like walking, cantering and trotting. You will want to develop a strong sense of comfort while in the saddle.

Some experts will tell you to spend at least a year attending the stables and learning the basics before even considering the purchase of your own horse. That's sound advice.

Here are a few of the reasons why it makes sense to transition into actual horse ownership slowly.

Making a wise investment. The notion that you might learn that you don't really care for horses or riding may seem downright silly, but it is a possibility.

Many horse owners have jumped in with both feet, certain they would forever be interested and attracted to ownership, only to find that their interest waned as the novelty wore off.

Many of us have romantic ideas about what horse ownership is all about and, occasionally, the nitty-gritty of dealing with the animals changes our thinking. Spending time learning and frequenting the stable before purchasing a horse can prevent you from making a bad decision.

Directing your purchase. By spending time at the stable without a horse of your own, you will have the opportunity to observe and assess a variety of different horses. Chances are that you will develop and understanding of what type of horse will best meet your needs.

Buying “blindly” right from the beginning may result in a poor decision.

Avoiding surprises. Those who buy a horse right after selecting a stable may be ill equipped to deal with the long list of subsequent decisions.

By spending time learning, you will know what kind of tack and additional equipment you will need in order to make the ownership experience work.

You'll have a stronger idea of time commitments and necessary scheduling, too. Put simply, you'll be much better informed, and that will make owning a horse of your very own far more rewarding and a lot less stressful.

Stable assessment. After spending time seeking out advice and recommendations from others and then visiting a series of stables, you will probably make an outstanding decision.

However, you are new to the horse world and it is possible that your judgment wasn't quite perfect.

Taking it slow gives you a chance to take the stable for a “test drive.” If it turns out that the situation isn't matching your needs, you will have the chance to try a different operation without all of the hassles of doing so while in the process of working with your new horse.

Instruction assessment. By spending time at the stables before purchasing your horse, you will have the opportunity to assess instructors and their techniques.

You will also be able to look for a different instructor if the one at the stable you have chosen just doesn't work for you.

You will be spending a great deal of time, energy and money on learning about your horse and how to care for it. Having the right teaching makes all of the difference in the world. It's so important, in fact, that we will be looking at the topic in depth in the next chapter of this guide.

THE TEACHER

OVERVIEW

The essential joy of being with horses is that it brings us in contact with the rare elements of grace, beauty, spirit, and fire.
~Sharon Ralls Lemon



Your instructor will be a key part of your life as a horse owner. He or she will teach you the basics and will influence the way you interact with horses forever. You will learn your teacher's habits, biases, strengths, and weaknesses.



You will adopt his or her best traits and will inadvertently mimic his or her worst weaknesses.

You can, and may, involve yourself with multiple instructors as you learn more about horses and riding.

However, your first teacher will always have an impact on you. Choosing the right instructor is, thus, very important.

Making a wise choice isn't just important in that sense, though. It is also a big part of determining how enjoyable your horse ownership experience will be.

You will be spending a great deal of time with your teacher, and if you don't match well with him or her, it can only serve to lengthen your learning curve and to make your time with your

horse less enjoyable.

If you can find a tremendous instructor, you will learn more than you ever imagined you could in a short period. You won't become an Olympic equestrian event qualifier overnight, but you will make great strides quickly. In addition, you will do it with a smile on your face.

Let's look at some considerations in finding the best possible instructor.

RIDING SKILL ISN'T ENOUGH

If the world was truly a rational place, men would ride sidesaddle.

~Rita Mae Brown

There are many spectacular riders who can dazzle us with their abilities in the saddle. These individuals are a marvel to behold and they obviously understand a great deal about horses and how to work with them.

Those skills, however, don't communicate anything about their ability to teach others. Teaching is a unique skill, just as riding is. You can't assume they go hand-in-hand. Horse instruction is like any other teaching field. An ability to do something doesn't prove an ability to teach it.

Ted Williams was one of baseball's all-time greatest hitters. As a manager, he could never field a winning team.

Many genius engineers and mathematicians, people responsible for some great scientific advances, were despised

as classroom teachers.

Meanwhile, some of the world's greatest writers and painters were taught and inspired by nameless academics who had the ability to teach but may not have had the special gifts necessary to produce their own masterpieces.

So it is with riding instructors.

A teacher may have a championship rodeo riding buckle around her waist or an Olympic gold medal on his chest. That's proof they know how to handle themselves in the saddle. It is not, however, evidence that they can teach you how to work with your horse.

That may be because the instructor has never taken teaching as seriously as he or she has developing his or her own skills.

It may be that the teacher just doesn't have the knack for imparting information to others. There are hundreds of possible reasons why a skilled rider might not be a great teacher.

It is true that you want your instructor to evidence skills on the back of the horse. You wouldn't want to take lessons from someone who was afraid to mount a pony.

You won't have to worry about that, though. Any instructor you encounter will probably have all the skills necessary—the question will be whether he or she has the teaching skills that can lead to a great experience.

WATCH THE INSTRUCTOR

Spending that many hours in the saddle gave a man plenty of time to think. That's why so many cowboys fancied themselves as Philosophers.

~Charles M. Russell

You will want to talk to the teacher. You will want to get an idea of whether the two of you can get along and how they approach their role. You can get some very valuable insight from those conversations.

However, you can learn a lot more from actually watching the teacher at work.

The proof, they say, is in the pudding. You really should take the time to watch a potential instructor work with other students in your same skill range and age bracket.

This will help you determine whether you have found the right person for the job.

An instructor who does well with kids may be less enthused or effective when working with adults. A teacher who loves to share advanced techniques with experienced riders may not have the same infectious attitude when it comes to counseling a rank amateur.

By watching people in your same situation, you can get a clear idea of how your own lessons might look and feel.

Here are a few of the things for which you should be looking while evaluating a teacher in action:

Student reaction. How do the student's react to the instruction? Do they seem put out by numerous recommendations and criticisms, or do they seem pleased to

learn when advice is given to them? Are they enjoying their interaction with the instructor or merely forcing themselves through the process in order to spend time on horseback? A quality teacher creates a consistently positive environment, and that skill will show on the faces of his or her pupils.

Commitment to safety. A good instructor will demonstrate a strong commitment to safety. He or she may evidence that commitment by taking a second look at a student's saddle before the pupil mounts the horse. It could appear in warnings and comments made during lessons.

Although riding is unbelievably fun, it does have its risks and those dangers must be taken very seriously. The best teachers understand that and make student well being a priority.

Animal treatment. Carefully note how the teacher is interacting with the animals, as well as the students. A good instructor will, of course, treat the horses with the utmost care and respect.

If you ever sense that the horses involved are almost an afterthought to an instructor, he or she will probably be a poor choice.

Careful observation of an instructor should help you decide if he or she is the right match for you.

PERSONALITY MATTERS

I go about looking at horses and cattle. They eat grass, make love, work when they have to, bear their young. I am sick with envy of them.

~Sherwood Anderson

There is another component to choosing the best possible instruction. It's a far less objective consideration, but it does matter. You need to find an instructor with whom you can get along.

An instructor's personality may be perfect for some students and dreadful for your experience. Even the best overall teachers may not be a perfect fit for everyone.

Remember, your learning experience is supposed to be enjoyable. You will be spending a great deal of time with your instructor. Dealing with someone you like will increase your enjoyment of lessons and will help to spur your learning.

Consider the teacher's personality while watching him or her at work. Also, ask questions of the instructor and develop a feel for his or her personality.

If you feel comfortable with the connection you made, that should be a consideration when you make your decision.

THE HORSE

OVERVIEW

People on horses look better than they are. People in cars look worse than they are.

~Marya Mannes



Your first horse can help introduce you to a fun new world of opportunity and understanding.

Selecting the right horse for you is integral to making the most out of your experience.

Who knows how many potential equestrians abandoned horses due to an error in judgment when selecting a horse? The number is undoubtedly quite high.

We are going to discuss numerous factors you should consider when choosing your first horse. One area we won't discuss in great detail is the matter of which breed is best suited for your needs.

There are a few reasons for this intentional omission.

First, there are literally hundreds of horse breeds and a comprehensive analysis of the traits and strengths of each is well beyond the scope of this guide.



Second, there are great resources already available that provide insight and information about the various horse breeds and their characteristics.

If you are interested in learning about a particular breed of horse, you should consider visiting the portion of the University of Oklahoma's "Breeds of Livestock" program dedicated to horses

(<http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/horses/>).

This comprehensive listing of breeds provides descriptions, photographs and important information.

You may also want to investigate the International Museum of the Horse's "Breeds of the World" page

(<http://www.imh.org/imh/bw/home2.html>)

which provides a great deal of data and organizes breeds on the basis of geography.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

He knows when you're happy

He knows when you're comfortable

He knows when you're confident

In addition, he always knows when you have carrots.

~Author Unknown

Once you've spent time in a riding stable and have learned enough about horses to take the next step, you will be ready to start choosing the right kind of horse to meet your individual needs. Let's now look at some of the matters you will need to take under advisement.



Your **riding goals** will directly influence your choice of a horse. Some new horse owners will primarily be interested in learning more about the basics of horsemanship. Others will be interested in particular types of riding.

You will need to define your goals as a horse rider and use that information to direct your decision. Obviously, a future trail rider will need a different kind of horse than someone who plans to participate in jumping events or other sports.

Those who are choosing a horse based on an interest in an equestrian event must consider the kind of horses they will need to reach their competitive aspirations.

Your current **skill level** will also impact your decision-making. This factor is too often overlooked, with often frustrating, if not dangerous, results.



As you grow as a horseman (or horsewoman), your horse will be just as much a part of your educational process as will your instructor. In fact, one could argue that your horse is probably your very best teacher.

Generally, this means one should seek out a horse that is a little more experienced with riders than is the rider himself or herself. A well-educated horse will be safer and easier for newer riders.

On the other hand, an exceptionally experienced horse may be accustomed to very slight, almost unnoticeable, cues.

This can result in problems for the novice rider who might accidentally send a mixed message or wrong signal. Basically, you want to find a horse that will respond to you and even be a bit “forgiving” when you aren’t exactly sure what you are doing.

Finances will often be a factor in choosing a horse. Earlier, we mentioned that this guide wouldn’t focus too much on money as a key decision making factor because anyone interested in pursuing the hobby should be financially positioned to afford it without worrying about cutting corners at every turn.

However, this does not mean that you shouldn’t at least think about the “dollars and sense” of horse ownership. The price of horses varies considerably and only the very rich can afford some animals.

You will need to keep your financial realities in mind when making a decision. We will discuss matters related to this factor later in the guide, when we focus our attention to budgeting for your horse.

The **size** of the horse does matter. You will want a horse that can carry you without discomfort. If you are too big for your horse, it will make the experience less comfortable for you and almost unbearable for the animal.

If you choose a horse that is far too big, you may feel “out of control” or almost insecure when in the saddle. The objective is to choose a horse that fits you while making sure you, also, fit the horse.

Conformation can be important. The term conformation refers to the physical composition of the horse and how it measures up to expectations for a breed with respect to the relative size and positioning of its features.

Conformation may not be a key concern to the casual rider who simply wants to enjoy weekend trail rides while on horseback. However, it can be of the utmost importance for those who plan to compete in breed-specific activities.

There are some basic aspects of proper conformation that will apply to any horse, and we will discuss these in greater detail as we progress.

If your riding plans require a horse that meets confirmative expectations, you will probably want to enlist the aid of your instructor and/or other experts when searching for your horse.

The **sex of the horse** can also play a role in making a decision. Although new horse owners are advised to avoid the often-temperamental stallions, geldings are a particularly reliable choice. Mares can also make fine first horses, and they do bring with them the added benefit of prospective breeding in the future.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

*I bless the hoss from hoof to head -
From head to hoof, and tale to mane! -
I bless the hoss, as I have said,
From head to hoof, and back again!
~James Whitcomb Riley*

After addressing the above-noted concerns, you will have probably developed a good idea of what kind of horse will best suit your needs.

Before you put your checkbook in your back pocket and start shopping, however, there are a few other things you should keep in mind.

Make sure you have solid and reliable plans for boarding the horse. You may be boarding your first horse at a stable. Others may care for their horse at home.

Think about what expenses will be involved and what, if any, preparations you will need to make before acquiring a horse.

You don't want to start shopping until you are sure of the kind of horse you want and equally certain that you are prepared to care for the horse after purchase.

THE BUDGET

OVERVIEW

When I bestride him, I soar, I am a hawk: he trots the air; the

earth sings when he touches it; the basest horn of his hoof is more musical than the pipe of Hermes. ~William Shakespeare

If you plan to own a horse, you need to plan on spending money. There is no way to own a horse “on the cheap” and the responsibility and duty owed to the animal dejustifies trying to “cut corners” at every turn in order to make ownership easier on the pocketbook.

Can you afford a horse?

That’s what this section of the guide is all about. It’s designed to give you an honest and accurate assessment of the expenses involved in horse ownership.

The differences in cost throughout different parts of the world and a host of other factors make it impossible to pin down exact expense levels.

However, the estimates presented here should provide you with good “ballpark estimates” to use in answering the affordability question.

As you decide whether you can afford to own a horse, it’s important to approach the matter with a few key points in mind:

Be honest and objective about your finances. Don’t make the decision to buy a horse based on optimistic assessments of how your financial circumstances may change for the better.

Look at the costs associated with horse ownership and determine if they can realistically fit into your current budget.



Provide a buffer. Although some of the estimated figures may end up being higher than your actual costs, others may be lower than what you will actually pay.

You don't want to involve yourself in horse ownership if you think you can barely squeeze these expenses into your budget. Thus, try to look at the figures with an understanding that costs may actually run higher than anticipated.

Keep your responsibility in mind. When you take ownership of a horse, it isn't merely a matter of satisfying your own needs and desires. You will be taking responsibility for a wonderful animal's life and well-being. With many other decisions, an error will only effect you and your quality of life.

When it comes to purchasing a horse, however, poor judgment can be a risk to the animal, as well. Take your duty seriously as you determine whether horse ownership fits into your personal budget.

EXPENSES

A horse can lend its rider the speed and strength he or she lacks, but the rider who is wise remembers it is no more than a loan.

~Pam Brown

The price of the horse itself only scratches the surface of the expenses involved in horse ownership. There are many other cost considerations that you must take into account when

making a decision.

Let's look at several of the things upon which you can expect to spend. These expenses are expressed in annual terms.

Pre-purchase examination:	\$100-\$1,000
Equipment and tack:	\$1,000-\$5,000
Health care:	\$150-\$700
Farrier:	\$150-\$1,200
Food and bedding:	\$700-\$2,000
Other supplies:	\$250-\$1,200
Boarding (full care):	\$2,500-\$8,000
Lessons:	\$1,000-\$7,000
Training:	\$4,000-\$10,000

As you look at those numbers, remember that they are estimates and may not exactly reflect your personal costs of horse ownership.

Note also that not all expenses will necessarily be accrued simultaneously. For instance, if you were caring for your horse at home, the boarding expenses wouldn't apply to your situation.

Likewise, if you pursued a full care boarding option, you may not have to worry about many of the other listed expenses.

So, based on the numbers you see, do you think you can afford a horse? Before you answer that question, there are a few additional expenses to consider.

OTHER COSTS

Many people have sighed for the 'good old days' and regretted the 'passing of the horse,' but today, when only those who like horses own them, it is a far better time for horses.

~C.W. Anderson

There are a few other costs that will vary too much to provide an accurate estimate range. You will want to include these costs in your decision calculus, as well.

Purchase price of the horse. Although the total expenses associated with ownership often swamp the purchase price of the actual horse, that isn't always the case.

Horses can cost as little as \$1,000 (sometimes less) and as much as anyone would like to spend. Most first-time horse owners, however, won't be investing in future Kentucky Derby champions and can safely assume they are unlikely to spend more than \$10,000 on a first horse.

Insurance costs. It's difficult to provide an accurate range of insurance costs because the price of adequate insurance will usually be related to the purchase price of the horse itself.

Generally speaking, insurance costs somewhere between 3.5% and 9% of the total purchase price of the horse on an annual basis.

That number will vary based on the type of horse, the coverage obtained and a variety of other factors. You should consult with

an agent to get an idea of insurance costs and options before finalizing your purchase. This is very important.

Transportation. Transportation is difficult to estimate because different horse owners will have radically different needs.

A rural resident who plans to keep a horse on his or her property and who owns an appropriate truck won't have many transportation issues and, if occasions do arise to move the horse, may only have to rent a trailer.

A city dweller or someone who plans to travel a competitive riding circuit will have much higher expenses.

REMEMBER

*Where in this wide world can man find nobility without pride,
Friendship without envy,
Or beauty without vanity?
Here, where grace is served with muscle
And strength by gentleness confined
He serves without servility; he has fought without enmity.
There is nothing so powerful, nothing less violent.
There is nothing so quick, nothing more patient.
~Ronald Duncan*

If you make a poor financial decision with respect to horse ownership, it can destroy the recreational value and enjoyment of the activity. It can also have horrific consequences for the horse involved.

Budget your horse expenses based on annual numbers and not on a monthly basis. Why? Because if you did decide your circumstances could no longer support ownership, you can't assume an ability to get out of the activity instantly. It may take some time to sell your horse.

Additionally, many of the expenses we've mentioned tend to come in an "up front form." You may buy most of the tack you will be using in a given year right from the start, for instance.

THE SEARCH

OVERVIEW

For want of a Nail the Shoe was lost; for want of a Shoe the Horse was lost; and for want of a Horse the Rider was lost; being overtaken and slain by the Enemy, all for want of Care about a Horse-shoe Nail.

~Benjamin Franklin

Finally, after choosing a stable, finding an instructor, determining the right horse for you, and carefully examining your budget, it is time to go shopping!

If any theme has been developing throughout this guide, it may very well be patience. That oft-repeated message would make another appearance in this section, as well.

Although there will undoubtedly be a strong urge to make a

quick decision regarding the purchase of your first horse, your best ally is patience. This is not the time to act rashly.

You will be making a substantial commitment in terms of your time, energy and financial resources. There is no reason to rush in purchasing your horse.

Follow the guidelines covered here in order to find the best possible horse to meet your needs. Don't panic and don't jump at the first attractive opportunity.

You want to put all of your hard work and thought to their best use and that means making a careful horse selection.

WHERE TO FIND YOUR HORSE

Men are generally more careful of the Breed of their Horses and Dogs than of their Children. ~William Penn

If you want to buy a goldfish, you just need to drive to the nearest pet store or large department store. Buying a horse isn't quite so easy.

There are a number of places to look for horses, and it will pay to look at as many of them as possible when making a decision.

Let's run down some of the places where you may find your first horse:

Newspaper advertisements. Depending upon where you live, the local paper may frequently carry classified advertisements offering horses for sale.

If the descriptions in the advertisements meet with your needs, you should certainly call the owner/sellers and arrange to look

at the horse (contingent, of course, upon a reasonable price and a productive discussion).

Horse magazines and newsletters. By now, you should be so involved with your region's horse scene that you have a good idea of the publications and newsletters serving your area. Almost all of these magazines will include advertising where local and regional horse owners can list livestock for sale.

This is another fine source of prospective horses that you shouldn't overlook.

Feed and tack stores. Almost every feed or tack store will have a community bulletin board upon which individuals can list items and/or horses for sale. This is a great place to find leads when you are shopping for your first horse.

The Internet. You are reading an ebook, which indicates you have at least some passing knowledge of computers and the Internet! You might, however, be surprised to discover that many owner/sellers list their horses for sale on the web.

If you investigate these options but are unable to find the right horse for you, don't grow frustrated. Instead, that's a signal that it's time to start checking with your contacts in the horse community. Your instructor will undoubtedly have some ideas as to where you might find a suitable horse.

Assuming you followed the earlier recommendations about finding a good instructor, you should have a solid, trusting relationship and should be dealing with someone whose judgment you value. Ask for tips and guidance about finding a horse.

Ask others in the horse world, as well. When we discussed



finding the right stable, we recommended asking feed and tack store personnel, area horse veterinarians and others with strong roots in the horse community.

Now that you are ready to make the jump to horse ownership, it's time to consult with those same experts again.

WHERE NOT TO FIND YOUR HORSE

One reason why birds and horses are happy is because they are not trying to impress other birds and horses.

~Dale Carnegie

There are a few other horse sales outlets you should probably avoid, if you can.

Although it is possible to find the right horses at the right prices in these environments, it's the kind of terrain a first-time buyer should happily navigate around. If you can avoid finding a horse through these means, so much the better.

Friends. You may want to buy a horse from a friendly acquaintance or from someone with whom you have professional relationship, but buying from a friend can be problematic.

People have long said that one shouldn't mix business with pleasure and this is a perfect example of why that old adage is so often repeated.

There are too many chances for disagreements and disappointments when doing horse business with a good friend. Try not to buy your first horse from someone on your holiday card list!

Sale barns and auctions. Horse auctions are nearly unregulated in the United States and although a well-trained, experienced expert with a sharp eye and a great deal of knowledge can find solid deals, the first-timer is usually in way over his or her head when trying to handle an auction setting.

New horse owners shouldn't look to auctions as a means of finding their first horses.

Horse dealers. It may seem logical to look up a horse dealer when you want a horse. However, doing so may not be the best decision. There are a few reasons for this.

First, the horse dealer has no legal obligation to fully disclose all relevant information about a horse. He or she is obligated to answer questions honestly, but doesn't have to volunteer information on his or her own volition.

Then, when you consider that horse dealers make their money by selling horses--and not by sharing the downside of a particular horse--it's easy to understand why a first-timer should be wary.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

He's of the colour of the nutmeg. And of the heat of the ginger.... he is pure air and fire; and the dull elements of earth and water never appear in him, but only in patient stillness while his rider mounts him; he is indeed a horse, and all other jades you may call beasts. ~William Shakespeare

Now that it's time to lay your money down and to purchase a horse, you will need to make sure you are gathering the right

information when looking at prospective mounts.

As mentioned, we recommend taking your time when shopping for a horse. If you follow that sensible recommendation, you can expect to see scores of different horses before finally making a decision.

In order to keep track of your visits and the prospective horses under consideration, we advise keeping some form of notebook or organized notation system to log the most important facts about the horses you view.

Having this information at your fingertips later can help to guide your decision making productively and will help you to remember the details of the horses under consideration.

When you purchase a used car, there are several questions you should ask. Experience and reason leads everyone to ask about past accidents, maintenance problems, mileage and other obvious matters.

However, the best car buyers know what other questions to ask in order to make the best possible decision.

A horse is a significant investment, and it warrants the same kind of questioning and consideration, if not a great deal more.

Although you would probably ask the many important questions without prompting, bringing a list of queries with you when looking at a horse and then noting the seller's responses makes a great deal of sense.

Here are a few of the things you should ask when looking at a horse with an eye toward making a purchase.

- How old is the horse?
- How large is the horse? (height, weight, etc.)
- How long has the owner had the horse?
- Why is the owner selling the horse?
- What is the horse's medical history?
- For what purposes has the horse been used?
- Does the horse have any odd tendencies or bad habits?

If you are looking for a competition horse you will, of course, have a variety of other questions more specific to your chosen specialty.

Answers to these questions will give you a clearer understanding of the animal under consideration and will help you to make sure you don't accidentally make a poor horse investment.

SEEING IT FOR YOURSELF

Again, the early-morning sun was generous with its warmth. All the sounds dear to a horseman were around me - the snort of the horses as they cleared their throats, the gentle swish of their tails, the tinkle of irons as we flung the saddles over their backs - little sounds of no importance, but they stay in the unconscious library of memory.

~Wynford Vaughan-Thomas

All of the question and answer sessions in the world won't make your horse buying decision. You will need to take a look at the horses under consideration with your own two eyes.

Looking at prospective horses can make a first-time buyer excited. As such, you should try to approach the process as

objectively and seriously as possible, in order to prevent a rash decision.

There is a certain method to looking at horses with an eye toward purchase.

For instance, you will be very interested in getting a full view of the horse in action. This means you need to look at the horse from every possible angle.

You will want to see someone walk the horse and to take it for a trot while you watch from every direction.

Assuming the horse passes a quick inspection and still has your interest, you will want to watch a rider take him through the paces.

You don't just want to watch the horse in action, however, you want to watch it during dressing and tacking up, as well.

Does the horse appear to be cooperative and friendly? Is there anything disconcerting about his habits?

When the rider hops aboard the horse, does everything seem to go smoothly? Does the horse appear to be cooperative and responsive to the rider?

Remember, you are looking for YOUR horse. You want an animal that is happy and cooperative--a horse with which you will be happy and enthused to spend time.

If the horse seems to be problematic for its owner/seller, things are likely to be even worse for you.

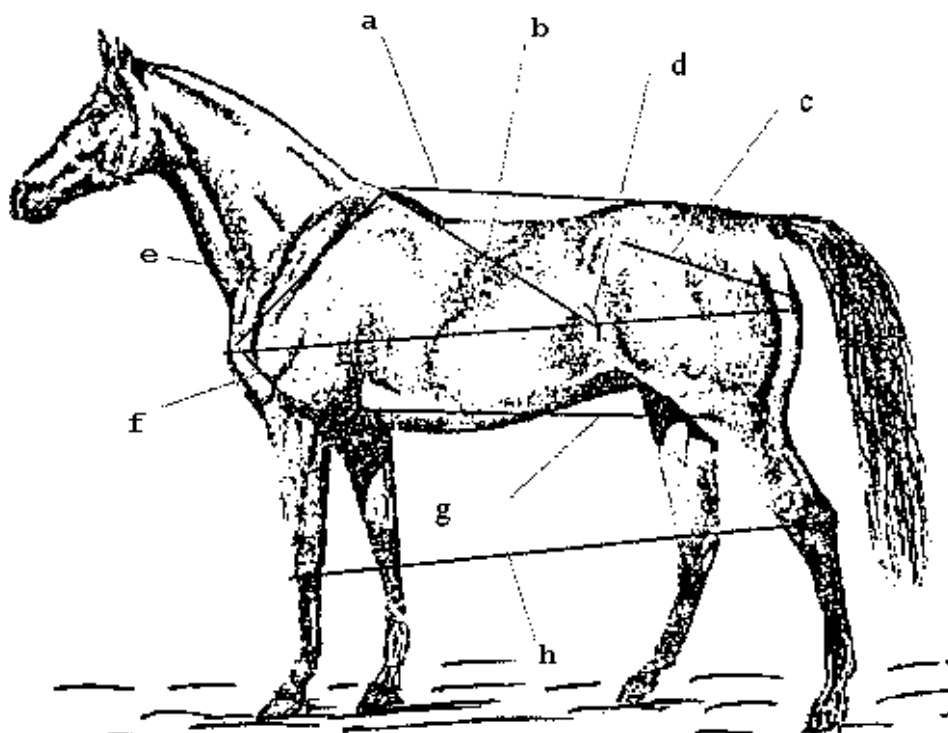
After you have seen the horse in action, you will want to take it



for a “test drive” yourself. While you are in the saddle, pay attention in hopes of answering questions like these:

Is the horse consistent with its previously obtained description? Is the horse you are currently riding match up with what the owner described to you?

Words will never fully capture the nature of a horse, but if there appears to be a substantial disconnect between the seller’s representation and what you are personally observing, that should be a danger sign.



A - Back (withers to peak of croup)

B - Body (point of shoulder to point of buttock)

- C - Pelvis (point of hip to point of buttock)**
- D - Rib length (withers to last rib)**
- E - Shoulder (withers to point of shoulder)**
- F - Arm (point of shoulder to point of elbow)**
- G - Elbow to the stifle**
- H - Knee to the hock**

How does the horse feel? We discussed the conformation of horse earlier. This is a perfect opportunity to assess whether the horse under consideration has a conformation that matches nicely with your own body. You want the ride to be a comfortable and natural experience.

If the horse just doesn't feel like a good fit, you should definitely have second thoughts before making a purchase.

Do you feel a connection? This is a difficult concept to explain, but one that is easily felt. Does the merger of man (or woman) and horse feel right? Do you have a sense that the two of you will enjoy one another's company and develop a good relationship.

We talked about trusting "gut instincts" when selecting a stable and instructor. That same intangible sensation can also help guide a buying decision.

Does the horse have a suitable disposition? As you ride, try to assess whether the horse seems to have a "personality" consistent with your needs and expectations.

What one person may perceive as skittishness, another may see sense as responsiveness. One rider's "lazy" horse may feel perfect and "calm" to another. You should use the "test

drive” opportunity to make sure the horse has a personality that will gel nicely with your own.

If you are purchasing a horse with the intention of using it in competition, you will also want to make sure that it appears to have the talent and natural skills necessary to excel in that arena.

Making that assessment will involve an understanding of the event in which you will be participating and the expectations of horses in that particular activity.

THE EXAM

*My horse's feet are as swift as rolling thunder
He carries me away from all my fears
Moreover, when the world threatens to fall asunder
His mane is there to wipe away my tears.
~Bonnie Lewis*

After an extended and comprehensive search, you have found the right horse. It meets all of your needs and you can just sense that it will be the perfect partner for you.



Although you are undoubtedly itching to write that check and to claim ownership of the horse, there is still one last step before you buy the seemingly perfect horse: the pre-purchase examination.

The pre-purchase exam involves having a veterinarian specializing in

the care of horses take a look at the animal.

They will test things like flexation, evaluate the horse's conformation with an expert eye, and look for other factors and indications that will help you make the best possible purchase decision.

Even the most expert veterinarians will admit that the pre-purchase examination falls short of being able to provide a guarantee of a horse's soundness.

However, trained professionals are able to spot things that first-time buyers won't be able to see and can provide potential buyer with critical data to help direct the buying decision.

Assuming the horse you have isolated gets a report with which you are comfortable, it will finally be time to take possession of your first horse.

If, however, the pre-purchase examination sends up a series of "red flags," you will need to seriously consider the provided warning signs before writing that check.

The main value is the ability to discuss all the findings with your vet and make an informed decision. There are very few perfect horses and each must be judged on its merits.

OVERVIEW

Brahma was excessively sparing with earth, water, and fire.... The reckless expenditure of air and ether in his composition was amazing. And, in consequence, he perpetually struggled to outreach the wind, to outrun space itself. Other animals ran only when they had a reason, but the Horse would run for no reason whatever, as if to run out of his own skin.



~Rabindranath Tagore

Wild horses are capable of caring for their own needs. Wide open spaces insure adequate exercise. Freshwater streams and rivers are a never-ending supply of water. Horses feed

themselves from the grasses and plants populating the pastures.

They are incredibly self-reliant creatures.

Although your horse will share many of the same

genetic characteristics of a wild horse, it will be far needier in terms of assistance with respect to its care.

Domesticated horses rely upon their owners to create and maintain a healthy environment in which they can thrive.

This puts a great deal of responsibility upon every horse owner. Caring for a horse is not an “occasional” activity. It is an every day process that requires a great deal of commitment and an attention to detail.

This guide will discuss some of the primary concerns associated with providing a horse with a proper and healthy environment. It is not, however, presented as a comprehensive guide to the well being of your animal.

There are countless volumes detailing the ins and outs of horse care, and once you take possession of your very own horse, you should avail yourself to these resources.

You should also confer with those more experienced members of the horse community, your veterinarian and your instructor to make sure you are doing everything necessary to provide your horse with an optimal environment.

SHELTER

...I heard a neigh. Oh, such a brisk and melodious neigh as

that was! My very heart leaped with delight at the sound.
~Nathaniel Hawthorne

In the wild, horses congregate in locations that provide an appropriate combination of features to meet their needs. Although wild horses may not have barns or stalls, they do choose areas that afford them some protection from the elements.

As a horse owner, you need to make sure your horse has access to adequate shelter.

You aren't relieved of the duty to have adequate shelter even if your horse is kept in a stall for the bulk of the day.

During the period in which they are "turned out" into the open, they still need to be able to access a windbreak or some other protection from the elements.

Shelter gives a horse a respite from precipitation and wind during colder times and a place to escape biting bugs and excessive heat during the summer. A loafing shed or access to a portion will do the trick.

Regardless of what kind of shelter you provide, it is important to make the area safe and comfortable. That means making sure structures are solid and reliable.

It also requires you to keep the area clean and free of any manure or other debris.

If you keep your horse in a stall for the bulk of the day, you will need to take care of that area. Here are a few pointers on creating a great stall environment for your horse.

Bedding is important. A horse stall should feature bedding made from straw, sawdust or wood shavings/chips. When selecting bedding material, keep in mind that wood shavings containing walnut must be avoided, as it is very toxic for a horse.

Additionally, you should avoid bedding materials that create a particularly dusty environment if your horse seems sensitive to the airborne particles.

If your horse develops a cough or seems to be breathing heavily, dust (fungal spores), from stall bedding materials may be at fault.

Cleanliness is critical. You need to clean your horse's stall every day. The ammonia in urine can build up in bedding material, creating potentially damaging fumes. Meanwhile, unclean stalls encourage the development of thrush, a painful and frustrating hoof condition.

You will need to remove the soiled bedding away from the barn area in order to keep it from becoming a veritable magnet for rodent and bug life.

You will need to be prepared to make arrangements for regular manure clean up, so that you don't create a problem spot on your property.

WATER

*The horses paw and prance and neigh,
Fillies and colts like kittens play,
And dance and toss their rippled manes
Shining and soft as silken skeins;...*

~Oliver Wendell Holmes

Constant access to clean and drinkable water is essential to the well being of any horse. As such, making sure your horse is properly watered is a critical aspect of proper care.

In many cases, owners rely upon tanks to make sure horses have appropriate access to water.

A large tank filled with clean water is a workable solution to meeting a horse's needs. However, in order to be sure that proper standards of care are met, there are a few aspects to tank maintenance that you should understand.

Let's look at a few of them now.

You must check the tank daily. You cannot assume that a tank that looked great yesterday will still be doing its job the next. Any number of things can happen to a tank.

A sudden growth of algae can make the water unattractive to your horse. Natural forces might disrupt the tank—a storm could send a tree limb crashing into the water supply, for instance. The horse itself might have accidentally damaged the tank overnight.

One must take a look at the horse's water tank every day.

You must clean the tank regularly. The idea of scrubbing a large metal tank probably isn't appealing, but it is absolutely necessary. Occasionally, you will need to clean your tank in order to insure your horse is receiving clean and healthful water.

One of the best ways to clean a tank is to scrub it using baking soda. This method does a fine job of scrubbing and is completely organic and safe.

Clean your tanks at the first sign of trouble or build-up, especially during the warmer months when algae growth can be quite rapid.

You must provide an escape route. Your horse isn't the only animal enjoying the outdoors. Fields and pastures are also populated by an assortment of small animals and rodents. They may make occasional forays to the water tank, too.

Unfortunately, these little critters have a nasty tendency of falling into the tanks and not being able to escape.

Your horse will not drink water from a tank in which a dead animal is floating. You can't keep the little guys out, but you can place a large rock or a floating log in the water to provide a means by which the animals can find their way to safety.

You should seek shade for the tank during the summer. During warmer months, sunlight will increase water temperature considerably, which will encourage the rapid growth of algae and other plant life.

You can keep the water cleaner for a longer period by finding a shady spot in which to place the water tank.

You can't let the tank freeze. During the winter months, you can't let the tank freeze over. Although you might not be as thirsty during cold spells, your horse will still need unfettered access to water. A tank warmer can keep water from freezing even in very cold environments.



Don't be fooled into believing your horse can substitute snow for water. It takes a substantial amount of snow to substitute for a normal amount of water and your horse simply won't hydrate itself adequately during those situations.

Your horse may not be getting its water from a tank at all times. In many cases, horses are kept in stalls for at least part of the day.

Even when your horse is safe in the barn, it is still critical to provide it with a consistent and clean water supply.

Here are some helpful recommendations for watering your horse properly when it is stalled.

Always have a bucket of clean water in front of your horse.

A five-gallon bucket of fresh, clean water should be within your horse's reach at all times. You will need to check on the horse's water supply at least a few times every day and will want to replenish that bucket every time.

Clean your buckets regularly. Just as you must clean your outdoor tank, it is important to keep indoor water buckets clean. Scrub them on a regular basis.

Don't be fooled into believing that an apparently clean bucket is "good enough." An old mouthful of food, for instance, could spoil in a bucket. The water poured into the bucket may look clean, but would actually be polluted.

Check the buckets for debris. Even the most well kept barn will feature more than its share of potential debris items that may find their way into a water bucket. If your horse is stalled, make sure his water supply isn't compromised by any outside elements.

Every horse will have a different way of approaching its drinking needs. Some may guzzle water when thirsty. Others may hydrate themselves in small doses throughout the day.

Regardless of an individual horse's tendencies, however, you must provide the animal with an uninterrupted supply of water. Pay close attention to your horse's drinking patterns, too.

Changes in those patterns may be indicative of a medical problem and could give you an early warning of a developing problem.

FOOD

HAY IS FOR HORSES!

Even an E-type Jaguar looks merely flash beside a really smart pony and trap. ~Marion C. Garretty

As we noted during the brief mention of wild horses, the animals are natural grazers. In a perfect world, they would be more than happy to eat their fill directly from the land, nibbling as the need presented itself.



Depending upon where you live, that may still be possible for your horse. However, most of us reside in locations and climates that don't allow a "pure grazing" feeding strategy.

As such, we look for alternative ways of providing our animals with an appropriate diet. One of the most popular foods for horses is hay.

Hay often serves as a domesticated horse's primary food. Hay can be made from any of a number of grasses.

Choosing the right hay for your horse may seem like a "hit or miss" proposition, but with an understanding of some basic pointers, you can get your horse the food it needs.

Green hay is best. If you can find hay that is still green and relatively fresh, your horse will thank you for it. Not only does green hay seem to taste better to horses, it also maintains higher nutritional value than drier hays.

Hay tends to turn to brown as time passes, but this doesn't make it inedible, so long as it has not become musty or moldy. Nonetheless, a green hay is always recommended.

Avoid yellow hay. Yellow hay bales are great for creating clever Halloween or Thanksgiving displays, but they are a poor



choice for your horse's diet. Yellow hay is generally too old and will often be quite moldy.

Moldy hay is a dangerous proposition. The spores can cause colic or respiratory difficulties for your horse, who won't be too excited about eating it in the first place.

Use alfalfa hay in moderation. Horses love the flavor of hay made from alfalfa. People also enjoy the taste of chocolate cream pie, but it isn't a primary part of a healthy diet!

Alfalfa is very rich and can strain the digestive system of a horse. It also tends to encourage a great deal of weight gain (just like that pie) and you shouldn't feed it to an overweight horse at all

You can use small quantities of alfalfa hay for your horse, but don't rely upon it. If you notice the presence of any small, purplish flowers, that is an indication that the nutritional value of the hay is in rapid decline.

Buy hay wisely. You should make sure you have enough hay to get your horse through the winter, which means you need to start looking toward the tail end of the summer. That will give you the opportunity to find and invest in quality hay that will last through the "hay season."

You should assume that your horse will consume about one-half of a small hay bale daily. Make a high estimate; you'll be happier with a small surplus of hay than you will be with a shortage on your hands.

If you don't feel you can distinguish good hay from bad, enlist the help of a county extension agent, a member of the horse community or some other experienced party to help you find the best product.

Hay will probably be a mainstay of your horse's diet. As such, you can't treat it as an afterthought finding and purchasing sufficient quantities of high-quality hay is very important.

Haylage: many horse yards use this feed which is grass preserved in a different fashion. It is much less dusty and is normally tolerated very well. However like any new feeds introduce gradually.

GRAIN AND SALT

Four things greater than all things are, -
Women and Horses and Power and War.
~Rudyard Kipling

It would be an exaggeration to compare grains and commercial horse feed with candy, but in many respects, the analogy is apt.

Your horse will find oats and other sweet feed irresistibly delicious, but it may lead to excess weight gain and health problems.

You may want to use an occasional handful of sweet feed as a treat for your horse, but before you make any such grain a regular part of your horse's diet, you should be aware of how to properly handle these products.

Consult with an expert. Before you begin integrating grain into your horse's regular meal plan, check with your veterinarian or a feed expert.

They can help you determine how much grain to use in the diet and will give you quality direction to help avoid creating an obesity problem for your animal.

Check your horse carefully. Obesity is a serious problem for horses and contributes to a substantial decline in overall health and well being. It is incumbent upon you, as a responsible owner, to consistently evaluate your horse's body.

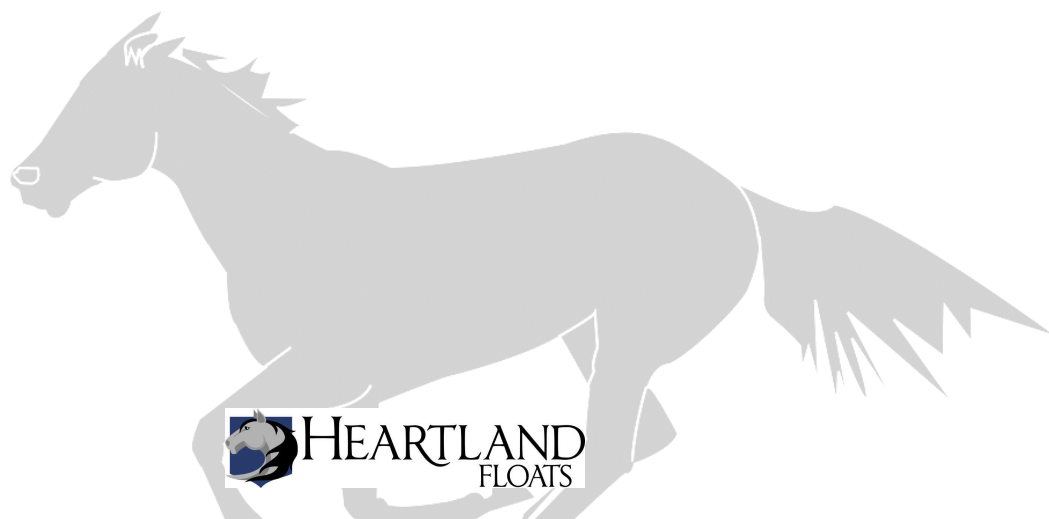
Be on the look out for fatty areas along the neck and buttocks of your horse.

If you do notice substantial accumulation of fat, additional exercise is usually the best way to rectify the situation. Some breeds of horses are very prone to putting on weight, and the most important principle is to keep your horse regularly exercised. Horses that are naturally somewhat rounded are often fine if exercised. But being fat and unfit is not good in horses or people!

On the other end of the spectrum, be alert to a horse becoming too thin. In such a situation, introduction of grain in moderation can be a good way of encouraging necessary weight gain.

Salt is necessary for your horse's health and you should always have it available for your animal. Make sure you always have an adequate salt supply on hand.

Salt blocks especially created for horses are readily available at any feed store and come in a variety of sizes, depending upon your needs and preferences.



CONCLUSION

A horse is a thing of such beauty... none will tire of looking at him as long as he displays himself in his splendor.

-Xenophon

It might start with an unexpected epiphany. “I think I’d like to own a horse!”

Going from that small thought to becoming a horse owner, however, requires a great deal of planning, consideration, thought, and effort.

Not everyone who toys with the idea of owning a horse will ever find himself or herself saddling up for a ride on a lazy Sunday morning. Relatively few of those who think about owning a horse will ever understand what Benjamin Disraeli said when he noted, “a canter is a cure for every evil.”

Some, however, will make the journey from a distant admirer of horses to horse ownership—and partnership. They will understand why having a horse is like “borrowing freedom.” They’ll know why Bedouin legend holds that the horse flies without wings and conquers without a sword.

Going from a passing thought to a living reality may take an investment in time and effort, but it is an investment that pays huge dividends. Remember ideally get your horse vetted or at the very least purchase with a knowledgeable friend you can trust. Also carefully consider Insurance options in your relevant country. This is the start of your journey never stop learning.

***My horse has a hoof like a striped agate
His fetlock is like a fine eagle plume
His legs are like lightning
My horse has a tail like a thin black cloud
the Holy Wind blows through his mane...***

-Navajo song

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