



## What to Expect from a Pre-Purchase Examination

Ready to make an offer on the horse of your dreams and ride off into the sunset? Or perhaps go win that championship ribbon you've been pursuing for so long? Wait – before signing the check, call a veterinarian for a pre-purchase examination.

Why spend several hundred to more than a thousand (depending on the number of radiographs) on a pre-purchase examination, especially if you're familiar with the horse and its owner or trainer? Because in most cases, horses are sold "buyer beware," meaning once the horse is in your hands, so are its problems. What you thought was going to be the horse of your dreams has the potential to be your worst health-care nightmare.

We asked Megan Green, DVM, Manager, Equine Large Animal Veterinary Services, Merial, about what to expect from a pre-purchase examination.

"It's extremely important to choose an objective equine veterinarian to do the exam," says Dr. Green. "It should be someone who has never treated the horse and doesn't know the seller."

A good option is your own veterinarian. If your veterinarian is unable to conduct the examination without being biased or is too far away for it to be feasible, you can contact the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) for a list of qualified veterinarians in the area.

Whether your own veterinarian conducts the examination or you hire another one, make it clear what you intend to do with the horse. Let the veterinarian know if it's going to be lightly trail ridden or competing. Is it going to tote the grandchildren around when they come to visit or do you envision winning a title in amateur western pleasure riding? Knowing the horse's job will help the veterinarian know if any areas require special attention.

If possible, you should attend the examination. It will be helpful for you to hear and see firsthand how the horse responds to the veterinarian and learn what he or she uncovers.

During the first portion of the exam, the veterinarian will simply look over the horse thoroughly, assessing:

- overall body and coat condition
- the horse's stance, attitude and demeanor
- any skin conditions or scars
- basic conformation
- ears, eyes, nose, teeth and gums
- heart, lungs and gut sounds
- temperature
- palpate joints and examine hooves with hoof testers to check for any abnormalities/sensitivities within the hoof.

The veterinarian will also ask the seller questions regarding the horse's health and medical history, including any previous surgeries, lameness, medical problems, vices or behavioral abnormalities.

Following the initial visual examination, the veterinarian will observe the horse moving in-hand at a walk, trot and canter to identify any signs of lameness. Following each gait, the veterinarian will perform flexion tests (manipulations of various joints) to reveal any pain the horse might be experiencing.

Lastly, the veterinarian will ask to see the horse lunged or ridden in small circles, on a hard surface, if available. The horse should move evenly and be steady at all gaits. The veterinarian might also recommend radiographs of the joints, and/or ultrasound of the tendons to determine if there are any unseen issues that could impact the horse's ability to perform in the future.

The veterinarian could recommend additional tests if the horse is being purchased for breeding purposes.

While a veterinarian typically does not issue a passing or failing grade, he or she should be able to equip you with enough insights to make an informed decision.