

GRACE'S GUIDE...

to buying/loaning an ex-racehorse.

In my view the stigma attached to ex-racehorses is very misguided. Although they are more athletic and therefore quicker in their reactions most are intelligent, versatile and keen to learn new skills.

The definition of an ex-racehorse

- A thoroughbred horse, bred for racing with a Weatherbys' passport.
- A horse that may have gone into training but not quite made the grade.
- A horse that has retired from racing due to injury or having no ability.

Having decided you would like to take on an ex-racer, or any horse for that matter, the first essential rule to apply is... can I afford it?

I am not referring to the cost of buying the horse, this is basically irrelevant as it is a one off payment and should only amount to what the horse is worth and how it suits your requirements. Actually being able to financially provide and care for the horse is the real issue as it is a long term commitment. Work out a financial plan taking into consideration:

- Insurance (including personal accident, legal liability and vet fees)



Make sure you see the horse ridden before riding it yourself.

- Keep, e.g. grazing, stabling, livery fees, blacksmith, regular worming, flu and tetanus injections
- Equipment, primarily for the horse but also for yourself

You should also seriously consider whether you have time to do yourself and your horse justice. Having ticked all the boxes you can start looking around.

Where to find a suitable horse

Ascot and Doncaster Sales are two commercial sale houses that specialise in selling ex-racehorses. However, be very careful when buying a horse at

Wear a body protector when trying out a horse you don't know.

any auction. Basically you are buying blind and unless you are experienced and know what to look for, it is very easy to buy something unsuitable.

Also unscrupulous vendors, whether selling at a public auction or privately, are capable of 'dumbing down' a horse's behaviour on the day.

Buying direct from a trainer is another option but it is best to choose someone you feel you can trust, or who is known well by someone you trust. You need to remember that trainers train racehorses as a commercial business and may not be inclined to take the horse back in the case of a problem you may experience later on.

A retraining/rehoming centre, such as HEROS, can be a good option but check out their credentials first. Looking through testimonials can be helpful.

Will it be the right horse for you?

Ask for the horse's history, however bear in mind you may not get the full story. Every thoroughbred that has run under rules will be traceable on the Racing Post website: www.racingpost.co.uk.

Insurance cover

The horse should have a valid Weatherbys' passport. Ask to see it and check the horse's markings, it should also have a microchip on the right hand side of its neck and when the horse is vetted this is something the vet will most certainly check for you.

When trying the horse, check whether the owners have insurance cover for you and the horse in case of an accident. I would advise you take out BHS Gold Insurance cover to make sure you are insured before you go and see any horse.

Always insist on seeing someone else ride the horse before you get on it and if you have any doubt in your mind, don't get on. Make sure you wear the correct clothing, i.e. hat, boots and most definitely a body protector.

Take someone with you, preferably someone with experience, to view the horse and also, in the event of a problem, to drive you home.

Try the horse more than once and in different situations. Observe its behaviour closely when being handled and also in the company of other horses in the yard and in the field if possible. Does it kick? Does it seem clingy? If hacking out ride in front and behind. It is more likely to show behavioural traits such as whipping around or napping when leading the way.

Vetted

ALWAYS have a horse vetted, even if it is just a two stage vetting, by an equine vet you trust or who has a sound reputation and knows thoroughbred horses.

HEROS prides itself on telling prospective new owners everything about a horse and taking care to match the horse with the most suitable new loanee/owner. However, I know that not all vendors or lenders are quite so scrupulous.

Take out BHS Gold insurance cover before trying a horse



Ask questions about how the horse is best shod and also if it has had any injuries and, if so, are there any veterinary reports you could see.

As you have probably by now gathered the best advice is to 'do your homework', as you should when taking on any type of horse.

Experienced

An added bonus with ex-racehorses from a practical point of view is that the horses are broken in at a young age and will have experienced lots of things, such as traffic, clipping and loading, crowds, noise etc. There is every possibility that you will get a bargain.

HEROS has seen some amazing successes from top class eventing, first class broodmare, showing and dressage and those used simply as fun horses or hacks. Contrary to popular opinion, thoroughbreds usually live a long and fruitful life in a caring environment and give years of happy service to their owner or loanee.