

THE PRE-PURCHASE EXAMINATION

YOU WILL LEARN

How to customise a
pre-purchase exam

What may be covered
in a pre-purchase exam

Other pre-purchase tests
you may need to consider

THE PRE-PURCHASE EXAMINATION

Are you considering buying a horse? A pre-purchase examination is essential.

Horses seldom come with a money back guarantee. That's why it's so important to investigate before you buy.

While many horse professionals can help you evaluate performance or breeding merits, only an accomplished equine veterinarian can help determine the prospect's overall health and condition. Yet, this is probably the most significant factor in deciding whether a horse is going to be a wise investment.

Whether you want a horse as a family pet, a pleasure mount, a breeding animal or a high performance athlete, you stand the best chance of getting one that will meet your needs by first investing in a pre-purchase examination. The expense will be small in comparison to the long-term costs of keeping and caring for a horse - especially one with health problems.

PRE-PURCHASE EXAMINATIONS SHOULD BE CUSTOM-TAILORED

Every pre-purchase examination is different. The procedures your veterinarian recommends will depend upon the intended use of the horse.



For example, a mare bought as a broodmare will require a thorough reproductive evaluation, along with a routine clean bill of health. A gelding being considered as a two-year-old racing prospect will need a comprehensive physical examination that includes lameness tests.

Deciding what should be included in the pre-purchase examination requires clear communication between you and your veterinarian. You should consider:

- > Choose a veterinarian who is familiar with the breed, sport or use for which the horse is being purchased.
- > Explain to your veterinarian your expectations and primary uses for the horse including short- and long-term goals (for example, showing then breeding).
- > Ask your veterinarian to outline the procedures that should be included in the examination and why.
- > Be present during the purchase examination. The seller or agent should also be present.
- > Discuss with your veterinarian the findings in private. It is wise to avoid a conflict of interest and ensure the veterinarian is not the veterinarian of the seller.
- > Don't be afraid to ask questions or request further information about your veterinarian's findings.

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NO PASS OR FAIL

The veterinarian's job is not to either pass or fail a horse. It is to provide you with information regarding any existing medical problems and explain the possibility for future problems, especially in light of the horse's intended use. Your practitioner can only advise you about the horse's physical condition, including conformation and explain how it might affect performance from a health standpoint.

Keep in mind the pre-purchase exam is like a still photo. It provides information about an individual horse on a given day at a particular moment. How accurate and complete that picture is will depend on how comprehensive the examination is and what the problems actually are. But remember, the still photo cannot provide the whole story. Many factors contribute to a horse's past, present and future health, and these factors may not be apparent at the precise moment of the examination.

Even with these warnings, the information contained in this portrait can be very valuable. Ultimately, avoiding the purchase of an unsuitable horse will save disappointment and many dollars.

Remember, there is no standard protocol of procedures for this exam, you and your veterinarian must decide what is needed. However, your equine practitioner may include the following:

- > Review the horse's medical history with the owner/agent, including vaccination and deworming schedules, feeding, and any supplements or drugs.
- > Monitor pulse, respiration and temperature.
- > Listen to the heart and lungs.
- > Check nostrils, ears and eyes.
- > Evaluate conformation.
- > Palpate body and limbs.
- > Draw blood sample for performance enhancing drugs.
- > Examine teeth and mouth.
- > Evaluate feet visually and with hoof testers.
- > Watch horse travel in a straight line, in small circles and under saddle, preferably at the walk, trot and canter, and preferably before the horse has been warmed up.
- > Perform flexion tests on joints.
- > Observe horse's behaviour.

FURTHER TESTS

The preliminary examination should alert the practitioner to problems or potential problems. If the veterinarian suspects something that may interfere with the horse's intended use, further tests may be recommended. These tests, such as x-rays, nerve blocks, urine and blood analysis, endoscopic and ultrasonic examinations, and others, are optimal and may be chosen by the buyer or recommended by the veterinarian based on clinical findings of the examination. They are generally used to confirm a diagnosis and provide a clearer picture of the seriousness of the problem.

RADIOGRAPHS (X-RAYS)

Radiographs are not a substitute for a thorough, systematic examination by your veterinarian. X-rays can deceive the viewer by providing a false sense of security or indicating problems that never surface. Rely on your veterinarian's judgement regarding the need for radiographs, especially if no clinically apparent problems exist.

REPRODUCTIVE EXAMS

Stallions and mares being purchased for breeding will require special tests to determine their reproductive status. For example, a stallion should be teased and collected to determine his libido and fertility. The semen will be evaluated for sperm count, motility and viability.

A prospective broodmare will undergo rectal palpation and ultrasound examination so the veterinarian can examine the mare's reproductive tract for signs of abnormal activity or structural problems. The veterinarian may also recommend a uterine biopsy and culture. This helps determine the health of the mare's uterus, and the probability of her conceiving and carrying a healthy foal to term.



UNDERSTANDING THE RESULTS

You need to thoroughly understand your veterinarian's findings in order to make an informed decision about your prospective purchase. If you don't understand the grading system for lameness, for example, then you need to ask questions until it becomes clear. Also, when you discuss the results with veterinarian, keep the following points in mind:

- > No horse is perfect in every respect.
- > Some medical conditions or conformational faults are manageable or may never seriously affect the horse's performance.
- > Learn what management options, such as specialised shoeing, exercise or nutrition, are available, and decide whether or not they are practical for your needs and budget.
- > If in doubt about the findings, get a second opinion.
- > Finally, make your own determination as to whether a horse is a good investment based on all the available data.

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Remember, the decision to buy the horse is yours alone to make. Even so, your equine practitioner can assist in the process by providing you with objective, health-related information. It might be useful to create a balance sheet. Write the horse's name at the top of the sheet of paper and the price at the bottom.

On the right side, list everything you like about the horse - colour, size, breeding, performance, conformation, health, etc. On the left side, list all the negatives. You can also assign point values - positive and negative - to each attribute.

Then, add up all the positives and negatives, and you will probably have your answer.

Even if you decide not to buy, consider the examination money well spent. The investment can save you headaches, heartaches and dollars, and provide a perfect opportunity to find the right horse - one that is healthy, and can meet your needs and expectations.

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DR LOUISE COSGROVE

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. 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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