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## “Buying a Horse Part II”

Buying a horse is a lot like shopping for a used car. You need to check the service record, safety features and reliability before you take a test ride. This article outlines my red flag, green flag evaluation process of purchasing a new horse. The red flag is a negative warning and the green flag is a positive point for the horse. Pay close attention to any red flag warnings. They could compromise your safety. Whether I'm looking for a new police horse or a horse for a client, I use this method to look for the safest and most trustworthy horse I can find.

### **Where to Look For a Horse**

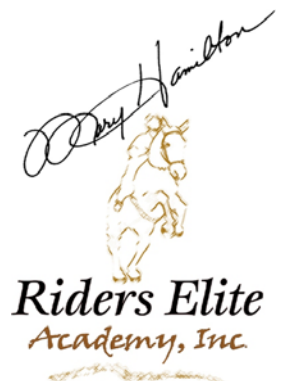
When looking for a horse, my first call is to several trainers, I trust. I know their training methods, the quality of horse they put out and that their descriptions of a horse are solid. They are invaluable resources.

Next, I will check newspaper, magazine and internet ads. I narrow my search by reading the text in the ad. I eliminate any horse with red flag terms. Ad descriptions like needs experienced or intermediate rider, good project horse, green broke, 30-days training, potential, good prospect, under four years old. All these red flag terms translate into additional training and expense.

### **Phone Screening Questions**

Horse sellers highlight the best qualities of their horses in their ads. The next step in the selection process is to call the seller. I ask these questions:

- Why are you selling this horse?
- How long have you owned it?
- Has the horse ever bucked, reared, kicked or bitten?
- How much training has the horse had?
- Who is the trainer?
- May I call them? (Call them for their opinion)
- Does the horse have any medical problems?





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- Who is the Vet?
- May I call him? (Call)
- Is he on any medicine or supplements?
- What are they?
- Who is the farrier?
- May I call him? (Call and ask if needs special shoeing)
- Has the horse ever foundered or coliced?
- How well does the horse tie, clip, load in the trailer and bathe?
- What type of riding do you do with the horse and how often?

### Evaluation

Bring your trainer and a friend to video tape the entire evaluation. By watching this video later, you will see things you missed. Begin by watching the horse in its natural environment. Watch the owner go into the pasture and catch the horse. Does the horse come willingly or is it hard to catch?

Red Flags	Green Flags
Horse has a cribbing strap on	Horse looks relaxed
Agitated, pacing fence line	Soft eye, partially closed
Hard to catch	Horse comes to owner
Needs grain to bribe	Horse stands quietly for haltering

Evaluate the horse's ground manners. Have the owner lead it around the arena in both directions. Good ground manners translate into a good foundation of training. Watch it being lead at walk, trot, halt and turn and evaluate it using the red flag, green flag method.





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Red Flags	Green Flags
Owner leads the horse with a stud chain over the nose	Horse walks calmly
Horse pulls or drags the owner around	Horse responds immediately to change of direction or transitions
Horse charges ahead or lags behind	Horse attentive to the handler's cues
Horse steps on the owner	Horse doesn't rub or invade handler's space
Horse pushes the owner with his head or body	

For a tying evaluation have the owner tie the horse in cross ties or a ring for five minutes.

Red Flags	Green Flags
Horse is nervous: eyes widen, nostrils flare, pawing	Horse stands quietly
Horse paces or won't stand still	Horse body posture is relaxed: lowered head
Horse pulls back	Doesn't move when you move around him

Have the owner pick up all four feet as the horse is tied.

Red Flags	Green Flags
Horse won't pick up feet	Horse picks up each foot on request
Horse kicks	Horse holds foot up
Horse swishes tail	





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Have the owner tack-up or saddle up in the equipment the horse normally uses

Red Flags	Green Flags
Excessive hardware and training devises for equipment	Mild bit and tack used
Difficulty getting the bit in the horse's mouth	Horse stands quietly and stays relaxed while being worked around
Horse swishes tail, pins ears, kicks at cinch or owner	Horse opens his mouth for the bit on his own

Have the owner ride horse first at the walk, trot and canter in both directions.

Red Flags	Green Flags
Horse walks off while being mounted	Horse stands while being mounted
Horse pins ears or swishes tails when cued to do something	Looks happy in his work, has a relaxed head carriage
Horse rushes or won't stop	Gaits appear steady and rhythmic
Needs repeated kicking or spurs to change gaits	Horse is quick to listen to the riders cues and change directions or gaits

Have the owner ride the horse outside the arena, around buildings and equipment.

Red Flags	Green Flags
Horse is nervous or anxious outside the arena	Horse is relaxed outside the arena
Horse bolts or runs away	Horse walks quietly
Horse spooks at everything or nothing	Horse may look at things but isn't frightened





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Either the potential buyer or I repeat the ground leading and riding exercises. When I ride, I look for qualities of obedience and a willingness to try. For example, when I ask a horse to sidepass or move laterally it really doesn't matter to me if he knows how to do it. You can teach that. I am looking for a horse that will listen and try for me. That's a green flag. A red flag is a horse that offers resistance (swishing of the tail, tensing, rushing) or ignores my cues.

Present something new to the horse and watch his reaction. Do this test with the horse free to move about the arena or paddock. I bring a long piece of flapping yellow police tape or a milk jug with small rocks in it to shake. I don't expect a bomb-proof reaction. I like to see a horse that is willing and curious.

<b>Red Flags</b>	<b>Green Flags</b>
Horse backs up or moves away from item	Horse looks at the new item
Horse refuses to look at item	After few moments relaxes and takes a step closer to inspect the item
Horse has an explosive spook reaction	Horse touches item with his nose

Have the owner load and unload the horse in his trail to determine how calmly and safely the horse goes in and out.

Go home, watch the video several times and write notes on each evaluation test. Schedule a pre-purchase exam with your veterinarian. Then make your decision on whether to purchase the horse or keep looking.

To find a "good" horse be prepared to look at many horses. Use your list of important needs to narrow your search. Buy the best, safest horse you can possibly afford. In the long run it's cheaper than training fees and the frustration of a poor selection choice.

