

Considering Buying a Horse? by Bonnie Martin

Before you get a horse, there are some very important things you need to consider. Too many people want a horse, go out and buy the first one they see that looks pretty, and end up being unhappy for a variety of reasons. Maybe that horse that looked so pretty at first doesn't measure up after all. There is more that needs to be considered about a horse than color, size, breed, or sex. Or, it might be that the horse isn't trained suitably for your level of expertise and both you and the horse will be unhappy with the ownership.

Buying a horse is a big commitment in time, finances, and responsibility. Take time to research before you make a decision about a particular animal. Educate yourself with more than just the fiction stories of *The Black Stallion*, *Black Beauty*, or *Spirit*.

Decide what you are interested in doing with a horse, and research the desirable characteristics of different breeds to decide what kind you want. Be warned though, that not all horses in ANY breed are going to all be alike and suitable for everyone's purposes and ability level.. You have to consider each horse as an individual.

There is a wealth of information available about horses to be found in books, magazines, on RFD-TV, through Horse Councils, clubs, tack and feed stores, and on the internet. Most breed associations can refer you to some local farms where you can see the real thing and maybe even have a test ride. The tough part of a farm visit will be resisting the temptation to buy the pretty horse you fall in love with there, but hold out until your research is finished and you have made up your own mind about what you are looking for. You will probably have changed your mind about that first horse you saw being the "perfect" horse for you by the time you are ready to buy anyway. It's very seldom that the perfect horse is THAT easy to find!

Believe it or not, the actual cost of the horse is the least amount of money you are going to spend in the course of owning one, so make sure you are realistic in making a distinction in what you really need in a horse as opposed to what you might simply want (unless money is not a problem in your considerations). Read the article on price tags to help make some decisions of what compromises you may need to make.

Even though you might think the original cost of a horse is high, consider how much enjoyment you will get out of owning and riding your own horse when you have picked wisely and have a suitable horse. Consider how long you plan to keep him or her. If it's only for a year, then a \$10,000 animal (just an example after you pick yourself up off the floor--there are plenty of nice ones for a lot less) is probably ridiculous to pay. However, if you are planning to keep the horse for 10-15 years, then \$10,000 amortized over that time is only \$1,000 to \$667 per year to have the continuous enjoyment you will get from having the right animal for you. If you consider what you are spending on entertainment for a year, you might decide that a horse is a healthier decision than time spent watching movies, trips to Disney, etc.

Before you buy a horse, you need to look at your monthly commitments and decide if you need/want to cut back on something else in order to have one. There is nothing worse than getting an animal and then not being able or willing to take care of it properly, and the care costs will continue to add up. If you have your own safely fenced property with good grass (usually around 2 acres per animal, depending on where you live) that helps, but there will still need to be some feed and hay purchased, especially in the winter. Without your own facilities, and depending on the area where you live, full board can run from \$200-1,000 a month so you need to research this too. Don't just call barns. Go look at them. If they are dirty, acrid smelling, have tons of flies---keep looking. Actually horses are better off being kept outside (barns are more for people and our convenience), but they need safe pastures with safe, good fencing, access to water, hay in the winter, and some supervision. Meet the people you will be dealing and associating with in a boarding situation. Do they seem friendly and share some of your horse activity interests? Are they safety conscious and helpful without being bossy and overbearing? Having riding buddies who will share some of the same goals makes horse ownership more fun.

Don't forget the things you will need for your horse--supplies to groom with, fly sprays, first aid kit, well-fitting saddle, bridle, halter, lead, and if you plan to go anywhere, a safe trailer and towing vehicle. There are veterinary expenses even when your horse is healthy, not to mention the possible emergency bills. Horses need routine worming, vaccinations, Coggins test, teeth floating, feet trimming and possibly shoeing.

Consider these things carefully and make a decision to do them before taking on the responsibility of a horse who depends upon you for its very life. It's criminal to buy a horse, have the new wear off, and then leave the animal neglected, unwanted, or even abandoned. This happens often enough that there are laws in place to help the poor animals. Horse ownership involves more time on the ground tending to them than on their backs with the wind in your face. If barn work feels like a drudge chore that you don't want to do, then skip ownership and go rent one for the day. Both you and the horse will be happier in the long run.

If you are not sure you want or can afford the responsibility that horse ownership involves, then get your horse fix by taking riding lessons, going to a rental stable, riding with friends who have horses, or working for someone who does have horses (there are plenty of owners who would love to share their horses in exchange for some help). You don't have to own one to enjoy it.

Think very seriously about why you want a horse. If it is a life-long dream and you really feel like you need one to make your life complete, and if you are prepared for the reality of ownership, then research and buy the best you can afford. If you are considering buying one because the kids have expressed a moderate interest in horses, then don't. Take them for riding lesson (highly recommended even if you are going to buy!). See if the interest wanes or grows stronger before you make a commitment. Run some scenarios in your mind before you buy. Are you still going to want this horse and be willing to take care of it when it is raining cats and dogs and you have to slog your way to the barn? What about the animal's care when you want to go on vacation? How about if there is a

blizzard and you have to carry water because the pipes are frozen? Horses cannot go without feed and water no matter the temperatures and weather conditions. Horse ownership is a lot of work and responsibility, but folks who are hooked on horse believe it is all worthwhile.

If you are still in the mood for your own horse after all this, GO FOR IT and happy ownership to you!