

# PURCHASE EXAMS

## A SOUND ECONOMIC INVESTMENT

Horses seldom come with money-back guarantees. That's why it's so important to investigate before you buy. While many horse professionals can help you evaluate performance or breeding merits, only an accomplished equine veterinarian can help determine the prospect's overall health and condition. Yet this is probably the most significant factor in deciding whether an animal is going to be a wise investment.

Whether you want a horse as a family pet, a pleasure mount, a breeding animal, or a high performance athlete, you stand the best chance of getting one that will meet your needs by first investing in pre-purchase examination. The expense will be small in comparison to the long-term costs of keeping and caring for a horse – especially one with health problems.

### PURCHASE EXAMS SHOULD BE CUSTOM – TAILORED

Every purchase examination is different. The procedures your veterinarian recommends will depend upon the intended use of the horse. For example, a mare being bought as a brood mare will require a thorough reproductive evaluation along with a routine clean bill of health. A gelding being considered as 2-year-old race prospect will need a comprehensive physical exam that includes a battery of lameness tests.

Deciding what should be included in the purchase examination requires clear communication between you and your veterinarian.

- Choose a veterinarian who is familiar with breed, sport, or use for which the horse is being purchased.
- Explain to your veterinarian your expectations and primary uses for the horse, including short-and long-term goals (for example, showing, then breeding).
- Ask your veterinarian to outline the procedures that he/she feels should be included in the examination and why.
- Establish the costs for these procedures.
- Be present during the purchase exam. The seller or agent should also be present.
- Discuss with your veterinarian his/her feelings in private.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions or request further information about your veterinarian's findings.

### NO PASS OR FAIL

The veterinarian's job is not to either pass or fail an animal. It is to provide you with information regarding any existing medical problems and explain the possibility for future problems, especially in light of the horse's intended use. Your practitioner can only advise you about the horse's physical condition, including conformation, and explain how it might affect performance from a health standpoint.

### DEVELOPING A STILL PHOTOGRAPH

Keep in mind that the purchase exam is like a still photo. It provides information about an individual horse on a given day at a particular moment. How accurate and complete that picture is will depend on how comprehensive the exam is and what the problems actually are. But remember: the still photo cannot provide the whole story. Many factors contribute to a horse's past, present, and future health and these factors may not be apparent at the precise moment of the examination.

Even with these caveats, the information contained in this portrait can be very valuable. Ultimately, avoiding the purchase of an unsuitable horse will save much disappointment and many dollars.

Remember, there is not standard protocol of procedures for this exam; you and your veterinarian must decide what is needed. However, your equine practitioner may include the following:

- Review the horse's medical history with the owner/agent, including vaccination and deworming schedules, feeding, and any supplements or drugs
- Monitor pulse, respiration, and temperature
- Listen to the heart and lungs
- Check nostrils, ears, and eyes
- Evaluate conformation
- Palpate body and limbs
- Draw blood sample for Coggins and other tests
- Examine teeth and mouth
- Evaluate feet visually and with hoof testers
- Watch horse travel in a straight line, in small circles and under saddle, preferably at the walk, trot and canter, and preferably before the horse has been warmed up
- Perform flexion tests on joints
- Observe horse's behavior

### FURTHER TESTS

The preliminary examination should alert the practitioner to problems or potential problems. If the veterinarian suspects something that may interfere with horse's intended use, he or she may recommend further tests. These tests, such as X-rays, nerve blocks, urine and blood analysis, endoscopic and ultrasonic examinations, and others, are optional and may be chosen by the buyer or recommended by the veterinarian based on clinical findings of the exam. They are generally used to confirm a diagnosis and provide a clearer picture of the seriousness of the problem.

### RADIOGRAPHS (X-RAYS)

Radiographs are not a substitute for a thorough, systematic examination by your veterinarian. X-rays can deceive the viewer by either providing a false sense of security, or indicating problems that never surface. Rely on your veterinarian's judgment regarding the need for radiographs, especially if no clinically apparent problem exists.

## REPRODUCTIVE EXAMS

Stallions and mares being purchased for breeding will require special tests to determine their reproductive status. For example, a stallion should be teased and collected to determine his libido and fertility. The semen will be evaluated for sperm count, motility, and viability.

A prospective brood mare will undergo rectal palpation so the veterinarian can examine the mare's reproductive tract for signs of normal activity or any structural problems. The veterinarian may also recommend a uterine biopsy and culture. This helps determine the health of the mare's uterus and the probability of her conceiving and carrying a healthy foal to term.

## UNDERSTANDING THE RESULTS

You need to thoroughly understand your veterinarian's finding in order to make an informed decision about your prospective purchase. If you don't understand the grading system for lameness, for example, then you need to ask questions until it becomes clear. Also, when you discuss the results with your veterinarian, keep the following points in mind:

- No horse is perfect in every respect.
- Some medical conditions or conformation faults are manageable or may never seriously affect the horse's performance.
- Learn what management options (such as specialized shoeing, exercise, or nutrition) are available, and decide whether or not they are practical for your needs and your budget.
- If in doubt about the findings, get a second opinion.
- Finally, make your own determination as to whether a horse is a good investment based on all the available data.

## TALLYING THE BALANCE SHEET

Remember, the decision to buy is yours alone to make. Even so, your equine practitioner can be a valuable partner in the process by providing you with objective, health-related information.

It might be helpful to create a balance sheet. Write the horse's name at the top of a sheet of paper and the price at the bottom. On the right side, list everything you like about the horse: color, size, breeding, performance, conformation, health, everything.

In the left column, list all the negatives. You can also assign point values, positive and negative, to each attribute. Then add up the positives and subtract the negatives, and you will probably have your answer.

Even if you should decide not buy, consider the exam money well spent. The investment can save you headaches, heartaches, and dollars, and provide a perfect opportunity to find the right horse—one that is healthy and can meet your needs and expectations.