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NWHS 101 – February 2006 Issue **Buying a Horse – Safety, Time, & Money**

So how's the process going of making your decision to purchase a horse? I am anxious to hear how you did on answering the questions for your "Horse Ownership License"! They are extremely important questions, and the horses have reminded me that the questions of the human's mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual fitness are truly on-going. In providing good leadership for our horses, we need to go back and re-answer these questions continually.

Now that you have passed the test for your "Horse Ownership License", let's look in depth to some very practical questions regarding safety issues for you and your horse, dedication of time, and developing a budget for horse ownership.

Safety concerns are certainly a huge issue, as these concerns truly should be what drives your answers regarding the amount of *time* you have to dedicate, and the amount of *money* you must budget. Here are some examples of questions you need to answer in order to keep you or your child, and your horse, safe and having FUN:

What training level & type of horse do we need to seek? If you are just getting into riding, I highly recommend you try to find an older horse, a school master that has had positive experiences accomplishing the types of jobs you are going to ask of him. It may cost you more money, but ask yourself how much is your safety, or the safety of your child worth? You also might want to consider taking some lessons in the particular discipline you or your child is wanting to pursue. **The initial cost of a horse will vary greatly with the region in which you are located, the horse's level of training and experience, and to**

some degree, the activities you will be asking him to perform. I hesitate to give an actual dollar amount range, but I can say that it is rare that you find that \$500 bargain that meets all of the criteria! If it is too good to be true, be sure to take a second look! Also remember that a "green" horse, with a "green" rider is NOT recommended! In addition, I feel strongly that you must also consider the "experience" of the horse, not just his training! I have seen particularly young horses that have been trained to achieve high level accomplishments in their discipline, but lack the "horse-sense" that comes from experience. In the March NWHS 101 articles, we will consider a variety of methods to help evaluate the horse and other sources to assist in finding the "Right Fit".



Alice works with Badger. Note the quality fencing in the round pen using 6 inch poles & RR ties, at least 6 ft. high. Footing is granite – sand.

How much time & money are you or your child willing and able to dedicate to horse ownership?

Time is a critical element in establishing any relationship. On rare occasions I have met and worked with people who are truly gifted in being able to relate to a

horse and communicate effortlessly without the benefit of hours of time dedicated. Most of us aspiring horseman need to give ourselves time to understand how the horse thinks, moves, and reacts, coupled with miles in the saddle, and perhaps educational assistance under the watchful eye of a good teacher. In addition, horses need companionship and love...This takes time! It has been said that horses don't CARE how much you know, until they KNOW how much you care! Here are some items that will help you to decide your time considerations, as well as budget: **Boarding** – Where will you keep your horse? If you own or are renting the land...how is the fencing, the water supply, the type of ground (rocky or soggy), exposure to the elements (shade from sun, break from wind),

and does the area provide adequate room for my horse to move and play? If you are keeping your horse at a boarding facility...Ask the same questions as above. If they are to be stalled, ask how often is the area cleaned and what is the floor/bedding material, and how is

the area ventilated? Will you be able to visit your horse daily to not just ride him, but also let him have a little time to play? If you can not visit everyday, will someone you respect and trust give your horse exercise daily? What are the principles of the owners/managers of the facility – Do they adhere to my principles of developing a willing partnership with a strong commitment to the horse, or do they see horses in a different light – one based more on fear and intimidation?

Care & Maintenance - Horses are not only very expensive to care for, their over-all health is a critical factor in *your* safety. A horse that does not feel well, has poor nutrition, or has not had proper hoof care, can spell problems for the rider. When budgeting, you need to consider the cost and quality of:

Hay/Pasture/Nutrition/Minerals & Vitamins

Quality & Amount: There is a great deal of research available regarding the nutritional needs for your horse. Start by talking with your veterinarian and local feed store representative. Ask for recommendations based on the area in which you live, climate, mineral deficiencies of the area, and how you will be using your horse, given his age and current condition.

Tack/Equipment/Grooming

You can quickly invest a LOT of money into tack and equipment for you and your horse. Two critical pieces of equipment are: 1) A quality helmet that is made for equine activities (Cost from \$50 to \$150); 2) A horseman's halter and 12ft. lead (Cost: \$45 - \$70;

Available through at:

www.tnhorsemanship.com)

My primary recommendation for purchasing equipment is to buy quality merchandise, that fits the horse and fits the human. I would much rather see you in a good

quality used saddle, than buying something poorly made, plastic, but flashy! A good saddle shop should allow you to try a saddle on your horse, and also assist you in evaluating the fit.

I know that the weight of the saddle is a big concern, particularly to women and children purchasing a western saddle. I recommend you learn how to toss the saddle on properly, without lifting, or set-up a pulley system to lower the saddle down on your horse's back. Most light western saddles I have seen constructed of man-made products, have had questionable fits for the horse's back and accommodation for the human's weight.



Artistic & excellent craftsmanship Saddles & tack by Greg Gomersal 208-278-0133; email: gomersall@fmc.com

Of course I'd love to see you eventually purchase a custom-made saddle that will last you a lifetime. In which case the saddle will be made to intimately fit you and your horse. Get to know a reputable saddle maker. Most that I know enjoy sharing their knowledge and will help you make an informed decision. (Check out:

tnhorsemanship.com/products)

Foot Care/Shoeing

There are plenty of schools of thought regarding proper hoof care and shoeing. A lot depends on the environment in which your horse will live and work. Living in eastern Oregon, I have enough

rocky area, combined with softer soil, to allow the environment to do "natural" trimming on several of my horses, with the occasional assistance of my farrier. No shoes needed. However, two of my horses just can't stay sound without shoeing every 6 to 8 weeks. (Cost: Saddle horses - \$50 - \$100) Here again, I'd talk with the local veterinarian and other horse owners in the area to ask for recommendations on farriers. You may even want to learn how to care, trim, or shoe your own horse. One qualification however for choosing both my farrier and my veterinarian...they need to adhere to my principles of treating horses with respect, and an understanding of how the horse thinks, moves, and reacts. If the halter comes out with the stud chain, or the only way they shoe is in cross-ties, I'd be heading the other way with my horse really fast!

Transportation

Considerations for how you will transport your horse are important for his safety and yours. It may be an item you will not have to consider immediately, but most likely at some point you will want to go to a show, go on vacation with your horse, head-out trail riding, or need to transport your horse to the veterinarian's. When you get ready to buy, do your research! The pulling rig needs to have adequate towing capabilities and power for the weight of the trailer. The trailer does not have to be new, but quality axles, heavy floor boards, lack of rust, and quality welds are important observations.

Vaccinations/Veterinary/Worming

There are different schools of thought regarding vaccinations and worming routines for horses. You'll have to make your own decisions, based on conversations with your veterinarian, and horse owners you trust. Personally we

vaccinate with a multiple vaccination that covers east/west flu & rhino, tetanus, and now West Nile. A nasal spray injection is also commonly given for strangles, however most veterinarians in my area recommend use only if you have a young horse, or are going to be mingling with horses from outside the area, or horses coming from or going to a known infected area.

and with the amenities provided. (i.e. stalls with runs, indoor/outdoor riding arena, access to trails, pasture – room to run) If you are building your own facility there are a number of good resources for helping you decide on barn type, arena materials, design, & fencing choices. Check out the internet and your local library. Talk to your horsey neighbors to see what worked for them.

(See NWHS Trainer vrs. Clinician by Alice Trindle, NWHS archives 2004)

WOW! This a lot to contemplate, but absolutely necessary for a successful relationship. Horse ownership is a HUGE responsibility, and one not to be taken lightly. Once you have taken and passed your “Horse Ownership License” (see NHWS 101 January 2006), next make a check list of the items above and develop a budget for each item. When you have made all these considerations, and are still ready to purchase a horse, prepare for the March issue of Northwest Horse Source where I’ll give my tips on evaluating a horse to find just the right fit.



Tilly in advanced double-bridle set-up: Pencil bosal, mohair mecate, & true bit.

Insurance/Liability

Depending upon how you will be using your horse, his monetary value, and your exposure, you may want to consider insurance for you and your horse. If you are boarding an expensive horse, make sure you check into the insurance and liability policies of the facility. If you have a stallion, you need to be aware of insurance issues. Personal insurance policies for accident related injuries are important considerations whenever you are working with horses!

Boarding/Maintenance of Facility

We’ve previously discussed some of the considerations of your horse’s boarding facility. Costs will vary greatly within the region,

Education for Horse/for Human

Of course I am a huge believer in continuing education for both human and horse. Personally I feel the best opportunity is always to participate as a partnership... You as the owner & partner, bringing your own horse along, under the watchful eye of a good teacher, clinician, or coach. If you must send your horse to a trainer, make sure you are welcome to watch as much as possible, and that the over-all price includes lessons with YOU riding the horse. You need to learn how the trainer has asked the horse to accomplish requests, and then practice them with your horse while she watches and coaches.

Good Partners... Participants in June 2005 Retreat... Loyal horse owners!

