

Your First Horse

By Elizabeth Jensen

When I sit down to write an article, I often find myself thinking what subject should I write about? There are so many ones that I want to cover that I wonder what should be next. So today I decided to write one for the beginners out there who are considering buying a horse for the first time. This is one of my favourite subjects to write about and I think one of the reasons could be because your first horse is always so exciting.

I remember the thrill and excitement that came over me when I got my first horse. It's an amazing feeling when you step into that saddle for the first time. A feeling that you have to experience yourself. I think it's one of those things that just keeps getting better and better with each ride until you're absolutely hooked on horses!

My first horse was a 27 year old retired Ranch and Rodeo mare. She was such a sweetheart and served her purpose well in teaching my siblings and me the first steps about horses. There is no better teacher than an experienced "been there and done that" type of horse. Reading books, watching videos, going to clinics and talking with experienced horsemen is a great way to learn and I highly recommend it, but nothing compares to the hands on learning that you experience yourself.

A check list before you buy

Starting from the beginning, the first thing that you need to do even before purchasing the horse is to make sure that you have the money, time and facility for it. A very common problem that first time owners have is buying one before they're ready. So here is a list to go over before buying:

1. Make sure that you have a good tight fence that will hold him. If it is loose then it is easy for the horse to get tangled in which can turn into an injury quickly. A lot of people like to use the barbless wire for horses, I personally haven't had much trouble with regular barbed wire but maybe I've just been lucky so that decision is up to you and what you feel comfortable with. After you have a good safe fence ready then walk the pasture to be sure of no hazardous objects that it could get hurt on, such as steep slopes and ditches and old wire tangled in the ground. If nothing like that seems to be out there then it's a good idea to check for poisonous plants, shrubs or trees that may be growing in the pasture. Although I haven't personally had trouble with all these, here is a list of what I have heard can be hazardous to horses:

Bracken, Buttercup, Flax, Foxglove, Hemlock, Horsetail, Lupin, Meadow Saffron, Nightshade, Purple Milk Vetch, Ragwort, St. John's Wort, Yellow star thistle, Box, Laurel, Oleander, Privet, Rhododendron, Buckthorn, Laburnum, Magnolia, Yew, Chokecherry leaves and, in large enough quantities, acorns can be as well.

2. After you are equipped with a good safe pasture, shelter and hay, then it is time to consider the monetary end of it. The actual cost of buying the horse can often be cheap compared to the upkeep

of it. Are you able to afford all the hay? (Assuming you don't grow your own). And what if you end up needing to feed grain as well? You also need to think about farrier bills on a regular basis, vet bills and any type of supplements your horse may need. Think about the cost of tack and riding gear. If you think that you can master that then that's great! You're ready to start the fun part of searching for your perfect buddy!

Take your time buying your first horse

If I could only give one piece of advice on buying your first, it would be to take your time shopping. Don't let the seller or anyone push you into making the wrong decision. When you're still inexperienced with horses and you buy the wrong one, then that can lead to some very unpleasant and possibly dangerous adventures. If a green rider gets on a green horse and a plastic bag blows in front of him and the horse goes out of his head for even a couple of seconds, that could easily be enough to injure the rider. If you get on a green horse before you are ready and get disabled that can mean throwing that sport and all your other dreams out the window... for life. But on the other hand, if you had waited until you had more experience before getting on the green horse then you could have easily saved yourself an injury. That is why I don't recommend that green horses and green riders go together. If one is green, the other should be seasoned. Those make the best teams. Just remember, there is probably nothing you'll ever do with a horse that is as important as your safety. If you don't feel comfortable getting on your horse yet, there is nothing wrong with getting a little more comfortable around horses before you get on. Don't let anyone's teasing and calling you a coward make you do the wrong thing. You are not a coward, you are smart!

Buy a horse with experience

Now that we've talked briefly about what not to buy, let's cover what to buy. Like I mentioned previously in this article, I started out on an old retired ranch/rodeo horse, and have ridden several since and they seem to me to be the best choice. They have "been there and done that", know the ins and outs of everything yet have had a lot of years to mellow out and get that spunk out of them. You need to look for the mellowed out ones because a lot of them still have that go, go, go from competitive rodeo life and that often doesn't mix real well with beginners. I do know however that retired ranch or rodeo horses can be hard to find and expensive if you do happen to find one so you may need to settle for an older trail horse. Don't rule out young horses but I just think that you're going to be most likely to find what you need in an older horse. A lot of people ask, is it OK to ride older horses?

Buy a horse in good health

Well that depends on the horse's health, if he's in good health condition and not suffering from bad arthritis or something else, then there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with it at all. It's not like a beginner is going to be out competing in horse races and stuff with a 25 year old horse! But if he is still in good health and you're just doing trail rides and stuff like that then, no I don't see a reason why age should matter.

Always ride the horse before buying it to see if you're going to click with it or not. I remember when I was about 14 I think I was selling a horse and a woman came to look at it and brought her friend who was experienced with horses along with her to look at it. He loved the horse and kept taking it for rides, but the horse wasn't for him, it was for her. And she didn't seem to like the horse, she just kept feeling uncomfortable around it and I still remember her friend saying how much he loved the horse but said that she and the horse just didn't click. There may not be any reason for it at all, but certain horses and certain people sometimes just don't "click". So riding the horse first before buying is a good idea. It also doesn't hurt to bring a horse experienced friend along to look at it too.

Well, I could go on and on telling stories of different happenings and things but I think you have got the gist of what I'm saying. Just make sure that you are prepared for a horse before buying and don't be in a rush to buy one. Shop carefully and wisely. Always underestimate your riding skills so you'll get a horse that is safe and that you can have fun with. For more info don't forget to like my Facebook page, Sunnyridge Horsemanship.

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