

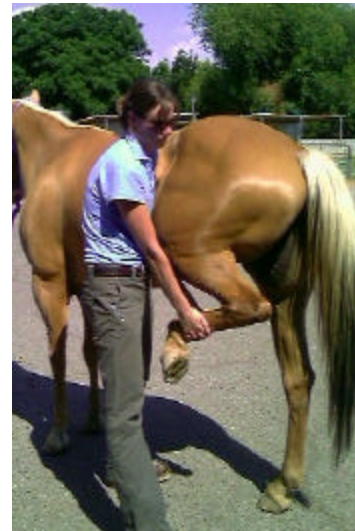
THE PRE-PURCHASE EXAM- Is it worth the time and money?

You've found the perfect horse, and now must decide whether to make the purchase or to consult your local veterinarian for a pre-purchase examination. Pre-purchase exams are important for any future owner as they highlight possible health problems and help determine if the horse is suitable for their intended purpose. Some may believe that these exams are only intended for high caliber horses, however, a thorough physical and lameness examination can save you from purchasing a horse with costly health issues.



There are several components to a thorough pre-purchase examination. These include, a general physical and musculoskeletal evaluation, radiographs (if desired by the purchaser), and evaluation of the horse's suitability for specific disciplines. The general physical evaluates the horse's body systems, including the respiratory, cardiovascular, and gastrointestinal systems, particularly the teeth, ophthalmic and neurologic examination. General palpation of the body looks for previous surgical sites and injuries. Ophthalmic assessment and a brief neurological examination are conducted and, if desired by the purchaser, blood can be sampled and shipped to a lab for drug testing.

The musculoskeletal evaluation includes limb and joint palpation, and testing for lameness. Initially, hoof testers are applied over all four hooves to assess sensitivity. The joints are then observed for effusion and the tendons are palpated for tenderness or thickening. The horse is walked and trotted in a straight line, in a circle in both directions, and lunged if needed. Flexion tests are completed on each limb, helping to isolate problem areas. The flexion is maintained for 45 to 90 seconds, depending on the joint being evaluated, and then the horse is trotted out and back in a straight line to evaluate for lameness. The fetlocks, carpi, and hocks are individually flexed. If a prominent lameness is observed, the pre-purchase examination may be discontinued immediately or a more thorough lameness examination with diagnostic nerve blocks may be carried out.





Radiographs are often included in pre-purchase examinations and aid in determining if bony changes are evident. If a severe lameness is evident, radiographs might be recommended for the affected region. Survey films of the feet, fetlocks, carpi and hocks will give the prospective buyer an idea of joint health and any major issues that might require future treatment.

It should be remembered that the information of the pre-purchase examination belongs to the prospective buyer and cannot be released without their permission. Although buyers might be tempted to forgo the time and expense of a pre-purchase exam, the benefits of this investment are obvious. The buyer can make a knowledgeable purchase decision and avoid the unnecessary disappointment and cost of purchasing a horse that is unfit or incompatible with its intended function.