



The Pre-Purchase Exam

Did You Know? Auctions do not allow a buyer to conduct a pre-purchase exam; one of the benefits of a private sale is there is time to conduct this important exam.

UNWANTED HORSE
COALITION

So you think you've found the perfect horse! As you know, owning a horse is a big investment, not only in time and money, but emotion as well. You would hate to bring your new horse home to find out he has a serious underlying health condition. Thus, many people will have a pre-purchase exam done on a horse before they buy. While the exam can be costly (depending on what you ask your veterinarian to look at), it can be looked at as a good investment- particularly when you compare the cost of the exam to what the potential cost could be of a horse that comes with a pre-existing problem.

Some people may look at the exam as an exercise in risk management. Of course, buying a horse is a risk, and the risk is there that you may purchase a horse that won't work out. The pre-purchase exam helps minimize this risk, and gives you as the buyer the necessary information to help you make a good and informed decision about moving forward. However, the most important thing to remember about the pre-purchase exam is that it is not a "pass or fail" test- it is simply a snapshot to tell you how healthy the horse is.

It's important to note that there is no such thing as a "standard" pre-purchase exam. Good communication between you and your veterinarian is helpful in ensuring the vet examines everything you as the buyer want examined! It's also important to choose a veterinarian that is impartial- meaning that he or she has never worked on the horse and should have no financial stake in the potential sale of the horse.

What does the exam entail?

The minimum a pre-purchase exam should include is a thorough medical and performance history (if applicable) as well as completing a complete physical evaluation.

Your veterinarian will look at things such as the horse's general physical condition, look at his eyes, check his temperature, look at his limbs and watch him move in an effort to make sure that the horse isn't lame or have any underlying soreness in his limbs or muscles. With all of this combined information, your veterinarian can give you an opinion on how the horse's health will affect what your intended use for him is.

Some of the "general" aspects of a pre-purchase exam are:

- Assess overall body condition- is the horse too thin or too fat?
- Evaluate the horse for any previous injuries or surgeries- Close examination of the horse's skin might reveal scars from costly surgeries such as colic surgery. Horses that have colicked in the past are very likely to experience another bout of colic in the future.
- Examine the horse's eyes-Taking a close look at the eye to make sure there are no superficial lesions on the cornea or other parts of the eye.
- Listening to the heart- This is important as it will detect any heart murmurs or arrhythmias that could indicate cardiac problems.

- Listening to the lungs-Any potential respiratory issues can be difficult to hear when a horse is at rest, so a vet may do testing such as listening to the lungs after the horse has been worked and is breathing heavily.
- Examining the horse's mouth/teeth-Looking at the condition of the teeth as well as gaging a rough estimate of the horse's age.

Additional Testing

Some veterinarians may recommend additional testing during the exam. Ultrasounds, x-rays, urine and blood tests, and more may be recommended depending on the results of the initial exam. For example, if the horse is going to be actively competing, the veterinarian may want to do soundness testing as well as x-rays on the horse's legs and feet.

It's important to keep in mind though that no diagnostic test can tell you if the horse will work out or not. For instance, some horses may have x-rays that are not generally considered "normal," but never show any active problems such as lameness.

Blood tests may also be run, as a negative coggins test for equine infectious anemia (EIA) is a must and required by law for a horse to move from state to state. The blood test can also be used to detect any underlying diseases or drugs that may be in the horse's system.

Take Home Message

To reiterate- the pre-purchase exam is not like a traditional pass/fail exam! The exam is intended to help you, the buyer, make the most informed decision you can about your purchase. Take your time to make sure that you are spending your time and money on a horse that you are going to be able to enjoy. A thorough pre-purchase exam can help you decide if your investment will be a good one, as well as determine whether the horse can be managed to remain healthy and successful in his job!