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Pre-Purchase Examinations for Horses

For most prospective horse owners, one of the most important investments that will ever be made in horse ownership is the Pre-Purchase Examination (PPE) by a veterinarian.

This is true even for a horse of minimal or no purchase price, since the considerable cost of maintaining a horse is independent of the purchase price; in fact, except at the very highest levels, the purchase price is an almost insignificant proportion of the life-time cost of ownership.

The PPE is a thorough examination of an animal prior to purchase. It is performed at the request of a potential buyer, and the medical record created is the property of the potential buyer. Ideally, the potential buyer should use the services of a veterinarian with whom they are familiar and trust. To avoid the appearance of bias or impropriety, the seller's veterinarian should not be selected for this task.

While a PPE cannot guarantee *any* particular level of future performance (or even of future basic health and soundness), nor the suitability of the horse for the intended use, it can be extremely useful in bringing to light pre-existing medical, behavioral, and conformational issues which can limit future health and performance.

A typical basic PPE performed by the veterinarians at Foothill Mobile Veterinary Service includes:

- Auscultation of heart, lungs and abdomen
- Dental/oral examination
- Ophthalmic examination
- Evaluation of conformation
- Palpation for abnormalities, especially of the limbs
- Hoof testers applied to all four hooves
- Evaluation of motion at a walk, trot and canter in soft and firm ground
- Flexion tests of all four limbs
- Brief neurological examination
- Evaluation of behavioral characteristics, if indicated
- Evaluation of previous medical history and records, if available
- Discussion with the prospective buyer of findings of the examinations, and of their potential significance

(See next page) over—>

Additional services which can be performed include radiographic studies, ultrasonography, complete blood count, blood chemistry, blood toxicology and drug screening, genetic testing, reproductive system examination, etc. These examinations involve additional cost, and so are usually only done if indicated by findings of the physical examination or history.

Arrangements should be made ahead of time if these additional services are expected irrespective of clinical findings.

Adequate conditions and facilities are important to a successful prepurchase examination. A quiet area is needed for conducting much of the physical examination. A sand arena/round pen as well as an area of firm ground large enough on which to longe a horse should be available. A darkened stall is ideal for performing the ophthalmic examination. If at all possible, a trailer should be available to demonstrate that the horse will load normally.

The horse should be recently trimmed and shod, but not within the past 3 or 4 days. All medical records should be available for review. Ideally, both the buyer and the seller should be present, and if the weather is extremely adverse, it may be necessary to postpone the examination.

Ideally also, the buyer and / or the buyer's trainer should have tried the horse one or more times to establish basic compatibility prior to the expense of the PPE.

The typical basic PPE takes about 60 - 90 minutes of time in direct examination and discussion, and costs \$240 / hour, in addition to the usual call fee of \$85, for a total cost of between \$325 and \$445, plus the cost of whatever additional studies may be indicated (usually none).

A written report of the findings of the PPE will be generated within a few days, and will be sent to the buyer; transmission of the report to the seller will be at the discretion of the buyer.