

# HORSES

The Hobby You Can Hug!



By Colleen Pace,  
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What You Should Know Before  
Enrolling In Lessons or Buying a Horse



Dear New Horse Enthusiast ~

This booklet is written as a brief introduction to horse riding and ownership in the United States. We horse owners comprise a truly huge and diverse population; representing a wide variety of life-styles. As a group, we own dozens of different horse breeds, and enjoy our time spent with them in many different ways.

For some of us, horseback riding is an amateur or professional sport. For the rest of us, it is a simple and rewarding hobby. This booklet answers some of the most often asked questions about the sport and hobby of horses; and it describes the foundation from which each of us found ... our first horse.



Sincerely,

Colleen Pace  
A Horse In My House

[www.ahorseinmyhouse.com](http://www.ahorseinmyhouse.com)



## There are Four Types of Stables

Public Trail Riding Stables

Riding Schools

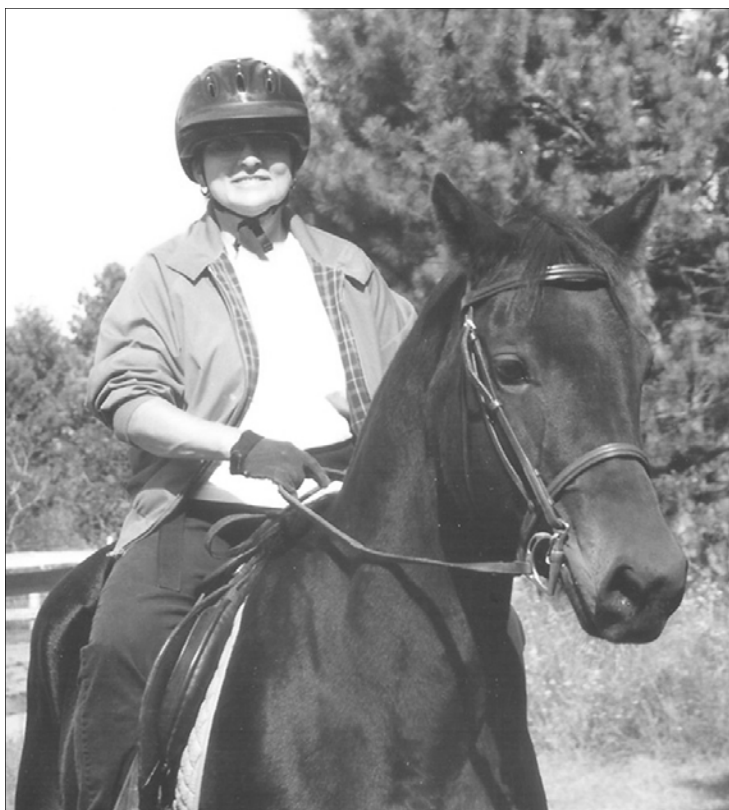
Boarding Stables

Competition Stables

**Public trail-riding stables** care for dozens of horses who are ridden by many people. By necessity, these horses must have extremely quiet dispositions; and be willing to tolerate a fair amount of jostling by inexperienced riders. At most public stables, riders are required to keep their horses at a walk and in single file. For this reason, there will always be a few disappointed customers who claim their horse was boring. But, walking in single file lessens the chance that one horse might get into a kicking snit with another, or decide to run back to the psychological safety of the barn - either of which could result in serious human injury.

To best ensure safe and enjoyable rides, most public trail-riding stables offer basic horse handling tips before each ride-out; and position seasoned trail guides at both ends of the line.

If you find a local stable that cares well for both you and its horses; and if a quiet ride down a familiar trail keeps you happy, then you could return to that stable often.



Keepers Fancy Miss, American Morgan Horse, © C. Pace

Sara HHA, Haflinger Draft Pony, © C. Pace



**Riding schools** offer riding and horse care instruction to non-horse-owning (and new-horse-owning) beginners, without the pressure to purchase a horse. A good novice-level school introduces a variety of horse breeds, and more than one style of riding. Their horses have the temperament of well-adjusted family pets. They are not as quiet as riding-stable horses; but also not as ambitious as high-level competition horses. You will gain the most comprehensive and enjoyable introduction to this hobby if your first lessons are on skill-appropriate horses, and your instructor is not strongly biased toward a particular breed or riding style.

Many riding schools allow you to enjoy horse riding and handling at their facility for as long as you'd like - even years - without the pressure of ownership. Most of them allow you to use their horses to compete in schooling shows. Should you eventually decide to purchase a horse, these lesson professionals have extensive contacts in the local horse community. Their relationships with horse breeders, trainers, and owners, combined with their memberships in various horse clubs, can help you find a suitable first horse. And, many riding schools also offer boarding, should you want to continue your hobby with people you know.

**Boarding stables** offer an alternative to keeping your horse at home. They can house as few as two, or more than a hundred horses. Some cater to families, some just to adults, and some to owners who share an interest in a particular activity – like trail riding, jumping fences, or driving buggies. The levels of service offered by boarding stables also vary – from your having to bring in your own feed and do your own chores, to your paying one flat fee and relinquishing all expenses and physical care to the stable owner and staff.



Boarding stables should make you feel at home.  
SummerBreeze's Storm, American Morgan Horse  
showing in an English Pleasure Class

**Competition stables** cater to horse owners who perform under the mentorship of professional horse trainers. They usually specialize in one breed of horse and just one or two styles of riding. They offer one-stop shopping for horse purchase, boarding, training, instruction, show grooming, transportation, and show coaching.

There is a surprisingly wide variety of riding activities available to us competitive horse enthusiasts. And, even though there is a perfect-fit for every horse owner, it would be by sheer luck that the competition stable closest to your home just happened to offer the horse breed and riding style that would be most rewarding for you. It would make good sense to learn to ride and care for a horse while observing some of the clubs, competitions, shows and other equestrian activities before investing in a long-term commitment.

## There are Purebred and Grade Horses

Purebred horses are registered with their respective breed associations. If you were to purchase a purebred, it would make good sense to join at least the state club, and possibly the national association. You will find supportive friends there, and avenues for enjoying your horse.

You could, on the other hand, purchase a grade horse - a mixed breed, like a mutt dog - who does not belong to a particular breed association. Owners of grade horses join clubs that are activity based rather than breed based because, as much as many of us enjoy the solitude of our barns and horses, most of us also want horse friends. Unlike dogs who sit on our laps or at our feet while we watch television, our horses are in the barn, waiting for us to come out and play with them. There's something about being connected to other horse owners that makes horse ownership more rewarding – friends who understand horses when ours is sick; or can care for our horse when we are out of town; or someone who simply understands and shares the therapeutic joy we find in barn chores.

## There are Many Horse Breeds

Draft horses, saddle horses, and ponies comprise the three main groups of horses.

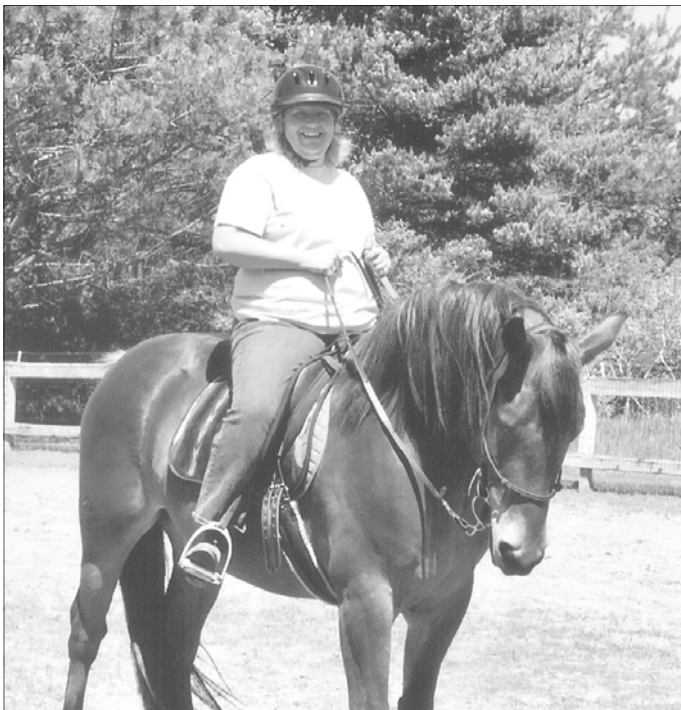
**Draft horses**, also called heavy horses, are large and strong enough to pull very big wagons. One place you will find them is giving hayrides at apple orchards. The most well-known of these is the Clydesdale, because the Budweiser® Beer Company has made them celebrities. Other popular draft breeds include the Belgian, the Shire, and the Percheron.

In the photo at the right, compare the size of this woman's head and body with that of her dapple gray Percheron.

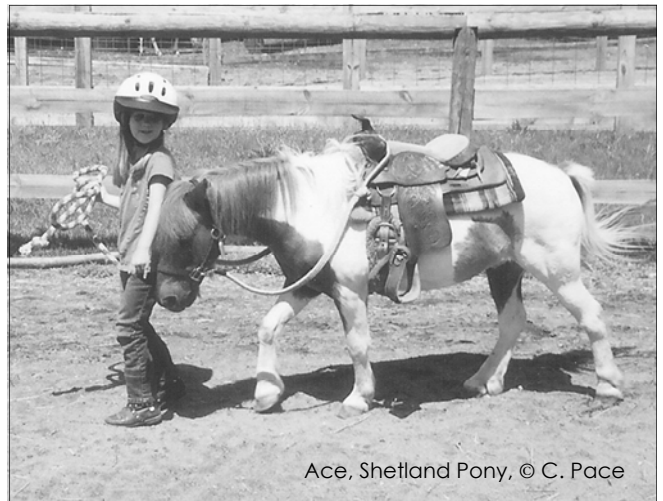


Riverbank Rose, Percheron, © C. Pace

Donka, a good grade horse, © C. Pace



**Ponies** comprise the third group. Ponies are not baby horses; they are small horses. They are very small when they are born; and they are still small when they are old. Popular pony breeds include the Shetland, the Welsh, Pony of the Americas (POA's), and the Miniature Horse; but there are many other pony breeds you might enjoy investigating. In the photo at the right, this devoted pony enthusiast is just seven years old.



Ace, Shetland Pony, © C. Pace

A good place to find information about horse and pony breeds is online at [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org). While on this free Internet encyclopedia site, search "List of Horse Breeds." From there, click on a highlighted breed, where you will be taken to a second page of information. At the bottom of that page, you will find *External Links*. The national breed association should be listed; and a click will take you to their site. In addition to listing local breeders, most associations offer promotional materials including brochures, posters, and DVD's.

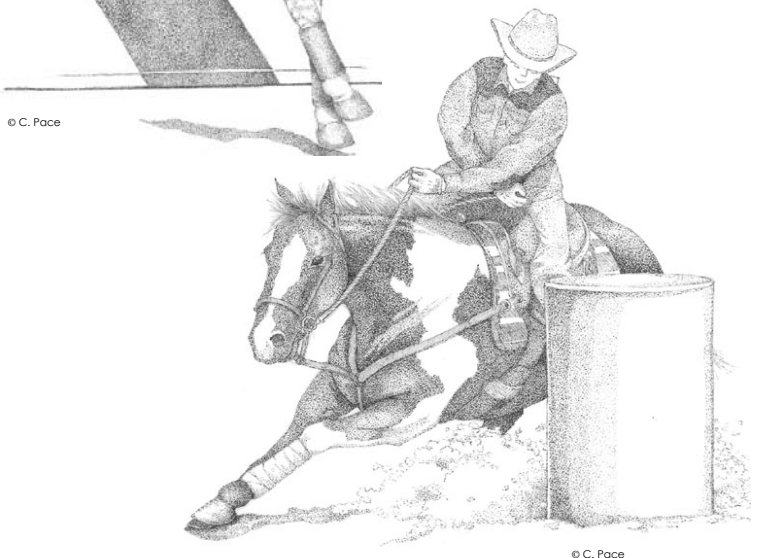
## There is a Variety of Riding Styles

Riding styles are as varied as the people who ride. Some riders are attracted to precision; others to speed; and still others to pizzazz. Some are task and goal oriented, while others are not. And, while most horses can be trained to do most horse things, some breeds are surely better at certain things than others. It would make good sense to not purchase a horse until you've researched the wide variety of activities we horse people enjoy with our animals.

You may have heard the terms, English and Western riding. There are also sub-categories of these two riding styles. The best way to describe the difference between English and Western is by remembering that saddles were invented in order for us to use horses for transportation. Let's compare saddled horses to modern-day vehicles....

English saddles can be compared to a sedan - a get-around-town car. They were originally developed in England; although they are manufactured all over the world today. Western saddles can be compared to a pick-up truck; or even a motor home. They were invented to carry riders with cargo over long distances. They are called '*western*' because they were used to explore early western America, and to work cows on western ranches. Over time a third genre of saddle was developed for cross-country endurance riding. It's heavier than an English saddle but lighter than a Western. In car terms, it is a cross-over.

Beyond this basic description, there are very specific saddles for very specific styles of riding. You can ride competitively or non-competitively in either an English or Western saddle. It would be a gift to yourself to dabble with both before choosing a favorite.



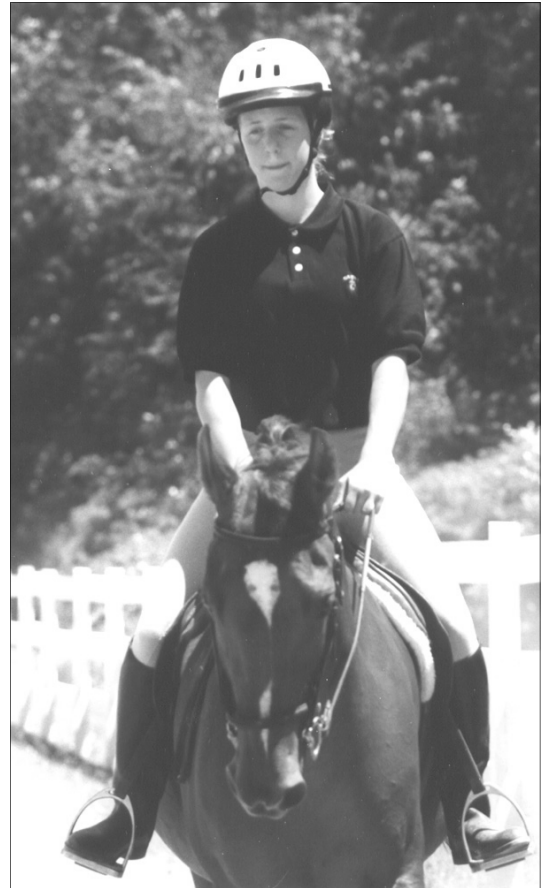
## You Can Enter Competitions (or Not)

You would be surprised to know how many equestrian activities are taking place all around you all the time. From today on, you won't help but notice how often you pass horse trailers on the expressway. We're always going somewhere; and always with friends.

### Competitive Riding

Many of us horse owners enjoy objective (judged by measurement) or subjective (judged by opinion) equestrian competition. Examples of objective competition include racing, jumping fences, running obstacle courses, roping cows, and completing long distance endurance rides. Subjective competition takes place in a show ring where a judge decides which horses look most like their respective breed standard, and/or perform according to breed standards.

There is an incredible variance in performance standards among the many different horse breeds; indicative of the incredibly wide variety of things we do with our horses. Moreover, there is a range of competition venues. Breed circuits cater to owners of registered purebred horses. Open circuits cater to a mix of purebred, cross-bred, and grade horses. Shows are A, B, or C-rated depending on size and prestige. When riding on the breed/A-circuit, you might relinquish all or some of your horse training, conditioning, and show prep to your professional trainer; while on the 4-H and open circuit, you usually retain much or all of the responsibility. This paragraph is not meant to confuse; but it suggests that you should know what you want and what you are paying for before you write your check.



Oakview Arwen, Morgan mare, © AARS

### Non-Competitive Riding

Well, then, there's the rest of us. Many of us horse owners have no interest in measuring our horse against the abilities of others, or against a predetermined standard. We may still take riding and horse care lessons, or enlist the services of a horse trainer; but our goal is simply safe and happy horsemanship. And, there are plenty of riding opportunities available to us.



Andy Jaskiewicz and Stormy, © C. Pace

We might restore an antique buggy; and then drive our horse in local parades. We might volunteer to mend bridges and campsites along our state's horse trail system; and then spend summer weekends leisurely riding the trails. We might take group riding lessons just to share an arena with friends; and then all go to lunch together. Whether we board our horses or keep them at home, we always manage to have friends around to share both riding and other horse related activities. Many of us horse-at-home people just like to putts around our barns and yards; spending time with our families and our animals.



## There's a Difference Between Teachers and Trainers

Instructors teach humans to ride horses; while trainers train horses to perform for humans. "Natural" horse professionals place greater emphasis on the relationship between the two.

There are two primary riding instructor certification associations in the United States – the American Riding Instructor Association (ARIA), and the Certified Horsemanship Association (CHA). There are also college equestrian programs that include a teaching tract. Certification does not guarantee good teaching; nor does not being certified indicate poor teaching. However, certification suggests that the instructor values teaching and learning enough to pursue the certification; and that some independent group, through testing and observation, is suggesting she is a good teacher. Furthermore, it is more likely that a certified instructor has participated in classes specifically related to rider safety.



Angel, Paso Fino - Morgan cross. © C. Pace

Outside of nominal certifications in natural horsemanship programs, there is no certification for horse trainers. You will rely on personal referrals and your own observations. There are two schools of thought among trainers - partly based on whether the trainer considers horses a commodity or a companion animal. You can observe training philosophies, albeit *extremely* polarized, by watching the Disney® movie, "Spirit – Wild Horse of the Cimarron." In this animated story, cavalry officers practice *obedience through intimidation*; while a young Native American develops a partnership based on trust and two-way communication. In the real world, most horse handlers, having accumulated a life-bag of mixed information from a great number of people, fall somewhere in between. Before entrusting your horse to a professional, confirm that their ethical standards regarding the physical and emotional well-being of your horse aligns with your own.

### Private vs. Group Instruction

There are good reasons to invest in riding lessons. One would be to simply enjoy the hobby. Another would be to get the inside scoop on a variety of safety issues. Still another would be to gain advanced skills for ownership, and possibly competition.

Like other recreation providers – karate, dance, skating, and gymnastics – most riding schools offer both private and group instruction. You will make better use of your money if you take your first lessons privately. Unlike dance or karate, the instructor must keep her eyes on more than just her students. She has to watch all the horses, too. When communication channels are open between the instructor and riders, the instructor and horses, each rider and horse, and among the horses themselves, there is not much attendance left for clear and consistent instruction. Also, horseback riding requires physical strength and balance, combined with some measure of assertive leadership. No two people are alike in their ability to address these issues while mounted on a thousand pound animal.



Pony Express, Welsh Pony, © C. Pace

When you reach an intermediate level of riding, whether you remain in private instruction or switch to group lessons depends on your goals. If you are serious about competition, then private coaching is essential. If, on the other hand, your goal is to simply enjoy your horse in the company of friends, then having a group instructor coordinate your ride time makes your hobby more consistent and so- cial – like enrolling in an aerobics class even though you have the workout DVD's at home.

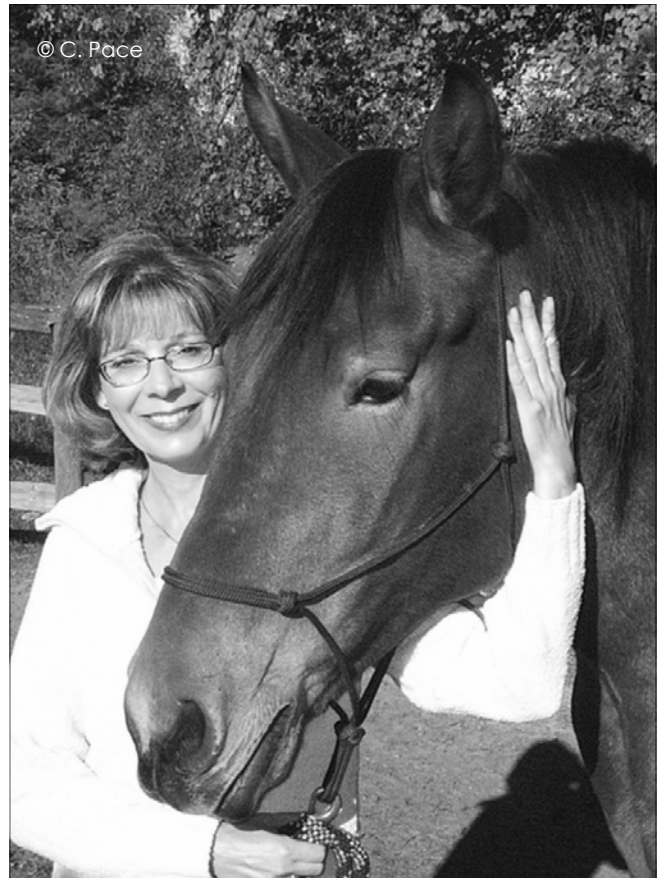


## It is Important to Understand the Nature of the Horse

Humans and dogs are predators. Horses, like deer and rabbits, are prey. When startled, predators tend to stop, listen, and think. Prey animals tend to run (or freeze, then run); and if they can't run, they panic. For this reason, a solid relationship begins with your horse accepting you as a dependable and trustworthy leader. This is easier for some horses than others; partly because of the

nature with which they were born, and partly because of their prior experiences with humans. Some horses have had the pleasure of a fair and consistent life before meeting you; while others have been forced to tolerate (sometimes many) inconsistent or un-trustworthy handlers.

Also, like humans, some horses develop inconsistent personalities; meaning they might behave one way for one person and differently for another. A simple example is the way middle or high school students might respect their primary teacher, but test their boundaries with a substitute. It's not uncommon for a horse who is apparently well-behaved for his professional trainer to test his new owners upon arrival at his new home. It is for this reason that most horse professionals recommend older horses for first-time owners. There is the belief that consistency - good or bad - comes with age.



In addition to one-on-one conversations with your riding instructor, you can find a great deal of information related to horse behavior, horse handling and training, and human-horse relationships in horse magazines, books, and DVD's; and on cable television.

If you decide to purchase, choose a horse who was raised in an environment and cared for in a manner similar to your intended purpose. A horse raised and trained entirely in stalls and arenas may be comfortable with banging doors, back-firing tractors, and blaring show-ring speakers; but might become skittish when ridden in wide open fields. In reverse, a horse raised in large open pastures and ridden on long trails would likely become depressed if confined to a stall and asked to perform repetitive arena patterns. If you require a child-safe horse, be sure that she or he has had ample exposure to the noise, movement, and unpredictability of kids.

## Each of Us Needs to be Personally Responsible

Horse ownership requires financial, physical, and emotional maturity. With regard to finances, stables develop their program policies with constant care of the horses in mind. Be sure you understand contracts before committing. Then, always pay according to schedule, and on time.

With regard to physical safety, most advanced riders consider horse handling a rugged, adventurous outdoor sport. No matter how gentle the horse or pony, we all need to understand the inherent risk when enjoying these very large animals. Safety rules are not just for wimps and whiners. None of us wants to be responsible for someone else getting hurt; so we all need to be responsible for learning, remembering, and acting safely when handling horses. A solid understanding of the nature of prey animals; and the human-horse predator-prey relationship should become an inherent, near-subconscious part of all of us.

Finally, we have a great emotional responsibility to these truly rewarding companion animals. Opinions vary widely about how much or how little horses understand. As with all animal studies, equine intelligence - their ability to have conscious thought - is open to ongoing research. There was a time when people who spoke about animals as if they were humans were criticized for *anthropomorphizing*. And, today, most people still agree that animals don't 'think' like humans. But, with each passing decade we hear that criticizing word - *anthropomorphize* - less. It's not because we are learning that animals think like humans; but rather because vast amounts of research is showing that many 'human' traits are also found in many other animals.

There is a cliché, "Never put an excitable rider on an excitable horse;" and some truth in, "When opposites attract, the couple is complete." For this reason, we should invest great effort in our search for the horse that is just-right for us. Some horses are leaders and others are followers; some are thinkers and others are movers; some prefer an active, engaging life and others are content to be, well, content. Some horses need a single, long-term owner-companion; while others are comfortable with multiple care-giving humans.

Foster children will tell us that everyone deserves a stable home. We know that necessary family relocations uproot children from their school districts; and that animals in their natural environs build new territories when they outgrow their family circle. But, too often, horses are bought and sold repeatedly simply because their use no longer serves their owner's intended purpose. Sometimes, the repeated buy-sell cycle in-and-of-itself compromises a horse's ability to communicate with humans. And, this can prove dangerous for both. No one imagines their dog living with a half-dozen different families during its lifetime; but few think twice about the plight of the horse.

### The Best Way to Buy a Horse



Horses can be purchased through newspaper and internet ads, from breeders, and through auctions. But, wouldn't it be nice if you actually had the pleasure of knowing your horse before you became responsible for it? Wouldn't it also be a good thing if you were already a friend of the person who was turning this horse's life over to you? There is a way you can....

If you're not sure of your favorite breed or riding style, take lessons from a general-interest instructor while you study your options. Once you decide, or if you already know, go ahead and join the club or clubs that cater to your passion. Individual membership in most state-level clubs is less than \$50/year. Then, tell the club secretary you want to volunteer to help at club events. It's the first step toward friendship. For the cost of dues, you can surround yourself with people who own horses just like the one you want. One of those club members is most likely raising and caring for the very horse you will someday own; and the rest of them can serve as character references for both the horse and the seller.

## Long-Term Riding Lessons



We'd like to close with a thought about long-term, non-competitive riding lessons for both adults and kids. Parents bemoan, "We've tried soccer, dance, karate, whatever; but our child is only interested in horses." With no readily available explanation, and with no disrespect for family and friends, for many of us "horse crazy" people, these animals fill an indefinable void – they ground us. Within a couple months of lessons, you will realize that the value is not just the relationship with the horse. For a child to have an instructor's supportive and undivided attention - an adult outside of school and the family who is equally enamored with horses and happy to talk about them - can be a very good thing. The same is true for

adults. You're getting more than your money's worth when your instructor becomes your friend. Where you once thought you were paying for lessons; you soon realize you are cooperatively supporting the care of these wonderful four-legged companion animals - with none of the responsibility for ownership.

Research has shown that one-in-three families include a person born with an intrinsic attraction to horses. Clearly, in today's busy urban and suburban families, there are 'horse needs' not being met! So, for hundreds of thousands of families, many years of riding lessons with no intention to purchase is a reasonable alternative. The horse is on schedule, the cost is known and consistent, and the rider develops a familiarity with the barn and a sense of ownership with the horse. All while the family goes about their school and work, soccer games and family vacations. No veterinary calls in the middle of the night, no hay baling, no stall cleaning, no fence repair, no trucks, trailers, or land taxes. A great number of people eventually go on to lease or purchase horses. For the rest of us, there are riding schools.



I hope you found the information provided in this booklet worthy for your purposes. All sorts of sports and hobbies compete for our time and money; and each of us has to find a way to make our avocations fit with our vocations and our families. Horses are a big responsibility, but so is much else in life. I encourage you to find a horse-owning friend and consider whether there is time in your life for . . .



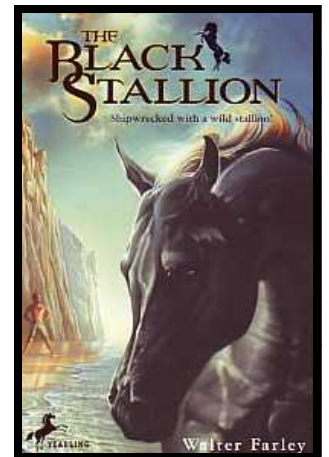
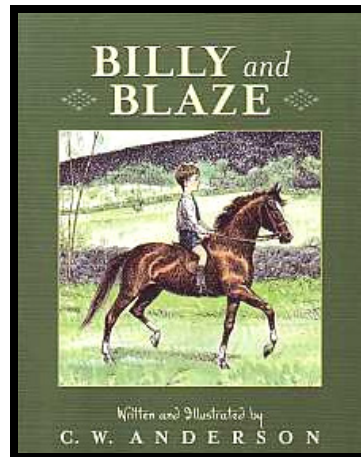
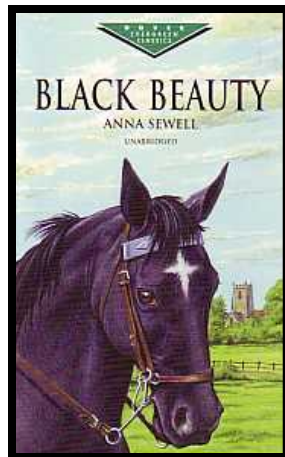
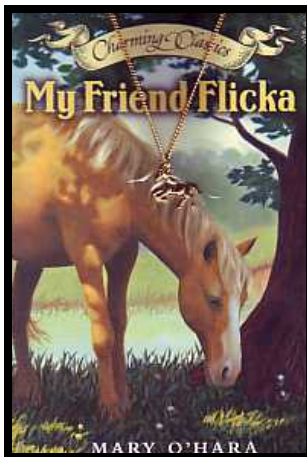
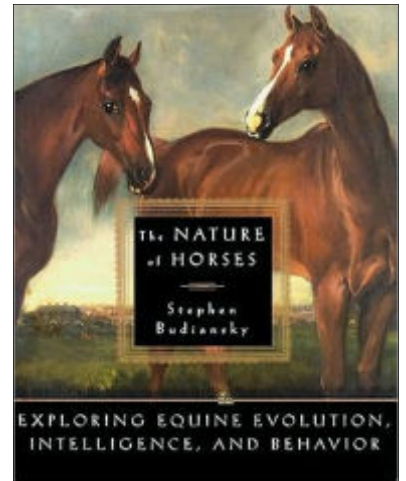
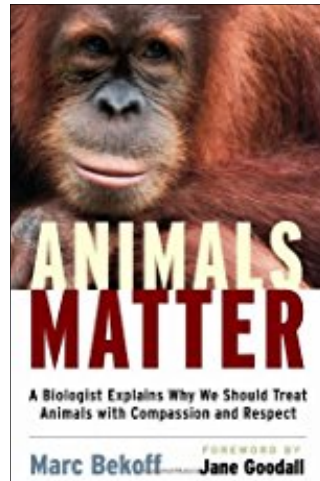
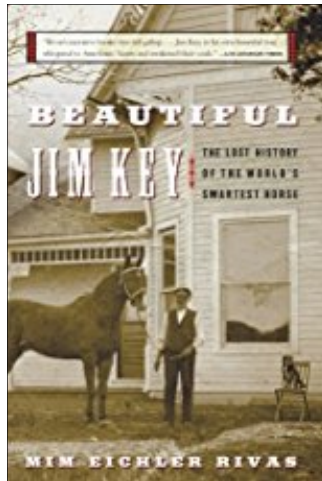
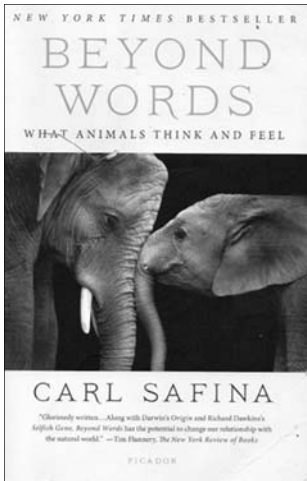
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