

PREPURCHASE GUIDELINES (OR... WHAT A VET WILL NOT LOOK FOR!!!)

by Andrea Haller WELLBORN QUARTER HORSES

Your vet will be able to determine the current soundness and appropriate-ness of your potential purchase, based upon your intended use for him/her. Conformational issues will (or should) also be addressed by the vet.

However, there are some issues that a vet will not normally address unless you ask or investigate on your own. Sending a vet does not alleviate you from the ultimate responsibility. We once sent a vet first, to inspect a TB mare that was 6 hours from us, each way. I wrote a list of the criteria I was searching for, particularly: should this mare be bred, is she conformationally correct? The vet report came back glowing. We bought her an expensive KK bit, as I knew from the video and by speaking at length with the seller that she had trouble accepting a bit and was hard to ride. We readied her stall, as we were going to return late at night, and could not put her outside in the dark in her new surroundings.

We drove our big trailer south, very excited about our newest mare. Boy were we disappointed, the moment she stepped out of her stall, to see that her right front foot toed out. Then, upon inspection from the rear, she was more than slightly cow hocked. I turned to the seller's "friend" who had also been there for the vet inspection and said "this is not the kind of mare we would consider breeding" and politely apologized and left. The vet got a scathing letter from me.

OH! And her back was so sore you could barely touch it, and while that was to be expected from her riding "posture", the vet did not mention this in the report.

IS HEIGHT IMPORTANT TO YOU?

My husband recently picked up a horse in SC and delivered him to his new home in upstate NY. He got off the trailer and was a full hand SHORTER than what the buyer had been told ! And she had done a full pre-purchase exam! You should ask the seller to show the horse in the sales video being measured, on concrete, if height is important to you. And have the vet do it again during the exam!

WHAT ABOUT IDENTITY?

Many vets do not match the papers to the horse during a pre-purchase exam ! Either they do not wish to insult the seller, or they simply do not realize that many horses "sold" are actually not the horse "on the papers". Now this can happen for a variety of reasons, some of which are fraudulent, and some are truly accidental... **but suffice it to say: HAVE THE VET CONFIRM THAT THE HORSE YOU ARE PURCHASING MATCHES IT'S PAPERS!** And if there is a question, the breed registry can confirm that the horse you are buying is (or is not) the horse on the papers!

We ourselves purchased our QH Stallion from a video. We sent a vet, first, to inspect him for us, and this vet flew on 2 airplanes with his portable X ray machine to do it. He arrived in Kentucky, and being a thoroughbred vet, was unfamiliar with the AQHA guidelines concerning facial markings. **He was convinced the stallion was an “imposter” and “got out of there as quickly as he could”.** The AQHA came to the rescue, and faxed him (and me) confirmation that the stallion was indeed the true “Buddy He’s Impressed”, and all I lost was one night of sleep over it!

ASK ABOUT VICES:

Ask the vet to check the teeth, not only for sharp edges and ramps, but for signs of cribbing. You can also check the environment from which the horse is being purchased: are there chewed boards and stalls? If so, there is a good chance that there is a cribber or wood chewer in the vicinity.

Mark Rashid tells a wonderful story in his book **“A Good Horse is Never a Bad Color”**. The seller successfully disguised the fact that the well-trained mare was a cribber, by having her in an arena (with stakes and wire) and a plump flake of alfalfa in front of her, at the first “showing”. Then, the seller moved the horse to her trailer, where her tack was waiting, and tied the horse to the trailer to saddle up. The ride went smoothly, and the client purchased the mare, only to get her home and find out that the mare would constantly crib. Since it was never asked of the seller “Does this horse crib?” no one suspected that there would be a problem.

So you can ask the seller: Does this horse have any vices? If the seller says “no” you should get more specific and ask: what about cribbing, trailer loading issues, etc?

Ask to see the horse load/unload into their trailer, and yours. Remember, always have your trailer hitched up for this purpose since a trailer can move suddenly if it is not hitched to a towing vehicle. If there is no trailer available, see what it does over a tarp, or a wooden platform or even a rubber mat on the floor of the barn. If there is trouble here, there is likely going to be trouble when asking the horse to load.

Ask to see the horse caught from the pasture. If the halter is left on, this could be a sign that the horse is hard to catch.

Ask to see the horse brought into a stall. See if he/she paces and/or screams for the other horses. This would be a clear signal that the horse is herd-bound and may be difficult (if not impossible) for a non-professional rider to take out on solo trail rides.

Ask if you can come back on “farrier day” and watch the horse have it’s farrier work done. Many horses will let the owner handle it’s feet but have to be tranquilized for the farrier.

If the horse has been “started” ask to see him/her saddled. Does it take three people and cross-ties to successfully saddle the horse? Clearly, if it does, this horse does not enjoy being ridden!

Watch the horse as he/she is bitted. Does it take a step-ladder to bit ? Again, not a good sign. Rashid’s next book **“Horses Never Lie”** is a wonderful collection of stories,

which will teach you how to “read” a horse in just a few moments. The horse will tell you exactly how he/she has been treated, and it will be the truth. The seller cannot always be expected to tell you “the truth”, because some sellers simply do not understand horses.

And of course, if the horse is started then the seller should be prepared to ride the horse for you, or have another party there (such as the horse’s “trainer”) to ride the horse first. **Do not get on a horse that the seller refuses to ride.**

Another chapter in Rashid’s book “**A Good Horse is Never a Bad Color**” reveals how Rashid was thrown off a horse (the owner said his back was hurt, and his “little grand-daughter” had just ridden and had gone home for the day.). Assuming the horse was “safe” Rashid mounted and had the ride of his life (almost his last ride).

Ask how often the horse is ridden: if the answer is “every day” and you only ride on the weekends, this may not be the horse for you! What you are trying out now is a horse in regular work. You may not have the same horse after a week or two “off”.

Look around at the “training” facility. Is there a pole in the center of the round pen? This is called a snubbing post. If used for training purposes, it is not a considerate way to teach a horse to stand, tie, saddle, or be mounted. Rashid’s other excellent book “**Consider the Horse**” looks at “training” from the horse’s point of view, and should be high on anyone’s reading list.

But we are getting off the subject, as I often do! Another book I strongly recommend to all horse buyers, especially first-time buyers is “**RIDING FOR THE REST OF US**” by Jessica Jahiel, Ph.D. In it is a wonderful chapter on the Pre-Purchase Vet exam, looking for a horse, how to look at a horse (imagine it covered in mud, she says). Do not be fooled by fancy or distracting colors as they often disguise conformational defects such as long backs, crooked legs, uneven gaits, and so forth.

In summary, you should buy the horse you think you will enjoy most. After you have completed your investigation that is. My husband says: how many times did you date before you decided to marry? The same thought and time should go into your horse purchase. They are easy to buy, but very VERY hard to sell once you have made a mistake.

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