



Owning a horse is a big responsibility that requires great commitment, time and money. Before buying a horse or pony you need to make sure you can provide everything your horse needs. Buying a horse is a time-consuming and lengthy process. You will need to do some research and visit different horses before you make your final decision.

What will owning a horse involve?

Owning a horse is not as simple as you might think. You will have to consider the following:

Why do you want a horse?

Whether you want companionship, want to compete or want a horse as means of getting out and exercising, they are your responsibility and a life-long commitment.

How time consuming is it?

This will all depend on your individual situation. If you decide to keep your horse on full-livery, your time commitment can be whatever you choose. Your worries might be less, but costs will be high and you will miss out on time and fun with your horse.

If you choose to keep your horse at home it will be a full-time commitment, 365 days a year!

You may choose to keep your horse on DIY livery, where you care fully for your horse. If, however, you are ill or want to go on holiday you can usually call on the assistance of the yard owner, at a cost.

What will it cost?

After the initial outlay of buying your horse, you will probably have to buy some tack and clothing for your horse, including saddle, bridle, rugs, etc. These can amount up to over £1500.

You will also have on-going costs, including:

Accommodation: this can cost up to £800/month, depending on the type of livery chosen. Livery charges usually include stabling, grazing, hay and straw or alternative bedding.

Bedding: this is usually included in livery charges but can cost up to £4/bale of straw or £6 for a bag of shavings.

Feed: as well as hay, hard feed, carrots and supplements may need to be purchased costing up to £8 for a standard 20 kg bag of hard feed.

Healthcare: this will include vaccinations, worming, shoeing/trimming and dental care amounting to approximately £600/year.

Do I have enough experience?

You will need to know... how to handle a horse on your own; how to feed a horse; how to clean out a stable; how to correctly place a headcollar, bridle, saddle and rugs; how to groom a horse; basic rudiments of riding or driving; when a horse is healthy or not; when to call the vet; how to maintain healthy feet.

Everything else you need to know will come with experience.

How do I go about finding a horse that is right for me?

Before buying a horse you will need to consider the following factors:

How much money have I got to spend?

This will almost definitely rule out one or more types of horses.

You can expect to pay as much as £2500 for a general all-rounder and tens of thousands of pounds for a competition horse.

What type of horse should I buy?

Buying a horse



This all depends on your experience and aspirations. All horses are different and as you visit various horses for sale you will soon come to a conclusion as to the type that is best for you.

Novice rider: a nice quiet schoolmaster would be suitable

Intermediate rider: a more experienced, but not necessarily registered horse would be ideal.

Advanced rider: a suitable competition horse with the relevant experience, possibly a hunter type.

What height should my horse be?

Small, light-weight adults, would probably go for a fine horse, anything up to about 16hh. For taller adults and men, hunter types up to and over 17hh would be more appropriate.

What age horse is best?

If you are a novice rider buying your first horse, an older more experienced horse would probably suit you best. More experienced riders would probably go for a slightly younger horse of about 6 or 7 that they can work with and possibly school and train further.

What sex horse should I buy?

Geldings are usually more reliable, they tend not to be temperamental and are usually fairly laid-back.

Mares can be too, but some become rather 'mareish', skittish and excitable as they come into season.

Stallions are usually not suitable as pleasure mounts, they can be dangerous when handled by someone who is inexperienced.

For an experienced horse-lover, breeding your own horse may be a possibility, if so, you may consider buying a good quality mare and sending her to stud.

Do I want a registered horse?

If you want to do some showing, you may need to buy a horse that is registered. Some breed and open classes require a horse to be registered.

When you buy a registered horse, make sure you ask to see its registration papers. Don't buy a horse unless the papers come with it - make sure the owner has signed the transfer statement.

Now you can start searching for your perfect match! Spread the word, news travels fast, you never know, something may come up. Keep an eye out in the popular 'horsey' magazines and on the numerous equestrian websites on the Internet.

What should I look out for when I go and see a horse for sale?

Go and see a variety of horses and get a feel of what is going to suit you best. You will need to check out the following before making any decisions:

See the horse in a stable

Make sure the horse is relaxed, confident and friendly and doesn't put his ears back, turn and face away from you, try to barge out of the stable, windsuck or show any other stable vices, or resist having the headcollar put on.

Note what sort of bedding is used and ask whether the horse has any reactions to straw or hay. If straw is used, does the horse attempt to eat it? A horse that eats straw can become full up without obtaining the necessary nutrients.

Note the horse's general health

Does the horse have any obvious injuries, a runny nose, have bright eyes - wide-set and large, have good teeth - check for parrot or undershot jaw which cause eating problems.

Check the horse's feet and legs

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Make sure the horse does not rest one leg excessively, is sound and free of stiffness, has good, strong hooves that are well-shaped, has no swelling or recent scars.

Examine the horse's body

As you look at the horse check for straightness of the back - is the back too long or too short? And does it have an even amount of muscle on either side of the rump.

Examine the horse at work (someone else should ride at this stage)

Check for the reaction of the horse to being saddled - does he bite or seem unusually aggressive? Does the horse breathe heavily, have an ease of movement and even gaits with a good head carriage? Does the horse fight the bit or resist moving forward?

Ride the horse yourself

Notice how the horse reacts when you mount, to leg aids - is the horse forward going and sensitive to your aids? To the bit - does the horse fight it or is the horse very strong?

If you are still interested, go back and ride a few more times. Get a feel for the horse and be objective, no horse is perfect, you may have to compromise with a few minor faults. As long as the horse is sound and willing to perform, patience and practice will resolve any minor problems resulting in a happy combination.

What should I do next?

Once you have made the decision that you would like to buy a horse, it is advisable to find a vet that will carry out a pre-purchase examination on the horse. Not only will it give you peace of mind, but if you intend to insure your horse, the insurance company you choose will probably request to see a copy of the pre-purchase examination certificate. The examination is not cheap but it may prevent spending large amounts of money on a horse with existing or possible health problems. It also maximises the chance of the horse successfully going through re-sale vettings.

The vet will examine the horse in 5 different stages:

1. Preliminary examination
2. Trotting-up
3. Strenuous exercise
4. Period of rest
5. Second trot and foot examination

This examination follows strict guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in conjunction with the British Veterinary Association and British Equine Veterinary Association.

All 5 stages will examine different aspects of the horse, including respiratory and musculoskeletal systems at work and at rest. The tests will determine soundness and suitability. Questions to the vendor will be posted, eg vaccination record, general behaviour and behaviour while being shod, clipped, travelling, etc. Blood samples, radiographs, endoscopy and other diagnostic tests can be carried out if you feel necessary.

You should discuss the results of the pre-purchase examination with the veterinary surgeon who carried out the examination. No horse or pony is perfect and you should listen carefully to the information that is given to you. You should question the veterinary surgeon regarding any worries you or he/she might have. Remember it is a clinical examination carried out at one particular time and not a guarantee for the rest of the horse's life.



If you want any other information on health issues concerning your horse please contact Dalehead Veterinary Group on (01729) 823538 and we will be happy to advise you.