



HAYES IS FOR HORSES®

HAYES IS FOR HORSES.COM

Buying A Horse

By **TIM HAYES**

Of all the major decisions people are faced with - getting married, having children, buying a house, buying a car, changing jobs or getting divorced, buying a horse, unless you are a professional horse trainer or have years of horsemanship experience, has the highest rate of poor choices and regrets. Unfortunately making a poor choice with a horse not only results in unhappiness; it can also produce serious injury or death.

It's been said that statistically 80% of all first time horse buyers sell their horse in the first year. Of the remaining 20%, 80% of those sell their horse in their first five years.

This means that 80 out of 100 people, who buy their first horse, sell it within a year after they've bought it. Another 16 people (80% of the remaining 20) will sell within the first five years. This means that only 4 people out of 100 still have their first horse after 5 years. When I heard this many years ago my first thought was; "That's amazing!" My next thought was, "Why?"



Be savvy when choosing a new horse.

Today I know there are usually 4 major reasons for this that we can call the 4-F's: Fear, Frustration, lack of Funds and lack of Fun.

Buying a horse can be exciting and fun. It can also be complicated, expensive and stressful. It involves the buyer, the seller, the horse, the desired discipline or activity, the cost, the boarding arrangements and many other factors all requiring informed decisions. I believe the most important consideration in the decision process is safety. Following safety comes fun and enjoyment. This requires matching the right horse with the right human. There are three elements that, if truly incorporated into the decision making process, will greatly increase the possibility of buying a horse that will be safe, fun and a life long partner: KNOWLEDGE, ABILITY AND AGE.

KNOWLEDGE

A long time ago like before I knew anything about horses, I thought a horse was not much different than a motorcycle. Kicking his belly was the gas, pulling the bit in his mouth was the break and pulling the reins was the steering. Like many novice horse lovers I believed by using this technology I could make my horse go as fast and or as slow as I liked and stop him at any time. I could also ride him anywhere I wanted: on the street, on a trail, in an arena, at a show, on the beach, indoors, outdoors, at my barn or at someone else's barn. I could ride him in any of these places all by myself or with other people and their horses. It wasn't long before I learned how wrong I was. Horses, I discovered, are nothing like motorcycles, they are actually more like children.

I believe buying a horse is much like becoming a parent to an adopted child. In order for my child and me to be safe and happy, I the adult must be one hundred percent in control. Like my child, my horse not only has physical needs, he has mental and emotional needs as well. Some of these needs are similar to humans some are very different. To have a positive resistance free relationship where my horse loves, trusts and respects me, I must know what is similar, what is different and have the knowledge to act or respond accordingly. If I don't know, it is my responsibility to find somebody to teach me and just like becoming an effective parent, I need to obtain this information *before* I buy my horse (adopt my child) and bring him home.

If my adoptive child was raised on the streets of a city and I took him to live in the country, he'd probably be lost and uncomfortable at first. He might be quite fearful of his new and unfamiliar environment filled with strange sights and sounds. Similarly people who buy a horse that has only lived at a stable are often surprised when they take their first trail ride and their horse becomes spooky. Conversely, if my new horse had been living in the country on a large horse farm, he might feel anxious and strange if his new home was a stall in a city or suburban barn.

A horses' natural environment is living with lots of other horses on thousands of acres of wide-open country. The closer his new home resembles this, the happier my horse will be. The less his new home is like this the more important it is for me (his owner/parent) to know this information so I can take the time to do everything to help him adjust and adapt. Have you ever moved to a new house, apartment, neighborhood or state? How long did it take until it felt like home?

Continued on page 34

Not only do I need to be knowledgeable about the nature of horses, I also need to understand that not all horses are the same. If I don't know some of these differences I won't be able to choose the right horse for my desired purpose. For example Thoroughbreds are different than Quarter Horses. They're usually bred with high energy to run fast or jump high. Quarter horses are usually bred to have calm and gentle dispositions; good for working with livestock and going on trail rides. This little bit of knowledge becomes enormously helpful when I'm buying a horse. It makes an enormous difference in choosing the most suitable horse for the discipline I want to participate in.

If you're not a horse trainer and what you desire is a confident, calm and gentle horse to take on long relaxed trail rides by yourself or with friends, a thoroughbred, like a retired race horse off the track, is probably not the best choice. Many of these horses have been bred and trained to run as fast as they can with almost no training on how to stop. In this situation a mature Quarter horse who has already been on many happy and successful trail rides would make a much better choice.

ABILITY:

Horseback riding is the simple act of not falling off your horse. To be able to ride a horse that is a willing partner, that is fun and non-resistant, on whom you feel safe whether you're at a show or on a trail, plus knowing you're riding a horse who is confident, reliable, trustworthy and looks to you as the leader (parent)...this is called good horsemanship. Knowing how to ride well is one part of good horsemanship.

Buying the right horse is like choosing the right dance partner. At least one of us needs to already know how to lead. Do I know enough to teach my horse how to positively respond to my requests? If I don't my horse will be very happy to lead and do what he thinks is a good idea – *hey, let's go for a run!* When a dance couple has no one who can lead, toes get stepped on. If I don't know how to lead, I cannot only get stepped on I can be seriously hurt.

Another common error when buying a horse is not knowing or telling the truth about the ability of either the horse or the rider. Horses are born already knowing how to do just about everything we want them to do – run, jump, stop, spin, etc. What they don't know is how to do it willingly when we asked them while we're sitting on their back. Someone has to teach them. They're called horse trainers. Humans are born knowing nothing about horsemanship. Someone has to teach them. They're called instructors or more accurately horsemanship teachers.

When it comes to matching the right horse to the right rider I find it helpful to rate both horse and human ability on a scale of 1 to 10. 1 represents a novice with little or no ability, 10 represents great expertise with professional or high level ability. All horses and humans are somewhere between 1 and 10. If I'm a level 3 and the horse I buy is a level 4, we are both going to struggle with each other. I don't know enough to control my horse and my horse doesn't know enough to feel safe with me on his back with my lack of knowledge.

If I'm a level 3 and my goal is to learn more, become a better rider and increase my horsemanship ability to a level 7, it would help to have at least a level 7 or 8 horse that I could learn from. A more experienced horse is usually more capable of tolerating my mistakes, which in turn can help build my confidence. That can't happen if the horse I buy has only a little more partnership ability than me. To buy the right horse I must know the truth about my level of ability. I must be honest with myself and not let my ego get in the way. I must also know the truth about the horse I'm thinking of buying. I must not base my decision on only superficial factors: "I bought *Sandy* because I always wanted a Palomino", "I bought *Buttercup* because I love the way she looks" etc.

AGE:

Age is a critical factor in the purchase of a horse. Just like humans, the ability of a horse is based on his experience. His experience is directly related to his age. A young horse (a 2 or 3 year old) will have very limited partnership ability and experience and therefore be more suited to an experienced horse person. An older horse (9 and up) will more likely have "been there done that" experience and be a better choice for a person with less horsemanship ability. A common and dangerous misconception in the purchase of a horse is a young or inexperienced human buying a young and inexperienced horse with the belief that "We'll grow together". This is the derivation of the old cowboy saying: "*Green on green makes black and blue*".

Buying a young horse because it's a better financial investment makes sense if you're a professional or very experienced horseperson. If you're not, you may not be around long enough to have your investment pay off. On the other hand, the age of a horse cannot always be taken at face value. Many older experienced horses can come with any number of negative experiences (baggage) and can be even more difficult and dangerous than a younger one. It's also possible to come across a young inexperienced horse that is exceptionally confident, gentle and intelligent. When considering age in choosing the best match, the key is to know and tell the truth about the ability of both you and your horse.

Like all big decisions, buying a horse can be filled with uncertainties. However making the best choice can be greatly enhanced by increasing your horsemanship knowledge and knowing the truth about you and your horses' abilities. And finally and most importantly, if you don't have the knowledge and are not sure about you or your horses' ability; *ask for help!* Buying a horse for most people is a dream come true. Matching the right horse with the right rider will not only reinforce the possibility of the dream being safe, fun and deeply rewarding, it will help to prevent it from turning it into a "nightmare." ©Tim Hayes 2011

Natural Horsemanship articles by Tim Hayes are at: www.hayesisforhorses.com

For Clinics, Classes or Private Sessions,

Contact Tim at: tim@hayesisforhorses.com or 800-959-3101