

Locating and Buying Horses

Considerations for selecting prospects
and factors impacting horse sale price



Part III: Types of Sale Outlets and Horse Sale Descriptions and Trends

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Part II: Types of Sale Outlets and Horse Sale Descriptions and Trends

Millions of people enjoy the companionship, competition and recreational opportunities that horses and other equids provide daily. Equine owners can receive years of enjoyment and satisfaction after locating and buying the horse, pony, mule or donkey that best fits their needs, experience level and expectations. The physical exercise and mental relaxation derived from a safe, well-trained horse can justify the expense associated with this form of recreation. The relationship between horse and rider can be unparalleled if the right horse is chosen to best suit the rider's intended discipline, goals and abilities.

Selecting the appropriate horse to purchase can be challenging and involves evaluating both horse and rider compatibility as well as understanding sale outlets. The Locating and Buying Horses publication series is designed to assist current and future equine owners in locating and selecting the most appropriate horse for their needs and desires, while considering various factors that influence sale price and suitability. For more information on aspects of the horse and rider that impact horse suitability, reference Part I: Considerations for Selecting Horses. For more information on aspects impacting a horse's price, reference Part II: Budgeting for the Right Horse. Specifically, this publication will cover information on locating horses through available sale outlets and information on horse sale descriptions.

One of the many questions asked by a potential horse owner is "Where do I find a horse?" Horses can be found and purchased in many different locations and settings, including private treaty, live auctions, online auctions and social media sales.



General Purchase Information

Although many horse sales are conducted informally, it is of the best interest of the buyer and seller to have a written agreement detailing sale procedure specific to the particular animal. A bill of sale, or purchase agreement, should be exchanged between the buyer and seller during any horse sale. Large sale companies, auctions, horse traders or breeders often have sale contracts they use. There is not a standard form for this document, but generally it should include the following information:

- ☐ Name, address and contact information for both the buyer and seller
- ☐ Complete description of the horse (color, markings, breed, age, sex, training level, current health condition, etc.)
- ☐ Pre-purchase exam results
- ☐ Price of the horse and payment terms, including interest if applicable (one-time cash or check payment vs. installments, trade for equal value, etc.)
- ☐ Sales tax liability
- ☐ Statement where risk of loss passes from buyer to seller

- ☐ Warranty, right of refusal, liens or other contingencies
- ☐ Agreement between parties as to where disputes will be litigated if non-judicial resolution is not possible
- ☐ Signatures of each party and date of agreement

In some situations, additional provisions should be added to the bill of sale to protect both the buyer and the seller. For horses sold for a high price that require payment installments over time, it is strongly recommended that the buyer seek the input of an attorney to review the bill of sale prior to purchase. Added statements within the bill of sale could include:

- ☐ Stipulations for feed, water, shelter, hoof care and preventative health care until the buyer pays the seller in full
- ☐ Maintenance of the horse's insurance by either the buyer or split between the buyer or seller until the price is paid in full



Types of Sales

Private Sale/Treaty

Purchasing horses through private sales, also known as treaties, can come from a number of different avenues such as breeders, trainers, agents, traders or individuals.

- Private sales usually occur directly between the buyer and the owner; however, breeders, traders, agents and trainers may also be involved. Horses can be purchased from an established breeder.
- Breeders can provide good quality information on the prospective horse such as temperament, medical history, previous foals and show history of their bloodstock. If the breeder is responsible and well-established, then they can often be a source of multiple quality horses of varying ages.
- Horse trainers, who ride professionally or for the public, can help provide horses of varying skill levels and thus can be a good source for trained horses.
- Horse agents and traders buy and sell horses (which may or may not be on consignment) and often may have leads for horses based on a buyer's interests. It is best to find a reputable agent or trader in order to have a successful purchase and a positive experience.
- Lastly, an individual owner may also list their horse for sale through private treaty and can make an excellent option for a prospective buyer if their needs and wants are well defined.

Often, horses sold through private treaty can bring a higher price than those sold through other methods reflecting quality and care of purchase. It may take longer to find the right horse, or the right buyer, as many private treaties typically involve showing horses to several prospective buyers before a sale is made. For buyers, private treaties provide an opportunity to inspect the horse more thoroughly and potentially determine if the horse is the right fit through a trial period. Prospective buyers should determine how far they are willing to travel to find appropriate horses marketed through this method. Although the size of the traveling radius varies by potential buyer, multiple trips to various areas could be required to view horses. The option of a trial or to return a horse may be possible if coordinated with the seller. Additionally, right of refusal contracts which permit the horse to be sold or given back to the original seller can be beneficial for the seller, who may have a strong personal attachment to the horse, or the buyer, who may need to give/sell the horse back (e.g., financial constraints, personal illness, etc.). Depending on location, states may have different laws in place to enforce right of refusal contracts; thus it is important to determine if any regulations are in place prior to purchasing an animal.



Social Media Sales

Social media is becoming a popular platform for buyers to find potential horses and sellers to advertise their horses, but like other sale types, has benefits and drawbacks. Social media sales can be similar to both online auctions and private sales. Buyers can find potential horses they may not see at an auction or from private sales and treaties, broadening the purchasing pool. However, unlike private treaty, the trust and relationship between the buyer and seller is more difficult to establish given the infrequency of selling and purchasing and the type of market. Typically, buyers find information regarding specific horses online and correspond with the owner directly, but purchase a horse after viewing videos, photos and descriptions of the horse's characteristics and abilities. Depending on the location of the horse and potential buyer,

the buyer could have the opportunity to see the horse in person or trial the horse, but this may not be possible for long distance transactions or restricted budgets. There is more flexibility between the buyer and seller than at auctions as the circumstances are varied based on the situation. Furthermore, social media groups that are created for specific breeds, disciplines and training can be helpful for potential buyers to locate horses suitable to their goals and for sellers to find potential buyers. Social media sales may have the highest risk as buyers may not be getting the most truthful sellers and protection for the buyer available through auction or other private treaty sales may not be available. Returns may not be possible, but it is encouraged for buyers to inquire if buy back contracts or first right of refusal contracts are possible.



Live/In-Person Auction

Live auctions can provide a readily available source of horses of varying breeds, ages, training levels and disciplines. Often, auctions can elicit a quicker sale but might not necessarily bring as high of a sale price as a private treaty. This could benefit both buyer and seller if the horse needs to be sold quickly, and potentially provide the opportunity for the buyer to purchase a horse for a lower price. Supply and demand greatly affect auction prices, and in some instances, bidders may drive a horse's price upward compared to the initial consigning price. Bidding in a live auction can be intimidating to a novice auction attendee, and it is important to ensure buyers are familiar with how bids are placed before the auction begins.

In-person auctions have varying price points, ranging from local community to high-end auctions. Many excellent horses can be found at auctions; however, the time available to view, inspect and determine if a horse can suit a buyer's needs is often limited. Some

auctions provide catalogs and prescreening options for sale horses. Prescreening can allow prospective buyers to look at the horse in person, thus, allowing for better information regarding a potential purchase.

Live auctions often have a no return policy. Due to the fast-paced nature of an in-person auction, it is beneficial to have an experienced person assist in the purchasing of a horse from this arena. Often an auction (in person or online) will require a seller to disclose specific health information and offer Conditions of Sale to protect the buyer. Some auctions permit pre-purchase exams, breeding soundness exams, etc. prior to bidding. This may even include legal action a buyer can take if a horse was misrepresented. A potential buyer should review such policies prior to participating in bidding on a horse. Purchasing horses from an auction should be done with attention to detail to ensure the horse is a good fit for the buyer before a final bid is placed.



Online Auction

Similar to live auctions, online auctions are an accessible venue to many sellers and potential buyers. This option can be convenient for those that cannot physically attend a live auction location or for those that wish to pursue horses from alternate areas. Online auctions can be risky due to not having the ability to see the horse in person. Potential buyers should search for Conditions of Sale or the opportunity to conduct pre-purchase health or breeding exams, which are available in many online auction formats as well. As with in-person auctions, it is always recommended to review online auction policies prior to bidding to determine what protective policies are in

place or if there are any buyer's premiums or fees that must be paid above the bid price.

Online auctions can provide descriptions, photos and videos of the horse in order to help aid buyers. Like most auctions, the horses will typically be sold "as is"; hence, there are no returns. Depending on the buyer's and horse's location, there is the added risk and cost of transporting the purchased horse over long distances. Online auctions, like live auctions, are a great place to have access to many different horses, but buyers should be aware of the inherent risks associated with an auction setting.

Table 1: Benefits and Drawbacks of Sale Outlets

Sale Outlet	Benefits	Drawbacks
Private Treaty	▪ Opportunity to thoroughly inspect horse including veterinary checks and breeding soundness exams ▪ Trial period may be available ▪ Potential to return horse to original seller (first right of refusal)	▪ Horse may cost more than if purchased through other outlets ▪ Increased travel and associated costs to view and transport horses if not located nearby
Social Media Sales	▪ Able to view horses from many locations ▪ Many horses to view with buyer preferences narrowed down	▪ Horse is often selected after viewing photos, videos and descriptions only ▪ Travel costs and risk for horse pickup ▪ Potentially highest risk for buyer ▪ Returns may not be possible
In-Person Auction	▪ Horse may be offered closer to true value based on supply and demand ▪ Reduced time investment by viewing multiple horses at once ▪ Most auctions require sellers to truthfully disclose health conditions ▪ Catalog and pre-screening options may be available	▪ Fast-paced nature of an auction can be difficult for novice buyers ▪ Often do not have a return policy ▪ Some cost associated with travel to in-person auction and transportation of horse
Online Auction	▪ Horse may be offered closer to true value based on supply and demand ▪ Reduced time investment by viewing multiple horses at once ▪ Details provided by seller in catalog listing, including pictures and videos ▪ Protection in place for seller if horse is not appropriately represented	▪ Travel costs and risks for horse pickup ▪ In most cases, not able to physically view horse before purchase ▪ Likely not able to return horse ▪ May not be able to complete pre-screening health checks



Locating Horses or Sale Venues

Finding a Horse for Sale

Determining where to find the right horse can be a daunting task. However, utilizing available resources can provide opportunities to aid in the search. Horse shows can be an excellent venue to identify potential horses of interest. The buyer can identify horses that may be for sale and observe their performance and behavior during an actual show. This provides the buyer with firsthand knowledge of a horse's ability to perform under show conditions. Boarding or breeding barns can also be worthwhile contacts as they may know of, or even have, horses for sale. As mentioned previously, horse trainers, traders or agents can also be valuable individuals to contact.

Many horses are sold through classified and other advertisements in newspapers, websites, social media outlets, horse breed journals and other horse-related publications. Veterinarians often provide invaluable information to prospective buyers about client horses that may be for sale as well as other horses in the immediate area. Many veterinary clinics provide clients with a bulletin board to list horses to buy

or sell. Often, trainers or barns will list available horses for sale on their website or on social media accounts. A potential buyer could identify local barns or trainers in their discipline of interest and contact them directly to inquire about horses for sale.

In-person auctions can be found through similar referral venues. Depending on location of the buyer, it may be a long distance to the nearest live auction. Online auctions can be found easily through common search engines, and often are breed or discipline specific.

County Extension agents, state Extension horse specialists and Department of Agriculture marketing specialists are good resource people for prospective buyers. Extension 4-H leaders and even 4-H members are very willing to provide assistance in horse selection. Often, these individuals make excellent resources because, in most cases, there is no financial consideration tied to their selection process or advice to a prospective buyer.



Location and Time of Year

Logically, areas with more equine events, farms and enthusiasts would equate to more horses available for sale and more prospective buyers. Depending on location within the country or state the availability of prospective horses and live auctions may be plentiful or rare. Online auctions and social media sales have helped individuals find quality horses in areas where local equine sales are scarce. A recent study of online stock horse auctions found Canadian horses to be slightly more expensive than those listed in the Midwest, which accounts for the differences in number of horses listed and the additional costs of transportation due to distance and policies between the

USA and Canada (Thompson and Kibler, 2020). Often, finding the right horse cannot be done close to home, as the search is dependent on the needs and wants of the prospective owner. For example, a safe, broke, backyard trail horse should be easier to locate locally compared to a rare breed trained for a specific discipline. When travel is required, it can be helpful to schedule multiple appointments to view horses in a given area, or locate auctions within a reasonable distance, where several horses can be viewed at once to make travel efforts worthwhile. Though differences in sale price vary, excellent horses can be found all year long through all sale outlets.

Evaluating the listing

When horses are listed for sale, typically a written advertisement or auction listing will be provided. Basic information should include the horse's name(s), age, sex, height, color and markings, breed, registry information and the horse's current location. In some instances, typically for private treaty and social media sales, the horse's list price may not be posted and will require contacting the seller to determine a price point. Price negotiation is common. Online and in-person auctions will often list the initial bid price within the auction listing, along with the horse's hip or lot number for auction identification purposes. There may be a note if there is a reserve price, which would indicate that the buyer has a minimum

price that they are willing to sell their horse for in the online auction. Pictures, videos, veterinary records and other pertinent information may accompany a written summary within the advertisement to help showcase the horse's abilities and health.

The written advertisement should contain information about the horse's training, disposition, experience and potential health or behavioral issues. It is important to read the description carefully for key words that can aid in determining if the horse is the right fit for the prospective buyer. Review the example advertisements below to determine how to interpret sale advertisements.

Example Horse Sale Advertisements

Young Hunter Pony Prospect

Three-year-old, black and white paint pony hunter prospect for sale. Cute as a button and would make a great child mount as she is just 13 hands tall. Flashy and will get you noticed in the show ring! Green and not started but very little spook in her. She stands to be groomed. She doesn't care for the vet or farrier too much. Born and raised on the property. This is your daughter's new Christmas pony!

Key words:

- **Hunter** – Type of riding discipline. In this case, it is being suggested as an appropriate discipline for this horse.
- **Prospect** – A young horse with no training
- **Flashy** – A descriptor used to indicate lots of color on a horse (white legs, face, etc.) and/or quality of movement
- **Green** – A horse with little to no training
- **Not started** – No training under saddle

This horse would be most suitable for a professional rider or experienced adult amateur because of its age and lack of training.

Dressage School Master

Hanoverian dressage schoolmaster, 17 hand gelding for sale. Proven 4th level with ability to go Grand Prix. Laid back personality and wants to please. Stands, ties, clips and trailers like a gentleman. Talented guy looking for his next show partner. Best suited for an experienced adult amateur or professional rider.

Key words:

- **Dressage** – Type of discipline. In this case, it is the discipline this horse is trained in.
- **Schoolmaster** – A horse with extensive training, often appropriate for riders to learn on
- **Proven** – Has successfully competed in the discipline and/or level described

Though listed as a schoolmaster, the level of training of this horse makes it the most suitable for adult amateurs with a significant amount of experience or professional riders.

Finished, Beginner Safe, All Around Mare

Eleven-year-old, broke, quarter horse mare. AQHA registered with show points. Been there done that with plenty of experience in the show ring. Fully finished Western pleasure mount. Has been ridden on trails and in parades. Safe for beginners with no spook, buck or rear. She is an easy keeper but does require hock injections every two years.

Key words:

- **Broke** – A horse that has been trained to tolerate a saddle, bridle and a rider on its back.
- **AQHA registered with show points** – Registered with the American Quarter Horse Association, and has been successful in registered breed shows
- **Finished** – The horse has been trained and successfully learned all necessary movements within the discipline
- **Western pleasure** – Type of discipline. In this case, it is the discipline this horse is trained in.
- **Easy Keeper** – A horse who does not require excessive amounts of feed and holds its weight well

This horse would be suitable for any rider of any age from beginner to advanced.



Conclusion

Locating suitable horses for sale through private treaty, auctions or social media sales can be successfully accomplished for buyers willing to seek references from industry professionals. In some instances it may be necessary to travel to view potential horses before making a purchase, or to bring the right horse home. Utilize the information contained within the horse's sale advertisement or auction listing to make

preliminary decisions on whether a horse could suit the buyer's needs. If possible, gather additional information about the horse and seek input from an experienced horseperson and a veterinarian before purchasing. For more information on purchasing a horse or finding a sale outlet, contact your local county Extension office, equine Extension specialist, or visit UTHorse.com.



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