



## Horse Buying Checklist

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Equine Legal Solutions developed this checklist as a tool to help you evaluate horses you are considering purchasing, including their temperament, soundness and training. We believe that our clients can avoid many of the problems inherent in buying horses by obtaining more information before making the decision to buy. In creating the checklist, we drew upon our clients' experiences as well as our own experiences in buying and selling horses. We add and edit questions from time to time as we gain new insights, so you may wish to download the most current version of this questionnaire from our website at [www.equinelegalsolutions.com](http://www.equinelegalsolutions.com). You may also wish to add questions based upon your own personal preferences and experiences. If you have suggestions for new additions to the checklist, please email them to ELS at [checklist@equinelegalsolutions.com](mailto:checklist@equinelegalsolutions.com).

Part I of this checklist is intended to help you decide if it is worth your time to go out and look at a horse advertised for sale. Key pieces of information in this section could save you from driving around the countryside to look at horses that are totally unsuitable for you. We highly recommend going out to see a horse in person before buying and Part II is intended to provide focus for your horse-buying trips. The notes at the end provide some insight into why we recommend asking some of the individual questions. For more tips on buying a horse, see "Buying a Horse" at [www.equinelegalsolutions.com](http://www.equinelegalsolutions.com).

## Part I - Before You Go

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We find it helpful to fill out this section with the information available in the ad, then call the seller and ask the remaining questions over the phone. Not only is it easier for the seller to answer questions by phone, it also provides an opportunity for you to get a sense of what the seller is like. Are they forthcoming or tentative in answering your questions? Do they seem kind and friendly or gruff and in a hurry? Email is useful to get directions and ask follow-up questions.

### 1. Vital Statistics

- A. Where did you see the horse advertised for sale?<sup>1</sup> \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Asking price: \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Horse's (registered) name: \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Gender:  Mare  Gelding  Stallion
- i. If gelding, when was horse gelded?<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Height: \_\_\_\_\_
- G. Breed: \_\_\_\_\_
- i. Registered?  Yes  No<sup>3</sup>
- ii. Does the seller have the original registration papers?  Yes  No<sup>4</sup>
- iii. Is seller listed as the current owner on registration papers?  Yes  No<sup>5</sup>
- iv. Registration number: \_\_\_\_\_
- H. Color/markings: \_\_\_\_\_
- I. Owner's name, address, phone number(s) and email<sup>6</sup>: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Soundness and Health

- A. Is the horse currently sound?  Yes  No<sup>7</sup>  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Has he or she ever been lame?  Yes<sup>8</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Does the horse wear shoes?  Yes  No
- i. If yes, what kind of shoes and does he have any special shoeing needs, such as pads or egg bar shoes?<sup>9</sup>  
\_\_\_\_\_
- D. Does the horse have any current health issues?  Yes<sup>10</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- E. What is the horse's current diet?<sup>11</sup> \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Has the horse ever had colic?  Yes<sup>12</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- i. If yes, did he or she require surgery?  Yes<sup>13</sup>  No
- G. Is the horse up to date on his shots, including Strangles and West Nile?  Yes  No<sup>14</sup>  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- H. When was the horse last wormed?<sup>15</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Disposition and Vices

- A. Ask the seller to describe the horse's disposition:<sup>16</sup> \_\_\_\_\_
- B. On a scale of 1-5, what is his typical energy level?<sup>17</sup> (1 = bone lazy, 5 = highly spirited)  
 1  2  3  4  5
- C. Does he or she:
- i. Kick or strike?  Yes<sup>18</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. Bite or nip?  Yes<sup>19</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

- ii. Rear?  Yes<sup>20</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- iv. Buck?  Yes<sup>21</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- v. Bolt?  Yes<sup>22</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- vi. Kick his or her stall?  Yes<sup>23</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- vii. Pull back when tied?  Yes<sup>24</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- viii. Crib or windsuck?  Yes<sup>25</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- ix. Stall walk or weave?  Yes<sup>26</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- x. Have issues with leaving his buddies?  Yes<sup>27</sup>  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Is the horse currently in a<sup>28</sup>:  Box stall  Stall/paddock combination  Paddock  Pasture  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Is the horse suitable for a child to handle?<sup>29</sup>  Yes  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Training and Performance Record

- A. Is this horse broke to ride?  Yes  No<sup>30</sup>
- B. What skills does the horse currently have? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- C. Has the horse had any professional training?  Yes  No  
If so:
  - i. By whom<sup>31</sup>? \_\_\_\_\_
  - ii. In what event(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Does the horse have a competition or show record?  Yes  No  
If yes, describe (dates/points/# of horses in event)<sup>32</sup>: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- E. Is the horse now in shape for competition or show?  Yes  No  
If no, ask the seller what needs to be done to get the horse in shape: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- F. Is the horse suitable for a child to ride?<sup>33</sup>  Yes  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 5. Basic Stable Skills<sup>34</sup>

- A. Does the horse stand quietly without a twitch for:
  - i. Grooming and saddling?  Yes  No
  - ii. The vet?  Yes  No
  - iii. The farrier?  Yes  No
  - iv. Clipping?  Yes  No
  - v. Bathing?  Yes  No
  - vi. Paste worming?  Yes  No
  - vii. Blanketing?  Yes  No
- B. Does the horse load readily into a trailer and ride quietly once in the trailer?  Yes  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Does the horse get along well with other horses?  Yes  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Breeding Soundness<sup>35</sup>

### A. Mares

- i. Has she ever been bred?  Yes  No<sup>36</sup>
- ii. If yes, how many times, when and to which stallion(s)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- iii. Were the breedings via AI or live cover? \_\_\_\_\_
- iv. How many breedings resulted in pregnancy? \_\_\_\_\_
- v. How many pregnancies resulted in live foals? \_\_\_\_\_
- vi. How many pregnancies were aborted or otherwise not carried to term? \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- vii. How many foals were stillborn? \_\_\_\_\_
- viii. Did the mare have any difficulty in breeding or conceiving? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ix. Did the mare have any difficulty in birthing or nursing her foal? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- x. What are the registered names of the foals?<sup>37</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- xi. Does the owner have any photos of the mare's foals?  Yes  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- xii. Has the mare had any genetic testing?<sup>38</sup> (E.g., for lethal white, HYPP)  Yes  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

### B. Stallions

- i. Has he ever been bred?  Yes  No
- ii. If yes, how many times and to which mares? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- iii. Were the breedings via AI or live cover? \_\_\_\_\_
- iv. Is he phantom-trained? \_\_\_\_\_
- v. Does the stallion have any breeding difficulties or behavioral issues associated with breeding?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- vi. How many breedings resulted in pregnancy? \_\_\_\_\_
- vii. How many pregnancies resulted in live foals? \_\_\_\_\_
- viii. What are the registered names of the foals?<sup>39</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ix. Does the owner have any photos of the stallion's foals?  Yes  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_
- x. Has the stallion had any genetic testing? (E.g., for lethal white, HYPP)  Yes  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. Photos and Video<sup>40</sup>

- A. When and where were the photos and video taken?<sup>41</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- B. For videos, watch the video several times all the way to the end and pay close attention to background noise, especially anything being said in the background.<sup>42</sup>  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 8. Terms of Sale

- A. Why is the horse for sale?<sup>43</sup> Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- B. How long has the horse been for sale?<sup>44</sup> Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- C. Has any other potential buyer performed a prepurchase vet exam or taken the horse out on trial?<sup>45</sup>  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Part II - The In-person Evaluation

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Even if you have years of experience, we highly recommend that you bring another experienced horseperson with you to look at potential purchases. That person can take photos and/or video and help you focus on your buying criteria. They can also serve as an extra pair of eyes and ears to spot details you might miss. If you work with a trainer, make sure that your trainer goes out with you to look at the horse before you buy. When you make the appointment with the seller, ask to see the horse brought out of the stall or pasture, groomed, saddled and bridled (rather than the seller having the horse ready to ride when you arrive).

### 1. Visual Inspection

- A. Your initial impressions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- B. Overall healthy appearance?  Yes  No  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- C. Weight: fleshy, thin or just right? \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Muscle tone: fit or flabby? \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Coat condition: slick and shiny or shaggy and unkempt? \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Front legs: straight and free of blemishes? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- G. Rear legs: straight and free of blemishes? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- H. Eyes: large, bright and clear, free of discharge? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I. Breathing: normal and healthy breath sounds, not exerted? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- J. Any visible injuries or scars? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- K. Any brands or tattoos? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- L. Condition of horse's feet – shod or barefoot? Do the hoof and pastern angles appear uniform on both front feet and both hind feet? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Temperament

- A. Does the horse look interested and friendly when you approach? Note the horse's ear position. Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- B. Does the horse stand quietly while being groomed, saddled and bridled? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- C. Pick up the horse's feet – is he compliant or resistant? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- D. While moving around the horse on the ground, ask him to move his hindquarters over, first one direction, and then the other. Is he compliant or resistant? Does he raise his leg or swish his tail? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Soundness and Way of Going

A. Ask to see the horse on a lunge line or in a round pen at the walk, trot and canter in both directions, preferably on a hard surface. Note his way of going as well as his temperament and willingness. Look for any gait irregularities, head bobbing or other indications that the horse may not be completely sound. Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

B. Ask to see the horse trotted toward and away from you on the leadline, preferably on a hard surface. Note any interference or gait irregularities. Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Performance

A. Note the equipment being used – type of bit, type of saddle, crop, spurs, tie downs, any other special equipment. Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

B. Does the horse stand quietly while the girth/cinch is tightened? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

C. Does the horse stand quietly while being mounted? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

D. What is the horse's general demeanor under saddle? Watch for any signs of inattention, nervousness or spookiness. Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

E. How responsive is the horse to his rider's cues – is he soft and willing or resistant? Pay special attention to gait transitions and backing up. Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

F. Ask the seller to have the horse do everything he has been advertised to do, even if you do not plan to make use of all of the horse's talents. Make sure you see all gaits in both directions, plus halts from all gaits and backing up. Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

G. If you still like the horse<sup>46</sup>, ride him yourself and test everything that he has been advertised to do. Note how responsive he is to you and whether you feel comfortable on him. Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

H. If possible, ask to ride the horse outside of the arena. This will take the horse outside of his comfort zone and give you an idea about his general temperament. Does he stay quiet and relaxed or does he get nervous? Does the seller look nervous when you ride the horse outside of the arena? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Stable Area

A. What kind of housing is the horse in – stall, pasture, paddock? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

B. Check out the stall and/or fencing – do you see any signs of cribbing or stall kicking? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- C. If the trash is easily accessible, walk by and look for any tubes of calming paste, syringes, or other items of interest.<sup>47</sup> Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- D. What do the other animals on the property look like? Are they in good condition? Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Friends' and Trainers' Notes:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## Veterinary Evaluation

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If the horse still meets your criteria, ELS highly recommends that you obtain a vet check from a licensed veterinarian who does NOT treat the seller's animals. A basic vet check without X-rays may cost \$100-300, but keep in mind that even a "free" horse could cost you thousands in vet bills, so the cost of a vet check is a good investment! To help your vet evaluate the horse thoroughly, make sure that you tell them what you are looking for in a horse and what you will be doing with this horse. At a minimum, your vet check should include tests for general health, vision, dental health, hoof health and soundness. For performance horses, you may want to consider having the vet take and evaluate X-rays. ELS also recommends having the vet draw a vial of blood to keep on file for testing in the event that the horse's health, soundness or temperament changes dramatically after purchase.

**Notes**

- 1 It's helpful to print out a copy of the ad and attach it to this checklist, especially if you are looking at a lot of horses.
- 2 Horses gelded after sexual maturity (e.g., after their yearling year) can continue to exhibit stallion-like behavioral characteristics after gelding.
- 3 If the horse is not registered, you cannot be certain of his lineage, and the price should reflect this fact.
- 4 If the seller does not have the original registration papers, ask for details, as there may be some question about the seller's ownership of the horse. For example, the seller may not have paid the previous owner of the horse in full.
- 5 Ask for details, and whether the seller has a signed transfer form from the owner listed on the registration papers. If not, be aware that there could be a problem registering this horse in your name.
- 6 It's often worth doing a quick Internet search on the owner's name so that you can gather a little information about the person you'll be dealing with.
- 7 Ask for details and discuss the matter with your veterinarian and farrier before going to view the horse.
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- 9 Any special shoeing needs may be indicative of a soundness issue, so discuss the matter with your farrier.
- 10 Ask for details and discuss the health issues with your veterinarian before going to view the horse.
- 11 Ask about any dietary needs that seem unusual and discuss with your veterinarian – they could be indicative of a health problem.
- 12 Ask the seller when and how often the horse has colicked and why the seller thinks that the horse colicked. Discuss the matter with your veterinarian before going to view the horse.
- 13 Many insurance companies will not provide major medical coverage for a horse that has had colic surgery.
- 14 Consult your veterinarian about the shots that this horse will require. If the horse is not current on his shots, this could be an indicator that he has received substandard care in other areas, too.
- 15 Most veterinarians now recommend administering paste wormer as often as every six weeks. If the horse has not been wormed recently, discuss the matter with your veterinarian, as parasite infestation can cause serious health problems, even death.
- 16 Here, you will want to listen for words that are descriptive of the qualities you want (and the qualities you don't want!).
- 17 Unless you are looking for a racehorse, endurance horse or gymkhana horse, it's usually much easier to speed a horse up than it is to slow him down.
- 18 Beware – this horse may be dangerous.
- 19 Beware – this horse may be dangerous.
- 20 Rearing is one of the most dangerous habits a horse can have. Not only can it cause the rider to fall off, it can also cause the horse to flip over backwards, injuring the rider and the horse.
- 21 Ask the seller for details – are these "feel good" crow hops or honest-to-goodness rodeo bucks? If the horse has learned he can unseat his rider by bucking, he may have a very dangerous habit. Be sure to ask when and how often he bucks.
- 22 Ask for details – when and why does the horse bolt? If he bolts regularly, this horse has a dangerous habit.
- 23 Stall kicking is not only destructive, it can also injure the horse.
- 24 In addition to being inconvenient, horses that pull back when tied may injure themselves, causing neck, back and/or muscle problems. If you get to the repurchase exam with a horse that pulls back when tied, ask your veterinarian to look for signs of injury.

- 25 Not only are cribbing and windsucking annoying and destructive, they can result in weight loss and make it hard to keep a horse in good flesh. Cribbing and windsucking can also be contagious – your other horses may learn to crib or windsuck by watching another horse.
- 26 Horses that stall walk, fence walk or weave can be very difficult to keep in good flesh.
- 27 Herd sourness is an issue that requires an experienced rider, or a less experienced rider working with a trainer.
- 28 Compare the horse's current living situation to what you will be offering him. If he is out on pasture, consider whether he will be content in a stall, and vice versa.
- 29 It's useful to ask this question even if you don't intend to have a child handle the horse, because it may reveal behavioral issues that the seller might not otherwise mention.
- 30 If the horse is not broke to ride, consider whether you will need to hire a professional trainer to break the horse, and include this cost in your evaluation of the horse's suitability for you.
- 31 Research the trainer – what disciplines does he or she specialize in? Does he or she have a reputation for good quality, humane training?
- 32 Many competition results are now available on the Internet. In addition, most breed association Internet sites provide the opportunity to search for a registered horse's performance record.
- 33 Similar to the earlier question about the horse being suitable for a child to handle, this question can reveal issues that the seller might not otherwise mention.
- 34 Not performing any of these skills is an indicator that the horse will need further training. Depending upon your experience, you may need a professional trainer to help you overcome these issues.
- 35 Even if you are not considering breeding this horse, it is useful to ask these questions, as they can affect this horse's market value. For example, a sterile mare would be worth far less than a fertile one.
- 36 A maiden mare may be harder to get in foal than a mare that has already had a foal. This is especially true for older mares.
- 37 On most breed association web sites, you can look up the foals' performance records.
- 38 Consult with your veterinarian regarding the results of genetic testing.
- 39 On most breed association web sites, you can look up the foals' performance records.
- 40 Whenever possible, view photos and video BEFORE going to view a horse, as you will save yourself a lot of time.
- 41 If they were not taken very recently, ask the seller for more recent photos and video. If the seller can't provide more recent photos and video, keep in mind that the horse may no longer be in the same condition as in the photos or video, so ask the seller detailed questions about the horse's current condition.
- 42 More than one seller has forgotten to check the soundtrack before mailing the video, which can result in unfortunate comments like, "I can't believe he didn't refuse any jumps this time!" or "I can't wait to get this horse sold!" They may also forget to erase "blooper" footage at the end of the tape.
- 43 Listen for reasons that might affect the horse's suitability for you. For example, if you are looking for a quiet trail mount, you might want to think twice about a horse described as "too much horse" for someone else. The answer to this question can also inform you about how negotiable the seller is likely to be on price.
- 44 If the horse has been for sale for a long time, he may be overpriced and/or the seller may be more negotiable on price.
- 45 Ask for details on whether the horse passed the prepurchase exam (and if he didn't, why he didn't). Ask for details on why the trial period didn't work out. Discuss these details with your trainer and/or veterinarian.
- 46 Don't be afraid to tell the seller that the horse isn't right for you as soon as you know. The seller will be grateful that you didn't waste their time. Trust your initial impressions and don't let the seller try to talk you out of your decision. Keep in mind that you need not provide details about why you aren't interested in the horse – a simple, tactful, "I don't think he's the right horse for us. Thank you for showing him to us." is sufficient.
- 47 This is a good job for the person who accompanies you to look at the horse.