

## NWHS 101 – January 2006 Issue

# Buying a Horse – Finding the Right Fit

It's a New Year! You have been waiting, saving, yearning, plotting, and dreaming of buying a horse or finding a new horse, and 2006 is going to be the year it happens. So what is next? How do you determine where to look for your perfect horse? What questions should you ask yourself before setting off on the journey of horse ownership? What qualities are you looking for in a horse, and what are your qualities as a good steward?

Over the next few months with Northwest Horse Source, we will be examining the questions and considerations you need to ask and answer before purchasing your dream horse. First we will help you to evaluate your own qualifications for being a horse owner, to help position you to find just the right fit with the perfect horse. Next we'll examine in-depth the commitment you are making to the horse for safety concerns, financial considerations, and the amount of time you will have to dedicate to developing a relationship. Finally, we will give you some very specific tips about "How" to evaluate the horse, before purchase, to assess if it truly is the "Right Fit" for you.

If it were a perfect world, two things would be prerequisites to horse-ownership: First, the human would have to pass a test regarding their mental, emotional, physical, and maybe even spiritual fitness. Second, the test would be administered by the horses and they would be the ones to grant a license for horse ownership! Similar to marriage counseling *before* you get a marriage license, there would be key questions that need to be asked

and answered in order for both parties to make a commitment. These would be some of the questions the horses would ask in order for the human to receive his "Horse Ownership License": **What are your motives and reasons for wanting a horse?** Just answering "I love 'em" or "They are so pretty", or "My little girl talks of nothing but horses" is not reason or qualities enough to own a horse. Certainly these are positive attributes, but they tend towards answering only the emotional part of horse ownership. Here are four questions that need to be answered by you, or if purchasing a horse for your child, answered by the two of you, to evaluate if you are ready for horse ownership:

**Mentally:** Am I willing to commit time to study how the horse thinks, reacts, feels, and moves in his environment, and educate myself to become a good leader for my horse? **Have I sat down and cognitively listed what motivates me to have a horse? Here you are, 61 years old, and you finally have the opportunity to own a horse. Ask yourself what do I hope to do with my horse partner? (Trail riding, competition, ranch work, driving) Next, what does that activity require regarding equipment, time, safety, and finances? (I will need a horse trailer and pickup; I will need to dedicate this much time daily, weekly, annually; I will need a horse that is well-trained that has had exposure to a variety of experiences to keep me safe and having fun; I will need to dedicate this much money monthly to the care, boarding, tack, insurance,**

**education, entry fees, and transportation of my new horse.)**

**Emotionally:** What do I hope to gain emotionally with this experience, and what I will need to give back to the horse? Am I willing to have patience, forgiveness, grace, kindness, and caring? **Again, ask yourself what truly are my motivations. Here I am going to speak up loudly on the horse's behalf. If emotionally you are looking to the horse solely as an avenue to win competitions, ribbons, and buckles, then please consider purchasing a four-wheeler or motorcycle! Horses are such intricate living, feeling creators and they deserve to have their human partners seeking to understand them...how they think, feel, and react. Don't get me wrong, I do believe horses love to compete, and go above and beyond the call of duty. But if you not willing to give back to them, and treat them with the respect they have earned over decades, then please reconsider becoming a horse owner.**



**Physically:** Am I physically capable of providing for my horse in terms of time, space, safety, fun, and finances? Am I physically fit to accomplish the ground work and riding exercises? **These are two**

very separate questions you must answer before making a decision. First, in terms of actual physical space for your horse, please keep in mind that they need to have room to romp and play daily. You may not be blessed with wide open pastures, but can you assure that at least once daily they get out of the stall, to not just work, but also play? Second are the questions relating to your personal physical fitness. In the past few years I have had several 60 year old plus women come to me with young horses they had purchased mostly because they thought the horse was beautiful, and they had the financial resources to pay the horse. In a number of these cases the women first were not knowledgeable enough to bring along a young horse with few experiences, and they were not physically fit to handle the rigors of ground work and riding. The combination was not safe. I highly recommend that if you are planning on being a "Weekend Warrior" with your horse, that you prepare yourself physically during the week!

**Spiritually:** Am I prepared to connect with my horse on a spiritual level that sets up a relationship built on respect and trust that ultimately makes me a better human being?



Some might think this is the same question as asking about the *emotional* preparedness. But I think it is more, and much deeper. Personally I know that horses were sent to me directly from a greater spirit. There are God-Sent. They are here to guide me on becoming a better, more compassionate, more feeling, human being that seeks to understand and get along in the universe. Now this may sound very "New Age" coming from an 'ol ranch girl from eastern Oregon, but I have always had a deep and abiding love for this land, its people and animals, and the heritage we all share. Horses help me to connect to that, and in so doing connect to them. To me the question of your *spiritual* fitness and commitment are essential in determining your capabilities and readiness for horse ownership...a horse relationship.

**What is the goal I will fulfill by having a horse?** For example: Do you want to go on trail rides every weekend, spending time with good friends or family, in a beautiful environment or are you looking to compete in equestrian events?

Whatever your aim, look for the type of horse will best help the two of you perform as a team.

**What is your level of competence?** Would purchasing a school master assist you in developing a deeper understanding with fewer frustrations?

Physically are you prepared to bring along a young horse, with few experiences?

In general, green horses with green riders do not make for a good match. An older horse, that has "been there and done that", can increase your fun and safety factor by a thousand percent! Ask yourself...How much is my safety, or the safety of my child worth?

As we continue in this series, we will examine a number of these considerations in much greater depth. My goal is certainly not to discourage you in becoming a horse owner. However, I am here to act as the horse's advocate. Take the time to see if you pass the test for your "Horse Owner License". I don't want to see you in Horse Divorce Court!

