

COMMITMENT

Horses require time and money. One-time start up costs are followed by continued horse maintenance costs. Common start up costs include halter, lead rope, brushes and other grooming tools, bridle, saddle and saddle pad, buckets, and the horse of course. You may choose to have a pre-purchase veterinary exam performed on your horse to protect your emotional and financial investment. This exam is designed to assess the health and physical fitness of the horse. Behavioral fitness, athletic ability and appropriate training level are left to the prospective buyer and his consultant. Horse maintenance costs include boarding, vaccinations each 6-12 months, deworming every eight weeks, hoof care every six weeks, dental care at least once a year and possibly extra veterinary expenses for illness or injury. If you opt to keep your horse at home rather than at a boarding facility, costs may include shelter construction, fencing, hay, grain, stable forks, bedding and other feeding/cleaning paraphernalia.

Caring for a horse requires a time commitment. Minimum daily care involves watering, feeding and a form of exercise. This adds up to a minimum of an hour a day. The less personal time that you can afford to spend, the more money you should plan to spend to have someone else care for your horse. Boarding costs vary depending on your geographical area and services rendered.

A popular old saying sums it up: It costs as much to keep a good horse as it does a bad horse. Buy the best horse you can, but buy the horse most appropriate for your needs. Whatever the initial investment in the horse, it will cost the same to maintain most horses.



BUYING YOUR FIRST HORSE



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Horses fulfill many roles in our lives. In many cases, owning a horse is a lifelong dream which can finally be realized. Horse ownership offers several benefits, including companionship, exercise and a social outlet as well as competitive opportunities. Prospective buyers should learn all they can about horses and have hands-on experience before buying a horse. Horse knowledge can be obtained from any number of books and horse publications and by taking riding lessons, attending horse camps, volunteering to work at stables, leasing a horse, joining horse organizations and learning from horse-knowledgeable friends.

Whether you are a youngster filled with dreams, someone who has earned a spot in life that affords you opportunities for horse ownership, or someone of any age who is looking for that special connection, this guide to buying your first horse will help you toward that realization. The guide is a joint publication of the Horsemen's Council of Illinois and Southern Illinois University's 4-year Equine Science Program.

PREREQUISITES TO SHOPPING

Before you buy a horse, you should already have some hands-on horse experience. This will allow you to know what type and temperament of horse will suit you. You should consider what type of activity you want to do with your horse. Driving? Trail? Showing? Western? Huntseat? Dressage? Saddleseat? **NO MATTER WHAT DISCIPLINE YOU CHOOSE, BUY A HORSE THAT ALREADY HAS THE SKILLS AND TRAINING NEEDED FOR THAT SPORT.** You need to ask yourself some honest questions in order to choose the appropriate horse. What level of riding are you at right now? (Leave your pride at the door and be honest.) There should be an inverse relationship between your ability and the horse's level of training. The more knowledge and ability the person has, the less training the horse must have at this time. If you break this rule, the result will be a confused and frustrated horse AND owner.

Write down a "wish list" guideline of what you want in your horse. Include age of the horse, height, gender (NO STALLIONS!), prospective use, level of training, price range and quality. Try to stick to your guidelines, but you may find yourself a bit flexible in some situations. Beware of sad tales and fast deals!

SHOPPING AROUND

Prepare yourself to look at many horses before buying. Ask important questions over the phone before looking at a horse. If the horse doesn't fit the criteria listed above, keep looking. This will save wasted trips and the time of the buyer, seller and consultant. (Don't forget that the seller also has a time investment. Be courteous and timely.) Some questions you may want to ask the seller are: How long have you had this horse? What is the reason you are selling the horse? Does the horse have any medical problems? Has the horse ever foundered or colicked? Does this horse have a current Coggins test? How is the horse with the veterinarian? May I call the veterinarian? How is the horse with the farrier? May I call the farrier? Has the horse ever hurt anyone or suffered



LOOKING THE GIFT HORSE IN THE MOUTH

Take an objective, horse-knowledgeable person with you on your horse shopping trip. Observe the horse's general mannerisms – is it quiet or nervous? It is always a plus to see the horse in its normal stable environment (pasture, turnout, stall) to check for cribbing, weaving or other behaviors. Watch as the horse is caught, tied, groomed and tacked. Ask the owner or someone who knows the horse to ride it first. If no one wants to ride the horse for you, that is a bad sign! The type of temperament the horse exhibits is very important. It should act as if it enjoys its job. If you and your consultant agree that the horse is suitable for you, then it is your turn to ride. Try out the horse thoroughly. If you are not sure if the horse is for you, you may ask for a second visit.

CINCHING THE DEAL

A pre-purchase veterinary examination will help protect your investment.

It is best to use the veterinarian who will have the responsibility of medically maintaining the horse later. Put your purchase agreement in writing. Put the *entire* agreement in writing, date it and have the seller sign it. This will prevent difficulty proving what your agreement was should something go wrong. If the horse is registered, get ALL of the registry paperwork in order before closing the deal. Make sure that you get the horse's original registration papers (and that they match the horse!) along with a signed transfer that matches the name listed as current owner of the horse. In Illinois, all horses must be sold with a current negative Coggins test. It is wise to obtain a copy of the horse's health maintenance records so you can keep its established schedule.

Buying a horse is akin to adding another member to your family. Horses need love and attention, and you have to be dedicated to your horse's care. This means getting out of bed on cold mornings and sitting up late nights if sickness requires extra attention. In return you will receive lots of love and fun times. Horse ownership is an exhilarating experience with proper preparation.

severe injury itself? What type of training does the horse have? Does this horse have professional training? May I call the trainer? What type of riding do you do on this horse? What is the horse's temperament? Does it have any behavior problems? How is the horse housed? Does it get along with other horses? How does the horse load and travel in a trailer?

There are many places to find horses for sale. Well broke horses are usually sold by word of mouth. Your riding instructor might be familiar with a horse to suit your needs. The stable where you plan to board has an incentive to keep you satisfied and should therefore be a good source for you. Breeders generally want to see their animals well placed so their product is enjoyed and well cared for and so you will return to them for your next horse. Newspapers and bulletin boards are a quick way to find a horse, but you may have little recourse should the horse prove to be unsatisfactory. Buyer beware at auctions, there is no recourse except to resell the horse if it doesn't work out.