



Information for a first time buyer to consider before booking a vetting

If you are new to horse ownership then buying your first horse can be an exciting, if not a little daunting. There are many factors to think about and it is worth considering them carefully.

1. Have you got enough time?

Caring for a horse is very time consuming; even a pony kept in a field will need checking at least twice a day and during the winter this requirement may be increased if you are mucking out stables, feeding and checking frozen water supplies. There is also the need to find someone competent to care for your horse if you go on holiday.

2. Have you thought about the costs involved?

The initial purchase of a horse should probably be seen as the cheapest part of horse ownership! As well as obvious costs for things such as grazing, stabling and feed, your horse will need regular visits from a good farrier, annual vaccinations and a dental check up. We would also strongly advise insurance (link to page of info about types of insurance?).

People often ask us why veterinary care for horses is so expensive. Firstly, the average horse weighs about 500kg. This is nearly 10 times as much as a person and over 20 times as much as a dog. For this reason, a horse will require a large amount of any given drug treatment, therefore an injection that would cost £2 for a dog could cost somewhere in the region of £40 for a horse.

Secondly, we aim to provide a high standard of care, without exception, to all our patients. We do not believe it is in our patients interest to cut corners for example with the quality of materials we use or the standard of service we offer. We work closely with specialist centres for example in Newmarket, who have state of the art operating facilities and diagnostic tools such as MRI. In the same way in human medicine that a GP may refer you to see a specialist if there is a serious medical problem that needs attention, we are able to provide the same service to our patients. Unfortunately there is no NHS for animals so all veterinary treatment is private and the costs reflect the time and expertise this takes. Furthermore, there may be medical conditions that require stabling or specific caring requirements that may mean you will suddenly have increased costs for livery.

3. Is the horse/pony suitable for the experience of the rider?

This is of fundamental importance. Make sure you have had ample chance to try out the horse. Don't be afraid to go back several times to see it, ask whether you can take it out for a ride or whether the vendor would be prepared to agree to a trial period before you decide to buy. If you are buying a pony for a child, if possible they should have the opportunity to go for a little ride.

It is advisable to take your riding instructor or a knowledgeable friend with you when going to try out a horse for the first time. The vetting procedure will not give you any guarantees about the talent or ability of the horse. We can give you some idea about how easy the horse is to examine, but there are some simple things you can do when you go to look for the first time to get an idea about this. Do pick up all the horse's feet yourself and feel down its legs and under the belly, do have a look in its mouth at the front teeth, do get someone to trot it up and down for you, and if you can have a go yourself. If you, or the child who'll be riding is nervous then don't go for a horse that is sharp or objects to having these simple procedures performed. However well bred or flashy it may look! A young or 'green' horse may look like the epitome of discipline and good behaviour in the hands of an experienced rider but turn into a heavyweight ill mannered brat the minute it senses the new handler has slightly less experience! Horses are not daft and it can completely ruin the confidence of a young rider to have a horse who doesn't look after them.

4. Who should be present during the pre purchase veterinary examination?

The examination will usually take place at the yard where the horse is currently kept. We would recommend for the potential purchaser to be present if possible, this way you can see how the horse responds to the examination and you can have plenty of opportunity to discuss findings with the vet. It is quite understandable that it may not be possible to be present during the examination, under which circumstance it is preferable to make telephone contact with the veterinary surgeon before and after the vetting. When you make a booking for a pre purchase examination you will be asked to give contact details for the day on which the vetting is to take place so that the vet can speak to you directly. Under some circumstances the horse will be on loan with the potential purchaser for a trial period, in this case it may be that the vendor will not be present.