

# GETTING YOUR FIRST HORSE



So you have made the decision to get your first horse. Congratulations, this is an exciting and challenging task, so it is best that you go into this as knowledgeable as possible.

First it is important that you identify what you want to do with your horse. Do you want to trail ride, jump, compete, carriage drive or just enjoy ownership. The horse you choose must be suitable for what you want to do. When you have decided what it is you want your horse to be capable of you must then consider what you, the rider can do. Are you an experienced rider, a beginner or a complete novice to horses? If the horse is for a young child special consideration must be taken. Ponies are small and cute, but very often undisciplined and hard to ride.

The horse you choose must be suitable in temperament and ability to your needs. Consideration must be given to the horse's age, size and breeding. Young horses are not suitable for beginners; you certainly cannot expect your child and the horse (or yourself as a beginner) to "learn together". It is a recipe for disaster. Buying a very old horse, one over 20, can leave the new owner with increased veterinary costs and limited use. Most horse owners should choose either a gelding (a castrated male) or a mare (female) as stallions are only suitable for very experienced horse owners.

There are many different breeds of horses that you can choose from. Thoroughbreds and Arabians are "hot blooded", Quarter Horses can be calm and easy natured. Each breed possesses traits that are desirable for different people and disciplines. Cross bred horses (those of mixed breeding) can often be the best as they bring many different wonderful breed traits in one horse.

A good idea is to take riding lessons on a school horse from a Certified Coach prior to making a decision about what type of horse you need. A certified coach can help you realize your competency level and assist you to improve. Ongoing lessons are always a good idea.

When you have done your homework regarding what level of rider you are, what type of riding you want to do and what age and breed of horse will best suit you, it is time to go looking. It is always recommended that you take an experienced person with you to help guide you in your purchase. You need to make sure your choice is sound, illness-free, the correct age, temperament and size for you, and able to perform what you want it to. Novice horse buyers are often led astray by a beautiful horse that is not suitable for them. You should be sure that you are not being misled by a less than honest seller regarding the age, training and health of your potential purchase. Paying a third party to guide you in your decision is money well spent. Having a Veterinarian perform a pre-purchase exam on your choice is recommended. Horse prices start at approximately \$1500.00 to any figure even over a million dollars! Buying from reputable source is always advisable and remember, make sure you have a bill of sale and a legal sales contract. If the horse has registration papers or a passport be sure to get possession of them and have the seller sign them over to you.



Before you are ready to bring your new horse home,

you must consider where you are going to keep it. Are you planning on boarding the horse at a stable and letting the owners of the facility take care of it, or do you plan to keep him at home? Boarding a horse will cost from \$250.00 up to and exceeding \$600.00 per month depending on the services you require. It is a good idea for new owners if they know nothing about horses to board at first so that they can learn before taking the horse home and providing all its care. Boarding also makes horse ownership possible for enthusiasts living in the city and those who do not have the land to keep one at home. Make sure you sign a boarding agreement and retain a copy for yourself.

If you are keeping your horse at home, you will need a paddock, barn or shelter, a grassy field, secure fencing and gates. You may want a riding ring and access to trails. Be sure to check with your municipal zoning to see the minimum amount of land you need and any restrictions regarding the keeping of horses on property.

Horses require a lot of time and attention. They should be fed 3 or more times a day, a diet of grain and hay, which depends on what type of work they are doing. Due to the delicate nature of the horses digestive system they must be fed at regular intervals and at the same time every day. They require free access to clean fresh water at all times. Horses should be provided shelter from prevailing winds and rain and lots of room to roam and exercise. Grass is the best choice of food for a horse (in addition to hay and grain), so good pasture is a bonus. Horses like company, so if they are kept with other horses they are happier, goats, cats or other farm animals can help them from becoming lonely. If you put your horse in a stall at night he will need shavings or straw as bedding. Stalls and paddocks must be cleaned out daily and kept clean. You will find that you will need a composting and disposal system for all the manure you will produce. The average horse produces 26 litres of manure per day, averaging 720 cubic feet per year. You will have to have a farrier trim or shoe your horse every 6 to 8 weeks and a veterinarian come out at least once a year for a check up, vaccinations and check the horses teeth. While a knowledgeable person can do some of the minor vet work and first aid themselves, you must have a vet check the horse regularly and take care of anything that could become serious. Horses should be de-wormed approximately 4 to 6 times per year. You can assume that monthly care costs for a horse kept at home will be in the neighbourhood of \$150.00 and more, with you providing all the labour.

Horses need halters and lead ropes for daily leading in and out with or to hold them with. You will need to have shovels, wheelbarrows, pitchforks and manure forks. Buckets, grooming brushes and towels are always needed. Depending on what type of riding you do, you will need a saddle, bridle, and saddle pad. Safety when riding is important so make sure you have an approved hard hat and boots with a heel to wear whenever you ride. Some horse owners blanket their horses in the winter, so you may choose to have stable blankets, warm waterproof turnout blankets, and coolers. In the summer fly masks to protect your horse from flies and fly spray are necessary. Some of these are expensive items to purchase, but quite often you can find good deals on used equipment. The equipment you buy, new or used must be in good repair and fit the horse correctly.

Owning your own horse is a rewarding experience. We can derive so much joy from interacting with these wonderful animals. Horse ownership is a great responsibility as they are entirely dependent upon us to provide for all their needs. Making the decision to own a horse should be done only after lots of research and preparation. This pamphlet covers only the very basic information you will need to know to be a responsible and caring horse owner.

