

Horse Shopping? Better Ask Some Questions

So you're in the market for a horse. There are many horses out there, so it's sometimes easy to get mesmerized into thinking that each one you encounter is the "perfect match" for you. But remember: take your time and do your homework to get the best match for the best price. It's expensive to own and care for a horse, so you want to get it right when you buy.

First, determine your goals for both you and your horse. Before setting out to find your ideal horse, develop a prioritized list of requirements for your horse. The list may include breed, gender, height,

disposition, conformation, movement, previous use, or breeding potential. It helps to write this information down, to review it from time to time, to discuss it with your instructor or trainer, and to update it as your needs change. Before looking at a given horse, review that list carefully. It can be difficult to resist sales pitches of people who are looking to sell, sell, sell. So make sure that you know what you want and need before beginning your quest. Fill in the list of goals and priorities below, and consider taking it with you when you look at horses for sale.



Goals/Priorities for My Horse and Me:

1. *Must be safe trail riding (for example)*
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Second, survey the market fully. It always helps to know what is available, and at what prices. Knowledge is power, especially in the horse market. Don't limit yourself to "the horse next door." Purchasing the first horse you look at is not always the best option. When you find a horse that you like, you should make several visits to evaluate the horse before making the decision to buy.

Third, enlist the help of an experienced horse person (especially if you are not), because they can help you make an informed decision. Working with a trainer who knows your riding ability and your goals can be very beneficial.

Meanwhile, it's important to get answers to the following questions. Some may be answered from carefully reading the advertisement for the horse. Others are easily assessed when you watch the horse and see the setting where the horse is kept. But some should be asked outright on the phone or in person. It helps to see that the information in ads matches the information that someone offers about a horse. And remember: better safe than sorry, so do your homework. And good luck horse shopping!



Questions to answer—
either from the ad, from observation,
or from interviewing the seller:

1. How long have you owned the horse?

2. Why are you selling the horse?

3. How old is the horse?

4. What breed is the horse? (some are
rather obvious; others are not, so be sure
to ask) _____

Is it registered? _____

With what registry? _____

5. How big is the horse, and how much
does it weigh? _____

6. What vet services has the horse
required in the last 2 years?

7. For what diseases has the horse been
vaccinated? _____

What are the vaccination dates?

8. Does the horse crib? _____

9. Does the horse have any other vices—
kicking, biting, weaving, etc.?

10. Does the horse stand quietly to be
clipped and bathed? _____

11. When were the horse's teeth last
floated? _____

By whom? _____

Was it manually done or done with
power tools? _____

12. Has the horse had any injuries?

What kind, when did the incident(s)

occur, and what is the prognosis?

13. What health records are available for
the horse? _____

14. What kind of hay and grain is the
horse being fed? _____

How much? _____

How often? _____

15. Is the horse on any supplements or
medications? _____

Get a list of the products and amounts
used. _____

16. Are there any issues with the horse's
ground manners? _____

17. Is the horse cooperative for the
farrier? _____

18. How often does the horse get
trimmed? _____

Is the horse shod? _____

Is there any therapeutic reason the horse
is shod? _____

19. Does the horse tie and cross tie
quietly? _____

20. When turned out in a group, where is
the horse in the pecking order?

Does the horse get along with both mares
and geldings? _____



21. Does the horse trail ride? _____
 Alone? _____
 In a group? _____
22. Does the horse load and trailer well?

23. Has the horse been shown? _____
 In what sort of shows and what sorts of venues? _____
 How did the horse perform? _____

24. What jumping experience does the horse have? _____
25. What kind of bit is used on the horse?

26. Has the horse been in regular work?

 Who has been riding the horse?

- How often is the horse ridden?

27. What experience level rider does this horse require? _____
28. Does the horse cross water? _____
 Bridges? _____
29. Has the horse been ridden in an arena? _____
 Indoor? _____ Outdoor? _____
 How does the horse handle each?

30. Do you work with a trainer? _____
 Who? _____
 What discipline(s), and how often?

31. How does the horse deal with being tied to a trailer at a show? _____

Notes and other observations to keep in mind:

1. Start your evaluation of a prospective horse in the field/stall first. Is the horse cooperative to catch, groom, and tack up?

2. Watch the owner or somebody else ride the horse first.

3. How difficult is the horse for someone to handle when mounting?

4. What temperament does the horse have when the rider climbs aboard? Ears

pinned, teeth bared, other reactions, etc.?

5. Does the horse move freely with a rider? _____

Any stiffness? _____

Does the horse track up correctly?

6. Is each gait technically correct? (e.g., no 4-beat canter, no uneven walk)

Walk _____

Trot _____

Canter _____

Other breed-associated gaits (e.g., slow gait, running walk, paso largo, etc.)



7. Note color of horse's coat: white/gray horses will likely have melanomas. Some can be serious problems, so be aware of the potential. _____

8. Strongly consider getting a pre-purchase exam with your own veterinarian. Note that there is a lot of variation in the exam and cost, depending upon the purpose for your horse. Reproductive soundness exams are critical for purchase of breeding stock, radiographs may be needed for some performance horses, etc. Prices can range from \$200 to \$2000 up, depending upon the detail of the exam.

9. Depending upon the situation, you may want to request references on the seller.

Good luck finding just the right horse!

For further information, contact the author:

Elaine Long Bailey
University of Maryland Extension
Calvert County
P.O. Box 486
Prince Frederick, MD 20678
Phones: 301-855-1150 or 410-535-3662
FAX: 410-535-2438
elbailey@umd.edu

Reviewed by:

Amy O. Burk, Ph.D., University of Maryland, College Park, MD
Elizabeth Greene, Ph.D., University of Vermont, Burlington, VT

Horse Shopping? Better Ask Some Questions

by

Elaine Long Bailey
4-H Extension Educator
Calvert County

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, University of Maryland, College Park, and local governments. Cheng-i Wei, Director of Maryland Cooperative Extension, University of Maryland.

The University of Maryland is equal opportunity. The University's policies, programs, and activities are in conformance with pertinent Federal and State laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, color, religion, age, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, or disability. Inquiries regarding compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Title IX of the Educational Amendments; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990; or related legal requirements should be directed to the Director of Human Resources Management, Office of the Dean, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Symons Hall, College Park, MD 20742.