



The Pre-Purchase Examination

The purchase of any horse involves you in the taking of a risk. No horse is risk free and at best, we can aim to identify, assess and attempt to quantify that risk for you so that you can come to an informed decision as to whether or not to proceed with your intended purchase.

By the time that you have a pre-purchase examination (PPE) carried out on your behalf you will already have chosen that particular horse. In other words, considered colour, type, age, height, temperament and experience for the task will have been decided and you should have already concluded that the horse would be suitable for you, providing it is also suitable from a veterinary viewpoint. If you have doubts as to the horse's suitability for your equestrian needs then consult your trainer or riding adviser.

Ensure that you talk with the examining Vet to discuss your requirements before the examination, or be present at the time. **The choice of Vet is a personal one but as a rule it is better to instruct an experienced equine Vet, who may also be a horseman, rather than a horseman who may also be a Vet.**

Types of vetting

There is only one type of PPE that gives you the complete picture and that is the full five-stage examination. Other, shorter inspections leave out certain parts of the full list of examinations and may therefore not give you a full and complete picture of your chosen horse and may not be able to give you an accurate assessment on which to base your decision.

The five-stage vetting has evolved over the decades and it is intended to provide you with a cost-effective **professional evaluation and assessment of a particular horse's suitability to perform a certain task.** It is an examination carried out on a given day and the opinion relates to that day; no long term warranty or guarantee of future health can be expected, although obviously the Vet will advise you about the long term implications of any abnormality detected.

The examination

The examination can take the best part of two hours and there are certain basic requirements that need to be in place for the examination to be fair:

- A dark stable in which to examine the eyes
- An area of hard level ground on which the horse may be walked and trotted in-hand. This should preferably be concrete or tarmac
- An area in which the horse may be safely ridden, including the ability to do a hard canter or gallop as required
- In addition, the ability to lunge or trot in a circle on the hard may be of considerable benefit

If the vendor (the person selling the horse) does not have such facilities, consider moving the examination to a different location. The actual examination usually takes place in a set routine according to personal choice and includes the following stages:

- Initial examination in the stable. General inspection and assessment including eyes, heart, lungs, mouth, ageing, etc.
- Outside, standing square on concrete, to observe the whole horse. Then walk and trot in hand in a straight line. Turning and backing. Probably flexion tests and possibly lunging or trotting on a hard circle.
- Examination under saddle. This is to include mounting, walking, trotting, cantering and probably galloping depending on the type and fitness of the horse. This exercise should be both in circles and in more extended straight lines.



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- While the horse cools down from exercise a more thorough and detailed examination of his hooves, limbs and body noting and assessing any abnormalities. The formal identification may also take place at this stage.
- Final trot up, which may include further turning, lungeing on hard ground and repeat flexion tests.
- The taking of a blood sample for future medication analysis (such as phenylbutazone or sedatives).
- Discussion with the purchaser of the findings and production of a written report.

Limitations and extra tests

The PPE is a clinical examination and does not routinely involve laboratory or diagnostic tests. It does not include a test for pregnancy, unless requested. The ageing of horses is notoriously inaccurate and comprehensive research over the last few years has indicated that the previously accepted methods of ageing a horse by his teeth may be quite inaccurate, even in experienced hands. Therefore, whenever possible, request the documentary proof of a horse's age. X-rays are not necessarily the black and white answer that everybody hopes for and they may, indeed, even complicate rather than clarify the situation. Unless specifically requested by the insurers or client the decision whether to x-ray or not is best left to the examining Vet based on his clinical findings. Routine pre-purchase x-rays are usually not nearly as helpful as expected. Similar arguments can also be made for routine endoscopy, ultrasound scanning and blood testing for health, but discussion with the examining Vet before and after the vetting, will enable you to obtain the most appropriate advice for your circumstances and your horse.

We blood sample every horse, at every pre-purchase examination, for storage and possible later testing for the presence of any medication that might have affected the examination. If a vendor refuses this, then we advise against purchase

Warranties

Warranties are a matter between the vendor and the purchaser, and the purchaser should obtain a warranty from the vendor as to vices, suitability, and behaviour when shod or boxed, etc. The only satisfactory confirmation of a pony's exact height is a current height certificate and, in cases of doubt, this should be obtained before purchase.

Conclusions

Communication between Vet and client is the key so that both sides know the intentions and limitations of the examination and can therefore come to the most satisfactory conclusion, with the purchaser receiving cost effective advice to enable them to make an informed decision as to whether or not to proceed with the purchase of their chosen horse.

Note that a vetting is not the same as an insurance examination. It is quite possible to "pass" a vetting yet later to find that insurance proves difficult because of the findings. The vetting assesses a horse's suitability for the purchaser's intended use while the insurance companies are more interested in making exclusions on anything that is not strictly normal. **It is always wise to obtain insurance cover before purchase, rather than afterwards, in case any exclusion might change your opinion as to whether or not to buy.**

Adapted from the British Equine Veterinary Association guidelines on the pre-purchase examination.