

CHOOSING A HORSE

PNW 587 The Horse Project Manual – Chapter 6



It is important to choose a horse that is the right match for you. The first step is to make a list of your requirements, taking into account all the factors listed here.

The most important thing to do when choosing a horse is to seek expert advice. The wrong choice can be a frustrating, dangerous, unhappy affair. Before you begin looking at horses, consider the following factors.

I. Rider's experience and horse's level of training

- ◆ A “green” or “novice” horse or rider are those who do not have much experience.
- ◆ A young horse & an inexperienced rider do not “learn together,” Instead, it often results in disappointment or accidents. The rider may become discouraged or frightened & lose interest in horses completely.
- ◆ The less experienced a rider you are, the more dependable and well-trained the horse should be.
- ◆ A trained horse may cost more money, but it is the best choice.

II. Rider's size & age

A. Rider's Height

- ◆ The rider's size affects his or her ability to make the horse perform.
- ◆ If the horse is too big, your legs may not be long enough to provide proper cues.
- ◆ Ideally, if the horse is the right size for the rider, the stirrups will be nearly level with the bottom of the heart girth. This gives a secure seat and allows for effective use of leg aids.

B. Rider's Weight

- ◆ Generally, a horse should not be asked to carry more than 20% to 25% of its body weight.
- ◆ Therefore, if the horse weighs 1,000 pounds, the rider should not weigh more than 200 to 250 pounds.
- ◆ Many children begin with a pony, which can give several years of pleasure under saddle or in harness. Ponies also cost less to feed & require less space than a horse.

III. Horse's age

- ◆ When choosing your first horse, follow the “age of 20” rule.
 - horse's age + rider's age = 20 or older
- ◆ Horses under the age of 5 usually are not fully trained (finished), and they may be unpredictable at times.
- ◆ For experienced members, choosing a yearling or 2-year-old & doing the training can be very satisfying.
- ◆ Here's a guide as to what different aged horses can do....
 - **Weanlings & Yearlings:** Can be led & exposed to new things.
 - **2 Year Olds:** Can begin to lunge & ground drive.
 - **3 & 4 Year Olds:** Can be started under saddle and or driving.
 - **5 & 6 Year Olds:** Are gaining miles under saddle & can begin to jump.

IV. Horse's gender

A. Stallions

- ◆ A stallion is a male horse able to sire (or father) a foal.
- ◆ Stallions over 12 months old may not be shown in 4-H.
- ◆ It takes an experienced handler to control a stallion.

B. Mares

- ◆ A mare is a mature female, 3 years or older.
- ◆ Mares are easier than stallions to manage, but can become moody when in heat.

C. Geldings

- ◆ A gelding is a male horse that has been castrated.
- ◆ A gelding is often considered to be the most even-tempered & dependable horse.

D. Colts & Fillies

- ◆ A female horse under the age of 3 is called a filly, & a young male is called a colt.
- ◆ An unweaned horse is a foal.



V. Breed & intended use

- ◆ Study the characteristics of different breeds & note those suited to what you want to do.
- ◆ Some breeds are better adapted to Western riding, some to dressage, some to jumping, etc.
- ◆ It is not practical to expect a horse to do well at an event that it is not bred to do.
- ◆ A registered horse is usually more expensive than a grade horse.
- ◆ A crossbred horse can combine good characteristics of both parent breeds & makes a good riding horse that can be less expensive.

VI. Conformation

- ◆ Good conformation is especially important if the horse will be used for showing, breeding, jumping, or other athletic work.
- ◆ Look for an overall balanced appearance and a smooth blending of all the parts.

VII. Lease Agreements

- ◆ If you are unsure if riding & showing is for you, leasing is perfect.
 - ◆ It's also great if you can't keep a horse, but would still like to ride.
 - ◆ There are several types of leases:
 - **Lease to Buy** - A portion of your monthly payment goes toward the purchase of the horse.
 - **Care Lease** – You get the use of the horse in return for paying for its care.
 - **Half Lease** – You pay for half the horse's upkeep & get to use it half the time.



- ◆ If you decide to lease a horse, you must have a lease agreement with the owner. Leases should include:
 - Names of lessor & lessee
 - Description of the horse
 - Length of time you are to lease the horse
 - What you will pay to lease the horse
 - What you can do with the horse
 - Facility requirements
 - Who pays for what
 - What happens in case of death or injury

VIII. Buying a horse

- ◆ Before you buy a horse, make sure you can make the commitment necessary to take proper care of him. If you are unsure whether you have the time and/or money to own a horse, try leasing a horse first.
- ◆ Tips for shopping for a horse:
 - Take someone knowledgeable with you
 - Watch the owner ride the horse
 - Ride the horse 2 or 3 different times, making sure you try everything you want the horse to do.
 - Arrive early, so you can watch the horse being caught and tacked up.
 - Don't be rushed into buying something. There are a lot of good horses out there!
- ◆ The horse's price depends on its age, training, and condition.
- ◆ The owner's eagerness to sell, the time of the year, & the availability of that type of animal are also factors. Often horses are less expensive in the fall, because owners don't want to bear the cost of keeping the horse over the winter.
- ◆ When you find a horse you like, arrange for a pre-purchase exam by an independent veterinarian.
- ◆ Once you've agreed to buy the horse, ask for a sales contract. The contract should include the following:
 - Names of seller & buyer
 - Name of horse with detailed description
 - Price, what is included in price & payment schedule
 - Warranties on health & training, or "as is"
 - Statement that seller has the right to sell the horse
 - Signatures of seller & buyer
 - Date
 - Return or void option
- ◆ Do not pay in cash unless you get a written, signed receipt.
- ◆ Papers on a registered horse should be transferred at the time the final payment is made.
- ◆ Check with the breed association for specific criteria on how to transfer the papers.

