

Buying A Horse Evaluation Checklist

A printable list containing questions and tests to consider when in the market for a new horse. This list is for anyone interested in purchasing a horse, from beginners to experienced horsepersons

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Health

Ears: Can you touch inside the horse's ear's? Any sores, wax, or sensitivity?

Legs and hooves: any hot areas (including hoof!), swollen areas, bumps, sores, lameness, scars. Any bad odor?

Leg confirmation: list any deviations from normal (compare to images on the internet - just Google horse leg conformation). Any signs of pain or change in comfort during the visit? Any lameness or arthritis after doing flexion test?

Mouth: Can you touch it? Any sores? Are teeth/bite even and aligned? Does it chew normally?

Age: Can you confirm the age via the teeth or paperwork?

Body Rub your hand along horse. Can you touch anywhere and everywhere? Any irritations, scars, or rubbed spots? Any sores (including pinprick sized ones), blotchiness, patterns, white spots under tack, swelling, sore/sensitive spots. Does the horse seem unusually itchy (factoring in bug bites)?

Eyes: Any cataracts? If you stick your finger up to one eye without touching it's whiskers, does it flinch (on both sides)? Does he startle with common objects? Do the pupils dilate properly when taken from inside to outside? Are the eyes similar?

Any unusual health symptoms: lethargy, rapid or odd breathing, pawing, lameness or uneven/odd looking movement, unwillingness to move, diarrhea, discharge from nostrils, huffing and puffing after minimum work, hot or swollen areas, or anything that caught your eye? Is it uninterested in eating, drinking, or treats during the interview? Note: some of these may be signs of travel sickness.

Any weak or abnormal muscle tone?

Does movement look normal, or unbalanced or irregular? Any stiffness?

Any irregular conformation?

Is the horse symmetrical?

Describe the hooves. Any concerns?

Tack

Saddle: Does your saddle or tack fit this horse? Will there be extra tack expenses (is a special saddle needed, such as a short back or gaited saddle? Is the mouth/bit average sized?). Are the withers prominent, and not too far back? Is the back sloped? Any variations from normal can make finding a saddle difficult, and can cause the saddle to move during riding.

Tack for sale: Is the seller offering tack for sale within your price range? Does this tack fit properly? Any bare or worn spots on tack, or unusual wear patterns? Any parts need repair? Is the saddle treed/treeless? What is the style/discipline? Does it fit you?

Saddle Pad: Is it shimmed, or are multiple pads need to balance saddle? Is extra padding needed?

Has improperly fitted tack caused any health/muscle issues?

What is the attitude during saddling?

Behavior

What is the attitude coming in and out of trailer? Can you put it in trailer yourself? What type of trailer is it used to?

What is the attitude during groundwork? How is it reacting to normal distractions like bugs and wind?

What is the attitude during riding? Any differences between indoors and outdoors?

What is the attitude during cool down? Any signs of pain or illness? Fatigued more than expected?

What does the horses environment tell you? Any kicked or chewed fences, uneven wear on floor, bites on other horses, ripped blankets (vices)? Is the horse separated from others?

Any vices or concerns shown? Any nipping, chewing, pinning ears, cribbing, swishing tail, avoidance? Is it head shy?

Does the training match what you expect?

Does the responsiveness match what you expect? Is this horse overly sensitive to cues (likely inappropriate for a beginner), or dull?

Did you see any aversion to tack, or pain?

Does the horse seem distracted? Is it responding to your cues and willing to learn?

Conformation and Movement

Is the horse fat, skinny, or average?

Does the horse look smooth and balanced from a distance, or sloppy and off?

Have the owner walk, trot and canter. Watch stride length, range of motion, lead, and if there is any stumbling, hooves hitting each other, dragging of toes (check the footprints), heavy uneven 'clop-clops', or anything incorrect with the gait. Watch for head bobbing or signs of pain or weakness.

Final Questions

Who will make up the sales contract? Will it include a trial period or health/fitness guarantee?

Overall, what did you like?

What things caused to you pause, were red flags, or were not a good fit?

Is the horse trained beyond your ability, just up to it, or needs more work? Don't expect to "grow with the horse" unless you plan to do that while the horse is in professional training.

Does the horse seem like the perfect horse, but you still aren't sure? The horse may be an awesome horse, but it needs to be more than that - it needs to be compatible with YOU. Any hesitation probably has a good reason.

Are you looking for excuses to say no instead of yes? Do you find yourself trying to minimize, overlook, explain away, or hope for future change with certain concerns? You will not be happy buying a horse that doesn't fit your needs.

Are you looking at the horse more than once? If you find yourself still unsure after 2 visits, it is likely not the horse for you. There will be others!

Is it comfortable for you? Is it too big or too small?

Will this horse fit the needs of your family? Will kids be safe around it? Can friends and family work with it or ride it? Will today's trail horse work as a show or dressage horse for your kids a few years?

Does this horse have a kind, large, intelligent, relaxed eye? If the horse seems perfect, but has a wide or frequently worried eye be concerned about bad behavior (spooks) with little warning. A piggy little eye can mean piggy little nature.

Are you thinking or feeling rushed to buy the horse on the spot. DON'T. You need a few days to think about it, and you need to look at other horses to make comparisons first. If the seller will agree to a trial period, that is even better. If they won't, be sure to ask why - a seller that likes the horse will want it to go to a good home. The others just want it gone.

Can you afford this horse, acknowledging that the most substantial costs come care *AFTER* the purchase?

Asking price:

Additional tack needed:

Additional basic care items needed (blankets, sheets, grooming, different fencing, buckets, etc):

Special needs (Medications, vet costs, vice aids, supplements):

Transportation:

Pre-purchase exam, and any resulting x-rays:

Training:

Boarding & feed:

Emergency vet care: (budget well for this! A horse is more likely to get injured at a new place, and you never know what chronic ailments the seller was hiding)

Dewormer:

Mineral supplements:

Annual vet care/shots:

Trail and usage passes:

Lessons:

Breeding care and fees:

GRAND TOTAL:

Other Suggestions:

Take a camera. Get pictures and/or video of:

Both sides, no rider.

Front.

Back.

Back from above (needed for saddle fitting and selection).

Horse with rider.

Horse moving.

If the seller did not give you his home address or seems dodgy, get a picture of them also in case of a stolen horse!

Anything visual or behavioral that was out of the usual.

Take a pencil and notebook or paper for each person in your party.

Turn down your "I don't want to insult the seller" filter a notch, and don't be afraid to point out things that are of concerns whether major or minor. Inexperienced sellers may be unaware of problems and have their horses way overpriced. Defensive sellers may be dishonest with themselves, and with you.