



Horse Shopping 101

Kaitlyn McAleese

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Shopping for horses can be exciting, fun and stressful all at the same time. As a buyer, your number one concern is finding the right horse, of course, but you often end up worrying whether you've tried enough, tried too many, if you've asked the right questions, if you're paying the right price, and perhaps whether you will be happy with the choice you've made once show season arrives.

As a seller, the situation can be just as nerve wracking. Letting a stranger sit on a horse you have put time and money into is never going to be without risk, and the outcome of a trial can be surprising no matter how well you know your horse. As a groom, I have sat in on countless trials and prepared all different types of horses to be shown to riders and trainers, so I've also seen all kinds of trials go completely awry and end in disaster.

Thankfully, there are a few things I think prospective buyers can do to make the process as pain-free as possible for everyone involved.

Be Punctual.

Please do not be early. Please do not be late. I think it's best and most professional when a horse being tried is fully tacked up, clean, and ready to go on the cross-ties when the buyers arrive. That being said, the horse should not have to wait on the cross-ties for an hour because you are late. First and foremost, this is not conducive to seeing a horse at its best, which is the entire point of the trial. If the horse is set to be irritable after waiting for you it's a waste of your time, the seller's time, and the groom's time. All these people had to put the rest of their day on hold to prepare the horse and then wait with the horse until you arrive. That being said, arriving early is just as inconvenient, and frankly rude, because it can make it difficult to show the horse at his best, if he is being pulled out of his stall and hurriedly tacked up.

Listen to the person showing you the horse.

If they tell you to start with no spurs, don't say "But I just want to see what they do with them on." Just don't. Whatever they do is obviously less appealing than what they do without them, or else the person wanting the horse to perform well wouldn't have suggested otherwise. Don't set the horse up to behave badly from the start. That isn't fair to the horse and is wasting everyone's time, including your own. You could end up crossing a good horse off your list for no reason. The same thing applies to asking for a different bridle before the first trial, or asking for the horse to be shown to you cold, straight out of his stall or something. Let the people present the horse to you at his best, and then, only if you are very serious about buying the horse and the specific thing you would like to change is a make or break situation, can you ask to make changes to the program.

Don't waste anyone's time.

This one is vague, but important. A lot of times people coming to look at horses take advantage of the situation in ways that can be extremely disrespectful. The biggest example of this would probably be people who choose to turn a trial into a lengthy riding lesson. Of course the rider should be making sure they have



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pushed all the buttons and have given themselves ample opportunity to get a feel for a new horse, but there is a line you just shouldn't cross. Around the point where the trainer tells the rider to drop her stirrups or sets up a very specific and complicated trot pole exercise that has nothing to do with getting to know the horse, is where that line lies. It's also rude to do any more with a horse that has already proven to be unsuitable, or that you've decided you will not buy. People who get on, flat the horse for 15 minutes and say, "thank you, but this just isn't the type I'm looking for right now," are my favorite. They know what they want and as soon as they realize they want to pass on one, they stop taking up everyone's time and taking any more out of the horse than they need to.

Similarly, I can not stand when people do a lengthy trial with lots of jumping, probably getting close to the riding lesson situation we just talked about, and then at the end say he was really great but he's unsuitable for a reason the seller made clear from the start. This goes for the people who come to look at a four year old, and then at the end say, "he's super, just too green." Realistically, how broke were you expecting the four year old to be?

Or maybe even worse, when a seller points out a vice such as cribbing or a hock that needs maintaining, and the people still come to try the horse anyway and then pass because of the vice. Do not try the horse if you don't think it will be suitable before you even sit on it, because chances are the issue will still be an issue no matter how well the horse went.

Finally, a quick note on second trials. Please do not tell me you're coming back for a second trial because my horse is in your top 13! You should only be coming back for a second trial if you are very serious about purchasing a horse, and a 1 in 13 chance of making a sale is just not serious enough. Trying horses in that way probably isn't going to allow you see all the horses clearly and will definitely make it too hard to remember the subtleties of each. In short, trying horses can and should be fun as long as everyone is respecting the time and effort that goes into developing, preparing and presenting a horse to someone and of course, as long as the horse's best interest is also kept top of mind.