

Finally, do not buy a horse or pony before the animal has been thoroughly examined by a veterinarian with experience in performing prepurchase examinations. Such an exam can reveal health problems that could negatively affect the horse's performance and quality of life. The exam consists of a thorough physical examination and evaluation of the horse's eyes, ears, heart, lungs, legs and hooves, digestive system, and skin. In addition, the horse is

evaluated in motion for any evidence of lameness. Other procedures that may be performed based upon the horse's intended use, a purchaser's request, or veterinary recommendation, include radiographs (x-rays), blood tests, drug tests, ultrasound examination, reproductive evaluation, or endoscopic examination.

Remember that after you have purchased your horse, your veterinarian is your best source of information about vaccinations, parasite control, dental care, and other routine health matters, as well as emergency medical care.



When you acquire a horse

You accept responsibility for the health and welfare of another living thing. You are also responsible for your horse's impact on your family, friends, and community. A horse will be part of your life for many years. Invest the time and effort necessary to make your years together happy ones. When you choose a horse, you are promising to care for it for its entire life. Choose wisely, keep your promise, and enjoy one of life's most rewarding experiences!

*For more information, visit,
American Veterinary Medical Association
www.avma.org*

*American Association of Equine Practitioners
www.aaep.org*

*www.myhorsematters.com
www.horsecouncil.org*

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Selecting a Horse



*Brought to you by your veterinarian and the
American Veterinary Medical Association*

Horses and ponies are important parts of American culture. Your horse-owning experience will be most enjoyable if you carefully consider if horse ownership suits your family, home, and lifestyle. Make an informed decision. Take time, involve your family, and give careful consideration to the following questions.

What's special about horses and ponies?

Horses and ponies can be wonderful, loving long-time companions. They have average lifespans of 25-30 years — some even live to be forty years old or older! They may also be willing riding partners for exercise, recreation, and competition.

What choices do you have in horses and ponies?

There are more than 200 breeds of horses and ponies in the world. Each breed has unique qualities and not all breeds are suitable for all riders and activities. There are also many breed combinations that produce an almost endless variety of mixed breed horses.



Because riding requires teamwork between the horse and rider, it is important that you select a horse that suits your temperament and riding style. A nervous, fearful rider should own a calm horse that will not respond in fear. Beginning riders should look for experienced, well-trained horses. An experienced rider may prefer a sensitive horse that responds to the slightest commands, or a young, inexperienced horse that can be trained.

Before deciding to buy a horse of your own, you should have some riding experience or have taken riding lessons. Once you understand your riding abilities and limitations, you will be in a much better position to choose a horse with the temperament and training that will suit you.

Before buying, also consider what type of riding you intend to do — English or Western. Both styles of riding are suitable for pleasure riding; however, advanced riders may pursue an English riding style for activities such as dressage, jumping, hunting, and eventing. A Western riding style is chosen for barrel racing, cutting, reining, and rodeo events. Many horses are trained in both Western and English riding styles.

Whatever style of riding you prefer, it is best if your first horse is already “schooled” or trained for that purpose unless you are an experienced rider and intend to train the horse for the purpose. An older horse that already has the skills you need is a better — and safer — purchase for a first-time owner or young rider rather than an animal that requires a lot of training.

What are the special needs of horses and ponies?

Owning a horse is a big responsibility. It requires a commitment of both time and money. A new owner should be prepared to spend time grooming, exercising, and caring for the animal — or assume the responsibility to see that the basic care will be performed daily. Dental, veterinary, and hoof care are also vital to maintaining a healthy horse or pony.

Who will care for your horse or pony?

Boarding stables offer levels of care ranging from complete board (where the stable provides feed, turnout, and basic care) to self-care (where the owner performs all duties, including cleaning the stall). Owners may choose to have their horses in stalls, turned out on pasture, or a combination of both.

Before buying a horse for their children, parents should assess their child's level of commitment. Horses are a lot of fun, but they are also a lot of work. One way to assess a child's commitment and ability to care for a horse is to arrange for riding lessons at a local stable, a partial lease or shared lease, or time to help care for another person's horse. Once a child realizes the amount of time and effort required to properly care for a horse, the decision to buy a horse now or wait until later may become easier.

Does a horse or pony fit your lifestyle?

Decide if your lifestyle affords you the time to devote to a horse or pony. Determine where you will house the animal and how much it will cost. While a boarding stable may provide for your horse or pony's basic needs, these animals deserve more attention from you than just weekend riding. Consider the time involved in getting to and from a stable.



If you live on property that can support a horse — legally and physically — be sure you have adequate stabling to protect the horse from inclement weather. Think about the time commitment necessary to meet the daily feeding, grooming, and other maintenance involved in owning a horse, as well as finding someone to care for your horse or pony if you are on vacation or away from home for more than a day.



If you live in a cold climate, consider boarding the animal at a stable with an indoor arena if you plan to ride during the colder months. Riding in freezing weather can be unpleasant and dangerous for both horse and rider.

Can you afford a horse or pony?

The costs of owning a horse can add up quickly and include expenses such as shelter (if boarded), feed, veterinary medical care, hoof care, and riding equipment. Other potential expenses include equipment costs (saddle, saddle blankets, bridle, halter, and other accessories), training fees, riding apparel (including a helmet), show registration fees, and transportation. In many instances, the purchase price is less than the annual boarding fee and maintenance costs.

Where can you get a horse or pony?

Possible sources for horses and ponies include: the stable where you ride or plan to keep the horse; riding instructors or trainers; breeders; fellow horse enthusiasts; classified ads; tack shop bulletin boards; and the Internet. Horse rescues often have suitable horses for adoption. Each resource has advantages and risks. Whatever the source, novice horse buyers should seek help from a trusted, experienced horse person.

What should you look for in a healthy horse or pony?

An animal's temperament should be the most important characteristic to you. Observe its general demeanor and how it reacts to people and its environment. Be sure you observe the animal in a well-lit place, preferably outdoors in the sunlight. Watch the owner groom and saddle the horse and never buy a horse with bad stable manners.

Ask the owner to ride the animal and take the horse through its gaits. If you are buying a hunter, a jumper, or other specially trained horse, ask the owner to demonstrate its skills. When it is your turn to ride, try out any special skills that the horse is trained to perform. This is a major investment and you should be allowed to test the animal thoroughly. Do not rush to a decision; arrange for a second visit to once again observe the horse's behavior. You may make important observations on a second visit that you missed the first time. Many times a brief “trial or lease period” (7-10 days) can be arranged for a prospective buyer to give you time to determine if you and the horse are truly compatible.