

Hey Neighbor



## For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

### Many Considerations Before Buying First Horse

"I want a horse."

That's a familiar statement from children and adults as well.

With many, it has been a strong enough urge to pursue the objective. What does one need to consider before getting the first horse?

"Is it really a good idea to buy a horse?" questioned Mark Russell, Purdue University Extension horse specialist.

"The time it takes to care for a horse, facilities needed, knowledge required for horse care and finances to pay for horse-maintenance are all important considerations," Russell emphasized.

There are numerous alternatives to owning a horse, such as taking lessons, renting a horse at a camp or park and leasing a horse and boarding it elsewhere, the specialist noted.

Most first horses are purchased for recreation. "Money spent for the horse is for enjoyment, and the buyer should not expect to

net a financial return," Russell said. "The upkeep of a horse in money and time is ongoing and much different than buying a boat or a set of golf clubs."

If a person has made the personal commitment to be a responsible horse owner, disposition, soundness and training should be the main considerations. "It is crucial that a person has an enjoyable, safe and affordable first experience with horse ownership," Russell contended.

A person should take lessons and learn more about horses before making a purchase. "Find a mentor, somebody who has horses and knows about handling and care of horses. They can help find the right horse," Russell insisted.

Many people buy a horse and discover there is more work and money involved than they expected. "There is high transition in horse ownership. Some owners decide they need a new and

better horse and make a purchase, while others decide to get rid of their horses because ownership isn't what they expected," Russell reported.

Any type of quiet horse will work for a trail and pleasure horse as long as it is physically capable of performing. "That is more important than the type or color of horse," Russell stated.

Western horses, such as Quarter Horses and color breed variations thereof, tend to be lower-headed and heavier-muscled. Hunters, such as Thoroughbreds, have longer, flatter strides and move forward with more impulsion and higher head carriage. English and saddle type horses, such as Arabians and Saddlebreds,



The younger the rider, the older the horse needed. This 25-year-old gelding works well for five-year-old grandson, Wyatt Buchman.

are higher-headed and move with more hock and knee elevation.

Breed of horse is not important other than for personal preference or if specifically being purchased for show purposes. It is not necessary for a horse to be

registered, other than to know the lineage.

"All breeds have gentle horses as well as anxious dangerous horses," Russell clarified. "The training and handling affects manners more than does the breed."

Horses must be sound

enough to perform. "Lameness or poor eyesight could limit abilities or make it inhumane to use the horse," Russell clarified. "Horses with blemishes that do not interfere with movement

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would be less valuable for show, but it should not be a consideration for pleasure."

Conformation or shape of the horse will dictate the ability and soundness. "Straight legs and correct feet on strong pasterns suggest that a horse will not break down," Russell described. "A bright alert head, long neck, short back, deep heart girth, 45-degree shoulder slope and strong quarters are desired."

Size of horse is a consideration, but horses are capable of carrying lots of weight. "Small children are often better off on nice-disposition, large horses than on small ponies that are wild," Russell critiqued. "A rider's leg ought to fit down the side of the horse in order to give signals, but not so long that the knee does not touch the ribs."

"Most adults would do well to buy horses over 58 inches at the withers. As long as the horse is calm enough for the rider to work around and mount, size

should be secondary," Russell continued.

The younger the rider the older the horse needed. "For a novice rider, it would be rare to find a horse under five that is well trained and quiet enough," Russell explained. "Horses live to be 25 to 30 years of age, so the purchase of a 5- to 12-year-old or even considerably older is wise for novice riders."

Mares and geldings (castrated males) are the only choice for first time owners. "Mares often look more refined and prettier, but can have dramatic behavior change when in estrus. Geldings are usually more consistent," Russell verified.

Bad habits like kicking and biting and vices such as stall weaving and pawing must be avoided. "A good disposition should be at the top of the priority list," Russell continued. "Horses that have been exposed to trailering, clipping, shoeing and riding in a variety of environments are most desirable."

While the first question everyone always asks is: "How much does a horse cost?" that probably isn't the most important point. "Realize that regardless of how much is spent to buy the horse, keeping the horse will cost from \$60 to \$400 per month and that doesn't even include shoeing and medical expenses," Russell recognized.

A newspaper ad or a local sale barn are not recommended as the place to buy a first horse. "The person helping you learn more about horses is a good

source to help locate a horse," Russell advised. "It's not always the most expensive horse that is the best, and bargain horses typically aren't suitable either."

"Finding the right horse for a beginner is not an easy task. What works for one person doesn't always work for another," Russell evaluated. "Just because an adult can make a horse obey does not mean that a six-year-old child can enjoy the horse safely."

There are sometimes suitable horses available for under \$1,000, but typically

one might expect to pay in the \$2,000 to \$3,000 range for a safe first riding horse.

Mustangs from the Bureau of Land Management can usually be purchased quite inexpensively, but are seldom a good choice for first-time horse owners. "It may sound as if you are buying a piece of the American Wild West, but the natural instincts of these horses are very strong and require extra patience, discipline and training to be useful," Russell related.

Fencing requirements for horses were reviewed in the

February 27, 2007 edition of this column, and horse housing information is to be discussed in the March 27, 2007 issue.

Horse ownership can be a rewarding experience if the appropriate horse is selected. "Regardless of the horse purchased, consistent and firm discipline and proper management are vital to maintain the horse. Horse ownership is a big responsibility, and the more knowledge one can continually gain, the more rewarding the experience," Russell concluded.

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