



Smart Gaited Horse Shopping

By Elizabeth Graves 2009

Whether you're looking for that first gaited horse or a new one, using common sense, wisdom and simply listening to ones gut instincts, can sure pay off in having a good experience in obtaining the horse one truly desires. The market being what we term as "soft" right now can also bring about some very good buys, but one needs to be price savvy also. The price ranges for sometime have been in a huge range and a more expensive horse does not mean its any better horse than one in a cheaper range. Right now there really is no base line in horse prices, it's just what one is willing to pay.

The value in my opinion of a horse is in the temperament and completeness of training over pedigree. Having papers on a horse may be necessary if one is going to show breed specific shows, or looking at a horse for future reproduction purposes. Even on the papered horse temperament, amount of handling and quality of training is first priority. The color of a horse should not be a first priority.

Some advice I often give to folks when asking which breed of gaited horse is the best is, ride a variety of gaited breeds first. Although they are all termed smooth gaited compared to their non gaited counter parts, the gaits can feel very different and your own body will tell you which feels the best. Also the same breeds doing the same gait can have slight variations in feel also. Another consideration is some are what we term "wired" differently in temperaments but that also can be individual horses to horse situation and not always breed specific.

Being an educated consumer will protect one from possibly purchasing the wrong horse for your situation. If one does not have the knowledge base then find a very experienced horse person to help you in your search. It's long been said the cost of the horse is the least expensive part of the investment and acquiring the wrong horse, an unsound or unhealthy horse can end up being a rather large unexpected investment.

A good base of knowledge is in knowing what is good conformation in any horse, not gaited horse specific, as many structural weakness although excepted in the breeds does not always mean an individual will hold up to long term reasonable use. Know what the gaits are, just because it's a Tennessee walking horse does not mean it does the signature gait of running walk or the proper gait has been developed. The whole range of varying gaits can be seen in all the gaited breeds on specific individuals. It has also been my experience a large number of trainers and breeders also do not know how to correctly identify or develop the gaits in the gaited horses they sell or represent no matter how long they have been working with in the gaited breeds. So determine if the seller just has quantity of limited experience but more important quality of knowledge.

First impressions and introductions

Advice to any consumer is what is your first impression of the seller when inquiring about a horse. Sometimes it's not what they say in giving information, but what they don't say or how they word the information. I feel it is wise to let them tell you about the horse first without saying what you are looking for specifically first. Give as little personal information about yourself to the seller other than what you have to offer in care of the horse and your experience as a rider to determine if this will be a good match.

Sellers do have the right to refuse a sale if they don't feel the horse will be receive proper housing, care, treatment or a good match with a potential buyer. Remember a horse's current owner can have a considerable amount of emotional attachment, proper training and time invested in a horse. Don't tell them your price range or what your profession is as a seller may price according to what they feel they can get from a certain buyer. Don't get in a hurry when buying a horse, often this can be a huge error in judgment and also it's not uncommon for a seller to put pressure on in saying they have someone else interested, when in fact they don't. This is a very common ploy to get a horse sold. This is not always the case as there may very well be other interested parties but this it when your gut instincts as to the true characters of a seller comes into consideration.

When an appointment is made to see the horse in person that first impression is also very important. Mental notes to make are cleanliness / safety of a facility is the horse friendly, mannerly, hooves in proper condition, does it look healthy in weight and quality of hair coat. A horse 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 as a lot can be missed or over looked in the process of evaluation a potential horse. This is a good tool to evaluate a horse later with no distractions. If a potential buyer is unable to see a horse in person then as complete video should be made available to potential buyers.

Lots of Myths

There are a lot of gaited horse myths floating about and have been for many years now. Knowing what these are and possibly hearing them from a seller can also clue one into their horsemanship skills and the information imparted to a potential buyer as accurate. Some of these would be, you have to use a gaited horse bit, use a gaited horse saddle, lean back while throwing your legs forward to ride, lift the head and hold up, gaited horses can't canter, gaited horses don't back. Always remember a gaited horse is a horse first and foremost before a breed and good horsemanship with completeness of training is the same on all breeds of horses, it's just that gaited horse have a different intermediate gait other than trot.

What to ask

When asking for specific information, be direct and again listen for what is said, not said or how it is said by the seller.

•Registration papers

Is the horse registered and if so papers should be present at showing. Be sure the papers match the horse. When a horse is purchased, the papers and transfer of ownership should be current and with the horse upon pick up of the horse. Check if the current seller is also the owner listed on the papers.

•Health

A vet check by a vet you know or 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 by what a potential buyer is willing to pay for them. Pulling blood for evidence of sedatives is also a recommended practice since they seem to be commonly used by some selling horses and can give a buyer a false sense of mental, behavior traits, training soundness and safety of a horse. X-rays may be a good investment of legs and back also for a horse started to young as is also common for many years now. Check the horse yourself for anybody soreness. Have the teeth checked also to ensure the age of the horse is being represented correctly. If purchasing for reproduction, get a reproduction exam done on mares and stallions. Ask if a gelding is a cryptorchid.

Vaccinations?

Currency of dental work?

Parasite control?

Hoof care?

Has the horse coliced?

Has the horse has any surgeries?

Is the horse sound of mind and body?

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 discharges, standing and when ridden

Has the horse ever been lame?

What is the horse's current diet?

•Vices

Ask if a horse has any bad habits or vices in general, and then ask specifically of the list below.

Does the horse Bite or nip?

Kick or strike?

Rear?

Bolt?

Buck?

Crib?

Wind suck?

Stall walk?

Weave?

•Training, Handling, General manners

What age started under saddle?

Any professional training and how long?
Level of rider needed
Stall well
Fence well
Get along with other horses when ridden and on free time turn out
Ride away from other horses
Ride alone
Barn sour
Ring sour
Trail ridden and how much
Accept a bath well
Accepts clipping well
Does the horse tie?
Does the horse pull back when tied?
Does the horse load in a trailer willingly?
Cross water willingly
Accept a saddle well
Accept a bit well
Pick up hooves willingly
Has the horse ever been shown?

•Some extras

A good practice with a riding horse, ask the seller to always ride the horse first and ask to show all skills represented by the seller. If a potential buyer is to ride the horse after the owner, wear a helmet.

Observe the horse in its pasture situation and /or stall behaviors. Observe if the horse can be caught and haltered willingly. You never have to buy the horse after one visit; a couple of visits with the horse are a good practice.

Don't expect a seller to allow you take a horse home on trial. If they offer this that's fine but certainly get paper work in order as to liability and responsibilities of each party. Accidents can happen easily and a new owner can misuse a horse rather quickly and devalue it from its original value.

There is no such thing as a bomb proof horse, be reasonable in your expectations of what a horse is and should be. Be courteous to the seller and respectful while on their property as well.

Sometime politics and competition, rumors can keep a buyer away from a good prospect, go see the horses for yourself and don't fall victim to some of these human traits that can get in the way of finding the right horse.

Closing Statements

I know many of us can add so much more to the lists above and often by personal varying experiences through the years or those we know others have had. Shopping for gaited horses can be fun, educational with the gaited horse industry having so many wonderful breeds to choose from and all shapes, sizes and colors. There is something for everyone. My own experience is the community so many have found in enjoying these gaited breeds together.
Happy shopping!

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