

Smart Gaited Horse Shopping

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Whether you're looking for your first gaited horse or a new one, using common sense, wisdom and simply listening to your own gut instincts can sure pay off in having a good experience in obtaining the horse you truly desire. This adventure is also a great opportunity to learn and expand your knowledge base to learn more about all the gaited breeds available and what may best suit your needs. The sales prices can span a wide range; however, a more expensively priced horse does not necessarily mean it's a better horse than one that is less expensive. It pays off to be patient and look at as many horses as your time and resources allow.

When I am looking for a horse, I place value on a horse's temperament and completeness of training over the pedigree. Having registration papers on a horse may be necessary if you are going to show at breed specific shows or use the horse for breeding purposes. Even for the registered horse, temperament, amount of handling, and quality of training are first priorities. The color of a horse should not be the first priority. However, if color is an important factor, you may have to expand your search to find all the desired elements.



People often ask me which breed of gaited horse is best. My advice is to ride as many of the gaited breeds as possible to experience their gaits first hand. Although they are all described as smooth gaited compared to their non-gaited breed counterparts, the different intermediate or soft gaits feel very different and your own body will tell you which gait feels best for you. The same breeds doing the same gait can have slight variations in how they feel due to different conformational influences. Another consideration is what

we term "how they are "wired" which typically denotes breed specific temperament traits. However, this can be an individual trait from horse to horse and not always breed specific.

Being an educated consumer will protect you from possibly purchasing the wrong horse for your situation. If you do not have the knowledge base to make an informed purchase, find an experienced horse person to help. A second set of eyes is always helpful when looking at horses for sale. You have probably heard the old adage that the cost of the horse is the least expensive part of the investment. The cost of acquiring the wrong horse, an unsound horse, or unhealthy horse can end up being a large unexpected investment, not to mention everything you will need to equip, keep and transport the horse!!

Recognizing good conformation in any horse, not just gaited horses, is a good knowledge base to have before you embark on your horse purchase adventure. Also, do your home work and educate yourself to know and recognize the various intermediate gaits. Just because the horse may be a Tennessee Walking Horse does not mean it can perform the signature gait of running walk or that the proper gaits have been developed in training. A wide variety of gaits can be seen in all the gaited breeds. If a buyer is interested in a specific gait, knowing and recognizing that gait on the ground and under saddle is important. It is common for a seller to describe their horse as smooth gaited but not actually know what gait the horse is performing.

First Impressions and Introductions: What is your first impression of the seller when inquiring about the horse they are selling? Sometimes it's not what they say but what they don't say or how they word the information. Let the seller tell you about the horse first without saying what you are looking for specifically. Do not provide any personal information about yourself to the seller other than what you have to offer in care and your experience as a rider to determine if this will be a good match. More information can be shared later once a buyer knows and feels more comfortable with a seller.

A seller does have the right to refuse the sale if they do not feel the horse will receive proper housing, care, and treatment or the horse is not a good match with the potential buyer. A horse's current owner may have a considerable amount of emotional attachment, proper training and time invested in a horse. A good match in the sale of any horse is as important to you as well as the seller. The seller is also interested in maintaining a good reputation if selling horses is their line of business. Buying a horse is very different

from buying a car. A horse is a living being with feelings and needs—physical, emotional and mental. Its wellbeing and success are of utmost importance.

When you schedule an appointment to see a horse in person, the first impression is very important. You should make mental notes that include the cleanliness/safety of a facility. Is the horse friendly and mannerly? Is the hoof care up to date and are the hooves in good condition? Does the horse look healthy in weight and quality of hair coat? A horse offered for sale should be ready for sale and presented by a seller in a proper manner and condition. Take a camera for photos and/or filming because you can miss a lot or overlook important things when you are caught up in the process of evaluating the horse. Photos and video are useful evaluation tools you can review later without distractions. If a potential buyer is unable to see a horse in person then a complete video should be made available.

Always be respectful while on a seller's property. Sometimes it is best to leave children at home for the first viewing of a potential horse. It is common to sign a liability release of injury while on a seller's property. Do not be alarmed in being asked to do so—this is a standard and professional necessity today and widely expected in the business.

Myths: There are a lot of gaited myths floating around and have been for many years. If you know what these myths are, you will be better able to judge a seller's horsemanship skills and accuracy of information. Some of these myths include: you have to use a gaited bit, you have to use a gaited saddle, you must lean back while placing your legs forward to ride to get the horse to gait; you have to lift the head and hold it up; gaited horses can't canter; or gaited horse don't back up. In reality, a gaited horse is a horse first and foremost. Good horsemanship and completeness of training is the same on all breeds. The main difference is that gaited horses have a different intermediate gait other than the trot.

What to Ask: When asking for specific information, be direct and clear. Then listen for what is said, what is not said or how it is said by the seller.

Registration Papers: If a horse is being sold as registered with papers, the papers should be available to inspect. Be sure the papers match the horse. When a horse is purchased, the registration papers and transfer of ownership should be current and signed over to you when you take possession of the horse. Check that the current owner you are purchasing the horse from is listed on the papers.

Health: A vet check by a vet you know and trust or one who has no vested interest in the sale of the horse or the seller as a client is a good practice. Vet exams can vary in completeness depending on what the buyer is willing to pay. Leg X rays are a good investment for all horses and more so with those started rather young with lots of riding time while still in the developmental years, which is common. Check the horse yourself or have an experienced friend check for any body soreness. Have the teeth checked to ensure the age of an un-papered horse and to identify any dental issues. When purchasing for reproduction, get a reproduction exam done on mares and stallions. Ask if a gelding is a cryptorchid.

Questions to ask: Date and type of last Vaccinations?

Date of dental work? Parasite control? Hoof care? Has the horse ever colicked? Has the horse ever had any surgeries? Is the horse sound of body and mind? Is the Coggins current? Has the horse had any illnesses? Has the horse had past injuries? Get an explanation for any scars. Are the eyes clean and clear? Is the breathing normal with no nasal discharge, while standing and when ridden? Has the horse ever been lame? What is the horse's current diet? Does the horse have any allergies?

Vices: Ask if a horse has any bad habits or vices in general, and then ask specifically: Does the horse nip or bite? Kick or strike? Rear? Bolt? Buck? Wind suck? Stall walk? Crib? Weave?

Training, Handling, General Manners: What age was the horse started under saddle? Has the horse any professional training, and how long? Level of rider needed? Stalls well? Fences well? Gets along with other horses when ridden and free in turnout? Will ride away from other horses? Ride alone? Barn sour? Ring sour? Trail ridden, and how much? Accepts a bath well? Does the horse tie and tie well or pull back when tied? Does the horse load, and travel willingly in a trailer? Cross water willingly? Has the horse ever been shown? Accepts the bit well? Accepts the saddle well? Easy to catch and halter? Picks up hooves well, front and back, and accepts trimming or shoeing?

In the marketplace, the Buyer should always beware. Just because the Seller provides an answer or information, does not mean that the Buyer has to accept the seller's response as the gospel truth. The seller may be inclined to tell you what he thinks you desire in a horse or what he thinks you want to work on or what type of training he thinks you should pursue. Ultimately, these are your decisions—not the seller's. The seller should provide or demonstrate answers to any of the questions above.

Extra Tidbits: A good practice is to ask the seller to always ride the horse first and demonstrate the horse's skills. If you decide to ride the horse after the seller, I recommend wearing a helmet. Observe the horse in its pasture situation and /or stall behaviors. Don't feel you have to buy a horse after one visit, despite any pressure the seller may apply. A couple of visits, at a minimum, is a good practice if a particular horse looks like a good prospect. Take your time and think it through well before making any commitment to buy. Conversely, be considerate and don't leave a seller hanging—indicate you are interested or that this horse will not meet your needs. Don't make a commitment unless you intend to follow through. If you make an appointment to see a horse, follow through or give the seller advance notice that you cannot make the appointment. Do not be a "no show". Sometimes politics, competition and rumors keep a buyer away from a good prospect. Go see the horse yourself and don't fall victim to some of these human traits that could get in the way of finding the right horse.

Before embarking on a gaited horse shopping spree, make your own list specific to your needs and desires in a new horse to help you focus. Shopping for gaited horses can be so much fun with the gaited horse community having so many wonderful breeds to choose from. Happy shopping!