

The Pre-Purchase Examination

Owning a horse is a huge responsibility that requires time, money and dedication. Before you start looking for your perfect horse or pony, it's a good idea to ask yourself these questions:



- Why do I want a horse?
- Do I have the time to look after a horse?
- Where will I keep my new horse?
- Do I have the funds to care for, feed and look after my horse? He or she will need regular farrier and vet visits as well as vaccinations and medication (routine healthcare and illness or injury).

If you're happy with your answers to these questions, the next step is finding a horse that suits what you want to be able to do with it. Once you have found him or her, we would always recommend a pre-purchase examination by your vet before handing any money over, no matter what the value of the horse is that you are planning to buy.

It is imperative that the horse or pony is evenly shod or unshod, and that he or she has a legal passport.

The 5 stage pre-purchases examination

Stage 1. Preliminary examination

This involves a thorough external examination of the horse or pony at rest. Your vet will be looking at and feeling your horse to detect any clinical signs of injury, disease or physical issues. All body systems will be assessed including eyes and incisor teeth, and a stethoscope will be used to listen to the heart and lungs. This examination does not include examination of the inside of the prepuce, a detailed examination of the teeth with a mouth gag, height measurements or examination for pregnancy. These examinations would have to be requested separately.



Stage 2. Examination at walk and trot

The horse or pony is walked and trotted in hand on a hard, flat level surface to assess gait and action. Any lameness or asymmetry in movement is noted. The horse or pony is backed and turned to assess coordination. Flexion tests and trotting in a circle may be performed if your vet considers it safe and appropriate to perform. Flexion tests involve holding the leg up, bent at the knee for 30-60 seconds, then releasing back to the floor, followed by trotting away and assessing the response.

Stage 3. Exercise phase

The horse or pony is given enough exercise to increase its heart rate and breathing. Your vet will also watch for gait and action during exercise. This is to make sure the horse or pony is fit for purpose. If there isn't a rider available or it is unsuitable to perform ridden exercise, then lunging is used for these exercises.

Stage 4. Period of rest and re-examination

After exercise, the horse is allowed to stand quietly and its breathing and heart rate are monitored as they return to normal.

Stage 5. Second walk and trot up

The horse is walked and trotted again to see if the exercise undertaken has induced any lameness that wasn't obvious during stage 2. A blood sample is also likely to be taken at this stage unless it has been specifically requested not to do so by you.



When all of the tests have been done, your vet will discuss the results with you, highlighting any issues and indicating if the horse or pony is fit for the purpose you want it for.

It is really important to understand that the examination is done at only one point in time. It is important to identify all potential problems if possible, but the examination cannot give assurances as to what may happen in the future.

If you would like to talk to us about a pre-purchase examination for a horse or pony, give us a call on 01637 880307.