

Why Such Differences in Horse Prices? by Bonnie Martin

This article isn't designed to give you a definite answer as to what a horse should cost. This is a big variable since there are so many things that go into the price of a horse. For an analogy, think of it like the options on a vehicle. You can get a basic model for a lot less than one with all the bells and whistles.

The following are some of the major things that made a difference in the price of horses. Depending on your planned use of the horse, these different things might be of major importance or might be much less important. The more criteria you have on your list of a dream horse, the more you are probably going to be paying. You have to decide what is important to you.

Use--don't try to get a draft horse if you want to be competitive in endurance, for example. Make sure the animal matches your intended use.

Smoothness--if you are going to be hours in the saddle you want to be comfortable.

Manners--no one likes or is safe with a horse that is knocking them down, biting, and stepping on them.

Spirit or Enthusiasm--want a live wire or a calm, sedate horse? You decide. Be realistic about your abilities.

Show Record--may be important if you want to be competitive.

Conformation--some flaws are acceptable, some aren't.

Color--not really important, but some people have an image in mind and are willing to pay for it. You will pay more for popular colors!

Training--there is basic good training and also some specialize training available. There is also a lot of poor training out there. Beware. There's nothing worse than getting a horse you can't do what you want to with.

Bloodlines--if you want to breed, this is probably pretty important.

Age--don't overlook the older horses. They can be useful well into their late 20's and even thirties and with age usually comes lots of training and life experience.

Health--major health conditions are very important, minor ones can be handled. Use a vet to help determine the difference.

Past Care--very important as far as vetting and farrier work done.

Breeding record--again important if you want to breed the animal

Size--personal preference.

Sex--personal preference except to say NO STALLIONS for any but the most experienced and who are planning to breed the animal.

As you can see, there is a lot to think about when choosing a horse.

There is no such thing as a perfect horse. You have to pick and choose on the things you think are the most important traits for you. An experienced, confident rider might not place as much importance on past training as a beginner SHOULD, for example. A beginner with a horse that displays too much spirit or lack of proper training might end up getting scared or hurt and not enjoying the horse, whereas someone else with that same horse might be very pleased.

Consider your own personality and temperament and don't get a horse that will continuously frustrate or scare you. Keep in mind though, that every item of the above list adds to the price the owner is asking. The "bombproof, pretty, well trained, 15 hand, ten year old gelding" is in high demand and is going to cost you a lot more than an unstarted colt or greenbroke broodmare. To get the colt to the place that the gelding is will take lots of time and considerable money. If you add on the requirement "flashy color" or show record, it will probably mean even more dollars.

It may seem that a seller has an inflated price on the trained horse, but consider what has gone into getting that horse to the point where it has so many desirable characteristics. First of all, the breeder had to buy a quality mare, let's say for \$3500, and breed it to a quality stallion. The stud fees vary, but many Missouri Fox Trotters have stud fees around \$500. Then the breeder has the mare care expenses for eleven months followed by the expenses for raising the baby. Let's be conservative here and not count the breeder's facilities in the cost. We'll say \$1200 for mare care and another \$2400 for raising the baby to training age. Training doesn't usually start until the foal is at least two years old (in my opinion it should be even later than that), and training takes a minimum of three months to get a green broke (very basically trained) horse. To get that horse really ready for show or trail takes more time. Training charges start around \$400 and up and if the horse is in training for three months, that's another \$1200. Considering all that, do you realistically think you can find what you want for \$1500? You are still getting a bargain even if you pay \$4000 for the young trained horse that needs more riding to be called "bombproof"! Of course, you can buy a baby or youngster, pay the expense of raising it yourself, get it trained, and hope it is the horse of your dream that you have been waiting for during the three years it took to grow up. Again, it's your choice.

Good luck in your search, and be patient but persistent. You can find an affordable horse if you are flexible and realistic in your needs and you do your homework. If we can be of any help to you in your search, we'd be happy to talk to you and maybe be able to point you in the right direction for your dream horse.