10 THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN BUYING YOUR FIRST HORSE

YOU WILL LEARN

- How to choose a horse to suit you
- If your property is suitable for your horse
- What you should factor into your budget
BUYING A HORSE

The 10 essentials that you need to consider when buying your first horse.

Owning a horse is a priceless experience. If you are thinking of purchasing a horse for the first time, there are a number of things you need to consider.

Being an equine veterinarian for many years now, I see many of the avoidable mistakes people make when buying their first horse. In this article, I hope to save you from the hassle and heartache of making the wrong choice.

Do you want to ride, compete or simply keep the grass down? If you aspire to ride or compete, you need to think about your height, weight and skill level.

1 CONSIDER YOUR RIDING ABILITY AND LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE AROUND HORSES

Can you ride? Are you able to put on a halter? Do you know what a halter is? If you said no to any of these questions, you should learn to ride on someone else’s horse before buying your own. If you are unable to handle and ride horses, you can seriously hurt yourself. Most horses are larger and heavier than us; even the cutest pony can be dangerous if you’re inexperienced.

2 CONSIDER WHERE YOU’LL KEEP YOUR NEW HORSE

Horses are grazing animals and require space to graze freely. A paddock with ample shade, water and pasture will suffice. If the paddock you own or lease isn’t very large, you’ll need to consider the additional cost of hard feed when pasture is low. Depending on where you live, a reasonably sized paddock allows 1-2 acres per horse. However, this depends on the rainfall and type of soil you have. You also need to check if the fencing is appropriate. If the fencing is unsafe or unsturdy, your horse may escape or become injured.

3 CONSIDER WHAT YOU WANT TO DO WITH YOUR NEW HORSE

Do you want to ride, compete or simply keep the grass down? If you aspire to ride or compete, you need to think about your height, weight and skill level. If you’re a young beginner, it’s not advisable to buy an off the track Thoroughbred to learn on. Likewise, if you just want a companion animal, an older Miniature is a better choice than a young foal who needs more mental stimulation. Ensure you select the right horse for you.
**CONSIDER THE BREED OF YOUR NEW HORSE**

Different breeds have different temperaments. Arabians and Warmbloods are often more highly strung than Standardbreds or Quarter Horses, so the latter may be easier to handle if you lack experience. However, you also need to choose the right breed for the discipline you want to pursue. Arabians are ideal for endurance, whereas Thoroughbreds, Warmbloods and Australian Riding Ponies excel in Dressage. There are many breeds to choose from to suit you.

**CONSIDER HOW YOU’LL MANAGE VETERINARY COSTS**

Veterinary bills can become very expensive, so you need to factor these into your budget. Horse insurance is well worth looking into to reduce the financial burden of unexpected injury or illness. The average cost of a colic surgery, including after hours care, ranges from $7,000-12,000, whereas horse insurance may only cost a few hundred dollars per year. Be careful to read the terms of insurance carefully to ensure you’re covered for what you need.

**CONSIDER HOW YOU’LL MANAGE FEED COSTS**

Unless you have ample space (at least 5 acres per horse in most areas of Australia) and good quality pasture year round, you’ll need to consider the additional costs of hard feed. As long as you’re supplementing your horse’s forage-based diet with extruded feeds suitable for their age, energy requirements and exercise levels, the costs of feed won’t be too high. Just be sure to store your hard feed correctly, as spoiled, mouldy or dusty food can causes health problems, like colic.
CONSIDER PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE, LIKE WORMING

Every year, your horse will require an annual dental check-up and vaccinations, such as Tetanus, Strangles and Hendra Virus, depending on where you live. Worming and hoof care are also ongoing costs you need to factor into your budget. Worming should be done every 8-12 weeks, depending on the product you use. Farrier visits should be at least every 8 weeks, possibly every 6 weeks. The frequency depends on if your horse is shod and how quickly their hooves grow.

CONSIDER HOW YOU’LL TRANSPORT YOUR NEW HORSE

If you need to move your horse, particularly in the instance of an emergency, you’ll need access to a horse float or truck. There are many options to find new and secondhand floats for purchase. If you can’t afford to buy a float of your own, you should know someone whose float you can borrow or hire, including in an emergency. It’s also important that you know how to safely load and unload your horse, along with maneuvering the float, both on the road and in confined areas, such as car parks.

CONSIDER WHAT TACK YOU’LL NEED FOR YOUR NEW HORSE

This will depend on what type of riding you plan to do and, even more important, the conformation of your horse. Just because you find a nice looking saddle, doesn’t mean it’ll fit your horse correctly. When buying a saddle, you must take into account your horse’s unique conformation and it’s best to use a professional saddle fitting service. Aside from a saddle, you’ll also need to purchase a bridle and bit, saddle blanket, halter and lead rope, and grooming items.
Having spent most of her childhood in the saddle, it was a natural transition into equine veterinary medicine for Louise, founder of Exclusively Equine Veterinary Services and HorseBarn Education. A practicing equine vet, Louise is passionate about empowering horse owners, like you, with a deeper understanding of horse health, so you can give your horse a longer, healthier future.

If you have any questions regarding your horse, you’re welcome to contact me personally.

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CONSIDER HOW MUCH TIME YOU CAN COMMIT TO YOUR NEW HORSE

Buying a foal, young horse or unstarted horse is not a good idea if you’re time poor. On the other hand, if you buy an older horse and want to spend every moment with them, they can become irritated. Older horses may have health issues, such as arthritis or joint disease, which can cause low-grade chronic pain, so you need to factor in their veterinary care and unique needs. Choose a horse at an age that you can manage, including any necessary training.

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DR LOUISE COSGROVE

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