



Temperament is one of the most important considerations when choosing a horse

Buying a horse

by Sue Webb

Becoming a horse owner for the first time is beset with pitfalls, but sensibly approached it is one of the most exciting and rewarding purchases you will ever make. Have a clear picture of your requirements before you start your search.

Work out exactly how much you can afford. Budget for a year on top of your purchase price. It pays to gain the advice and experience of someone knowledgeable to assist you. More or less decide where your ambitions lie, and aim for the right type of horse. Although you must establish a rapport with your horse, try not to let your heart rule your head. Follow these tested guidelines.

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Agra Ko-ops

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083 571 7778

TWK

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082 555 2713

017 824 1158

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How to budget

Necessities: You will need tack (saddle and bridle with all the fittings), a blanket, bucket, head collar and other bits and pieces used in riding and horse care.

Livery: A horse at livery will cost anything from R600-R2 000/month. You will have to pay extra for medications, inoculations, farrier and worming.

Stabling at home: It can cost R500-600/month for food and hay. Medications, dip, inoculations, farrier and worming will still have to be paid for additionally. However, there are things that you will need:

- A stable and storage space for all feed and tack
- A tap for water
- A paddock with safe fencing – post and rail can cost R50/m
- A method of fly-prevention and manure disposal
- Water, feed buckets and bins
- Stable cleaning tools
- Grooming equipment
- If you do not intend doing all the work yourself, you will need to appoint a groom, with the going salary around R1 500/month
- Shavings or straw for bedding.

However, keeping your horse at home may be more enjoyable and cheaper if you share the facility with other horse owners, or if you have more than one horse.

Cost of buying the horse: Decide what you want to spend and stick to it. Determine what you can expect to find in the price range that you can afford. Be realistic when you buy a horse. Breeders and trainers will not bother if there is no return on the horses they offer for sale. This is roughly what you can expect:

- An untrained youngster – may be cheaper now, but will take years of keeping and training and needs lots of experience
- A three or four year old, broken but needing schooling can also be cheaper, but again needs time and training
- A mature, “going” horse that has reached its potential is usually the most expensive, but the results are immediate

If it is at all possible, an excellent option for a novice rider is to lease or “bait” a schoolmaster

for a while, and take time to purchase the right horse. As the novice improves and grows in ambition, a horse with potential may be more suitable than a “going” horse.

Commission: If you use the services of a finder to point you towards the right horse, and it results in a sale, the cost will include a commission that is paid to the finder by the seller. This could be from 2-10% of the price of the horse. This is only fair, considering the time and trouble required to find the right horse. However, the finder cannot be held responsible if the buyer is not satisfied after the conclusion of the deal.

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Sources: Horses can be obtained from various sources, such as:

- Newspaper advertisements
- Equestrian publications, such as: *The Farmer’s Weekly*, *Landbouweekblad*, *Horse Ads*, *Horse Trader*, etc
- Auctions
- The racetrack
- Riding clubs
- Riding schools
- Studs
- Professional trainers

Suitability: The type of horse needed depends almost entirely on what you intend to do with it. Nevertheless, there are certain things that are essential for any horse, such as soundness and a good temperament. Once this is established, you need to look at those factors that are applicable to your intended purpose:

- **Trekking and outriding**
 - Any breed
 - Gelding or mare
 - Any colour
 - Blemishes acceptable
 - Preferably trained
 - Older horses acceptable, but not over 18 years
- **Show horse**
 - Stallions permitted
 - Typical Type for the breed if showing in breed classes
 - No blemishes
 - Not aged
 - Acceptable colour for the breed/Type, eg Show Hacks should not be skewbald
 - Good conformation for the breed/Type
 - Good paces

- Trained/untrained
- **Sport horses (jumping, dressage, polo, etc)**
 - Sound
 - Any colour
 - Geldings, mares or stallions
 - Not aged
 - Suitable size
 - Athletic movement.

“Trying out”: Once you have found a horse that might be suitable, but is too far away to view, ask the owner to make a video of the animal. If the owner is keen to sell, it should not be too much to expect and it will save you travelling costs. Have the good manners to return the videotape, whatever your decision. A photograph of the horse is not enough. If the horse is close by, phone and make an appointment to try the horse if it sounds hopeful. Take a knowledgeable person with you, complete with tack and a helmet, just in case. Also take your mental checklist and check all these on first sight:

- Age
- Gender
- Size
- Attitude
- Type
- Blemishes
- Conformation

Under saddle, check out the following:

- Soundness (wind and sight as well)
- Movement
- Level of training and potential to meet your requirements
- Attitude to work
- Ride – do you like riding him?

What you do not want: No horse is perfect, so after the initial examination of what is available, absolutely avoid the following:

- Too big or too small
- Very old
- Unprovoked viciousness
- Broken wind
- Ringbone
- Dropped hip
- Laminitis
- Rearing or other vices
- Blindness.

If only one or two of the following are obvious, keep it on the “maybe” list:

- Certain conformation faults such as upright shoulder, straight hocks, cow hocks, slightly low set neck, sloping croup (goose rump), slight roach back, long back, slightly over at the knee, etc
- Common head
- Slight dishing or plaiting
- Unfashionable breeding
- Honest scars
- Small splint
- Warts
- Parrot mouth
- “Veld mange”
- Poor condition without sign of disease.

Protocol: When you do view the horse, the owner will exaggerate the good points. Do not be intimidated or let the seller appeal to your vanity. The horse should not be very timid or hostile. You want to enjoy riding and handling your horse. Reputable sellers will agree to an examination by a veterinarian. If possible, use your own vet. You will have to pay for the examination.

Have every detail of the transaction down on paper, even if the seller is your best friend. Obtain a receipt for payment. If your purchase is purebred, you are entitled to its papers if it is registered with the breed society. Thoroughbreds off the racetrack are registered with the Jockey Club and on completion of their racing career, their passports should be returned. Details of every registered TB can be obtained from the Jockey Club for a fee, as long as you know the original racing name.

There is an enormous risk in buying a horse unseen or from an auction. If you do choose one from a bunch, take a photograph of it to make sure you receive the right one. Very occasionally a seller will let you take a horse on a month’s trial. The horse must be insured in case of an accident or even death. Sometimes a horse can be paid off over a limited period. The amount and payment due should be put down in writing and copies signed by both parties. If you buy a mare, and even though the owner absolutely guarantees she is not in foal, insist on a veterinary examination. Especially if you buy it from a farm where there is a stallion. **SAH**