

Horse&Rider MONTHLY

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Horse Life



TRAIN / HEALTH



TRAIN

What To Do Before Buying a Horse

YOU THOUGHT HIS DISPOSITION and level of training were just right for you. But soon you began to feel nervous on him, especially at the lope. You realized you could probably do a lot of groundwork and mounted exercises that, over time, would help him be more responsive and you feel more comfortable.

But...you thought this one was "ready to ride"!

What went wrong?

Getting expert help whenever you acquire a new riding horse is always your safest bet. But when you're working on your own, there's one strategy you can use to test in advance that you'll feel truly comfortable on a horse.

It's simple and straightforward, but a lot of people don't do it.

It's loping the horse. A lot.

What usually happens instead is you watch the owner ride the horse, including at a lope, but when it's your turn to try him you spend most of your time at a walk and trot. You lope just a few strides each way of the arena.

"Seems OK," you say to yourself. "This is plenty until I get him home." You think this way because you're a bit nervous riding him, you're sure you'll feel better at home in familiar circumstances, and—perhaps subconsciously—you want to quit before something goes wrong.

Because you already love the horse, and don't want anything to scare you away from him.

Not smart! But not uncommon.

"You wouldn't believe how many people don't lope a horse before buying him," says Clinton Anderson, who adds that loping is critical "not just to see how he goes, but also to evaluate his overall training, willingness, and temperament."

The clinician, who's had lots of experience helping people with horses they're afraid of, explains why loping is THE key measure.

"Most horses feel some obligation to at least walk and trot, and will do so without much backtalk. It's when you ask them to canter that chinks in their training—or any latent naughtiness—is likely to come out."

And if it is going to come out, don't you want to know that before you buy?

Of course you do. Here's the ideal sequence for trying a prospect to make sure you'll feel comfortable riding him once he's yours:

1. Watch the owner lope the horse, on a loose rein if possible. (And if the owner won't lope the horse, that's a deal-breaker.)

2. Lope the horse yourself in an arena where you feel safe. Spend time at it. Note whether he quietly and correctly picks up his leads. Put some slack in the reins and see how he reacts. Go three, four, five times around each direction, giving him a chance to do whatever he's going to.

★ When you're buying a horse, don't neglect this one key pre-purchase check that will tell you if you'll be able to ride him with confidence.



PHOTO BY ALANA HARRISON

Does he keep motoring along at the same speed on a loose rein until you cue him otherwise? Or does he start to gain speed or get hot and nervous? He may not perform perfectly, but how well does he do, and how do you feel on him?

3. If he feels great to you loping in the arena, ask to try him somewhere outside. If need be, have the owner find another horse so the two of you can go on a little trail ride and find a safe spot for a stretch of loping. Obviously, this is especially important if you intend trail ride on this horse. But even if not, it's a superb advanced test of his temperament and training.

"A lot of horses act much differently away from home than they do in their familiar stomping grounds," says Clinton. (And, of course, if you don't feel safe loping the horse outside, don't do it...but accept that as a serious don't-buy signal.)

4. If the outside ride goes well—and even if it went perfectly—plan to come back one or two more times to do it all again, to check for consistency. Then, if you can talk the owner into letting you take the horse home on a short trial, better still. During that trial, do a lot of...you guessed it...loping.

If you lope the horse this much before deciding to take him, you'll be as close as possible to knowing you'll feel comfortable riding him. Of course, the catch-22 is that the riders most likely to neglect all this loping are the ones who most need this he'll-work-for-me assurance.

If you don't feel up to loping strange horses this much, reconsider your buying plans. You may be better off working with an instructor to ride as many school horses as possible before you buy your next mount.

The end result—a horse you feel fabulous on—will be well worth it. ★



HEALTH

What to Expect in a Pre-Purchase Exam

★ Learn what to expect from a pre-purchase exam so you can be prepared for the vet's visit and choose the right things to test for.



The vet will watch the horse move at a walk and trot.

PHOTO BY TERRY CAGE/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

A PRE-PURCHASE EXAM is when you have a veterinarian give a horse you are considering purchasing a thorough examination. During this exam, they will check for any potential issues that you would like to know about before buying the horse. While it's not a guarantee that your horse won't have any issues if their pre-purchase exam (PPE) comes back clean, it can help you make an informed decision and give you some peace of mind when making such a big purchase.

When you ask for a pre-purchase exam, the vet is going to ask what specific things you want to check for. You might think that you should test for everything, but that would be an unnecessary and extremely expensive veterinarian's visit. Keep reading to get an idea of what you can expect during your pre-purchase exam and which tests are worth springing for.

What to Expect

Usually, the potential buyer will schedule and cover the expenses of the PPE. If the horse you're thinking of buying is local to you, it's possible to use a vet you are familiar with. But if you're looking at a horse outside of your area, you'll have to go with a vet in that location.

PPEs are a common request for equine vets, and they most likely have a standard routine that they follow. In most cases, the vet will come to the barn where the horse is located and perform the exam. Depending on the situation, you can choose to be present at the exam or have the vet give you the results after.

Before you call to schedule your exam, it's a good idea to know what things you want the vet to test for and check. Here are some common pre-purchase exam tests that you might consider:

Lameness Evaluation

For performance horses, a lameness evaluation is an important part of the PPE. The vet will watch the horse move in-hand at the walk and trot, in a straight line, on a hard, level surface.

They'll be watching for:

- How the horse's feet land
- Alterations in limb movement
- Abnormalities in the footfalls
- Obvious signs of lameness, pain, or weight-shifting when the foot lands
- Asymmetry with the way the body or pelvis moves

Then, the vet will usually watch the horse go both directions in a round pen or on a longe line.

They'll be looking for:

- Highlight a shortness of stride, particularly in the hind end
- Allow the horse to move more freely at faster speeds than traveling in-hand allows
- Show the horse's movement at the canter, including any difficulty in picking up a particular lead
- Demonstrate fluidity (or lack thereof) in transitions
- Accentuate a lameness, because the circle puts more pressure on the inside legs
- Uncover potential respiratory issues, such as if a horse makes noise while traveling at speed, gets out of breath easily, or recovers slowly. Plus, the veterinarian will be able to assess the heart and lungs after exercise.

The Stress Test

Joint flexions are often considered to be one of the central elements of a soundness assessment. During this test, the vet will flex a single leg joint tightly and hold it in place for a set period of time, usually 30 to 90 seconds. As they release the joint, the handler immediately trots the horse off. Then, the vet will look for any signs of lameness.

Red flags to look for:

- Resisting or even holding the limb during flexion
- Remaining sore for the duration of the exam after being flexed

It's important to remember that this test has a lot of variability depending on who is performing the flexion. An individual's strength, how tightly they hold the joint, and even slight variations in how they hold the joint

can all make a difference to how the horse reacts to the test.

Soft Tissue Palpation

A typical pre-purchase exam also includes thorough palpation of the horse's soft tissues. Here, the vet is feeling for any evidence of current or past injury, such as heat, tenderness, or unexpected thickness.

X Rays to the Bone

Radiographs are probably the diagnostic aid most commonly used as part of a prepurchase exam. It's never a bad idea to have a baseline set of X rays for your new horse. Plus, X rays will show things like bone chips, potential feet issues, and many other possible problems.

Other Tests to Consider

Whether you have a specific reason or you just want to be extra thorough, there are more tests you can ask for. An ultrasound can identify any tendon or ligament inflammation. A Coggins test and a standard wellness profile are the most common blood tests done during a PPE. These give an overall screening for organ function and overall health. Drug testing can also be done during a PPE blood test.

There are a number of other things you can ask your vet to test for, but the ones listed above are a good place to start. Preparing yourself in advance means you'll go into the PPE knowing what to expect. You should also have an idea of what you're willing to deal with as a horse owner. Always have an in-depth conversation with your vet about the results, any concerns, and questions you might have. Once you fully understand the results of the PPE, you'll be able to make an informative decision when deciding to buy your dream horse. ★

Joint flexions are a common part of a lameness exam.



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Sale Barn

Stepping into a sale barn can be daunting for a first-time horse sale buyer. Don't worry—we've got industry experts to set you up for a seamless sale-buying experience.



STEVE FRISKUP, of Muleshoe, Texas, has been involved in the Clovis Horse Sales for more than 30 years, now as an ownership partner, and he's the country's leading Western performance horse auctioneer. Friskup has sold some of the highest-selling horses in the business, but he also prides himself on ensuring quality in the market for the everyday horsemen and horsewomen, too. More info: clovishorsesales.com.



JANN PARKER, of Billings, Montana, is one of the horse industry's leading ladies. With her late husband, Bill, Parker built Billings Livestock Commission's Horse Sales into one of the top volume consignment horse sales in the nation. BLS offers monthly horse sales featuring everything from cutters and reiners to trail horses, guest ranch horses, and rope horses. More info: billingslivestock.com.



SARAH BOWMAN, of Grapeland, Texas, along with her husband Joel, operates the monthly Anderson County Horse Sale at the Anderson County Livestock Exchange. The Bowmans' extensive background in the horse industry gives them a no-nonsense approach to buying and selling horses in the heart of Texas. More info: andersoncountylivestockexchange.com.

Horse sales have shaped the financial ebbs and flows of the equine industry for a century, allowing the free market to set the price for every level of horse available—from the highest-end show and breeding prospects to would-be rescue horses and everything in between. For years, horse sales have gotten a bad rap as places horse traders could get the best of buyers. But times have changed, and reputable sales provide a one-stop-shop to buy and sell with consignors who are in the business for the long haul. We brought together a team of experts to break down the ins and outs of horse shopping at an equine auction.

BEFORE SALE DAY

The hard work of horse shopping happens long before the day of the sale. Doing your homework—on the sale company, on the consignors, and on the horses—is the best way to ensure you're getting the horse you want.

Know the Sale Company.

Take a look at the longevity of the sale company hosting the auction, and find out how long it's been in business.

"Make sure it's licensed and bonded—those are big deals," Friskup said. "Look at the longevity of the relationships the sale company has with the consignors and the buyers. Those of us who have been in business a while, we aren't trying to do anything bad to anybody. We're all trying to do a good job."

Choose a Catalog Sale.

While some horse sales are more fly-by-night operations where you might just find a diamond in the rough, most reputable sale companies offer catalog sales with horses' information listed long before sale day.

"Horses in catalog sales weren't just bought yesterday and sold tomorrow," Friskup cautioned. "You can do your homework on a horse and seller long before you ever get to the sale that way."

Research the Consignor.

Sellers put horses in sales these days for any number of reasons—not just to unload them to the highest bidder. Some sellers prefer the one-stop-shop atmosphere of the sale.

"Horse traders have always been held at arm's reach, but there are people who are in the horse industry to improve the product to a higher level," Friskup said. "They train and they fit and they have a good reputation of selling you what they've represented to sell you. You find people who have done this for a living. We have people at our sale who may only sell one or two a year, but they ranch and wheat pasture on them and they're honest and they do a good job."

Large breeding operations with top

ors. Ask for additional video and pictures. If there's any way to go try the horses you're interested in prior to sale day, do it. If you know you're going to a sale, set something up there to try the horses."

At Parker's BLS, each monthly sale might offer 200-300 head of horses, with everything from weanlings to ranch geldings and everything in between. Chances are, you'll be interested in more than one.

"Make the phone calls on all of them," Parker added. "If you're coming to the sale, be at the preview. If you want a 4-H horse or one you hope is the rockstar reiner that you're looking for, it has to fit your level of good—not mine as sale manager, not your neighbors', not your husband's, not your best friend's. It has to fit what you want and feel how you want



Part of doing your homework is talking to the sale manager to get to know the reputation of the seller and the background on each horse that peaks your interest.

bloodlines may prefer to sell their large herds through sales, as do big ranches looking to cut down on their remudas of hardy geldings.

"We put the consignors' phone numbers right there in the catalog and on every Facebook post," Bowman said. "People won't consign a horse they don't want to talk to somebody about, so that really helps the quality of the sale."

Do Your Homework.

"Even if it's an elite sale where everything is supposed to be right, it needs to be right for YOU," Parker said. "Call the consign-

it to feel. What is broke to one person is not broke to another. So you won't know that unless you put in the work up front."

And if you've still got questions, feel free to contact the sale manager. He or she will know the background on the consignor and his or her horses. Because the sale manager values his or her own reputation, too, you're likely to get an honest answer.

Conduct a Pre-Purchase Exam.

Yes, even when buying a horse through a sale, it's a good idea to have a pre-purchase exam done ahead of time so you

know if you can raise your hand to bid in full confidence.

"Soundness is relative," Parker said. "You need to feel good about what you're buying, but too many people from beginners to tough competitors get too wrapped up in it. Life is short, time is short. Do you want to win? Do you want to go on a trail ride? Maybe the horse needs maintenance, but it's well worth it. Remember, you can have all the x-rays you want available, but if you don't have somebody to read them that matters, it doesn't mean anything. Get a veterinarian you trust to look at the horse before the sale."

Research the terms.

Each sale company operates on its own terms as far as soundness guarantees go. Don't walk into a sale and be surprised by the terms.

"If you're not sure, call the sale manager and find out how they'll handle the situation if one should arise," Friskup said. "There are a lot of different situations as far as soundness goes. Find the sale company policy so you know ahead of time if there is an issue."

ON SALE DAY

Register as a Buyer.

If you're buying in person, most sales allow you to walk up in-person. Bring a copy of your driver's license, as well as your bank account information and method of payment. Some sales operate as cash or check only, while others permit money orders or bank wires. And payments must be made before the horse leaves with the buyer.

Check Again.

If you've done your homework and seen the horses in person before sale day, it's still worth walking through the sale barn to take another look at each horse and visit with the consignors.

Bring Help.

"Depending on your expertise, if you're buying a horse for your personal use,



Sales can be a great place to find a great kid's horse or ranch horse ready for his next home.

it's good to have a second set of eyes of someone you trust," Friskup said. "Bring somebody who's familiar with your needs and the equine industry. They can confirm what you're thinking or tell you if you're off base."

Know Your Budget.

Once a sale gets started, auctioneers can roll through horses quickly. Be prepared with how much you can spend so you're not caught off guard.

"Keep up with the pace of the auction, know your budget, know your limits, so you don't have to make a five-minute decision in a two-and-a-half-minute situation," Friskup said.

AFTER THE SALE

Find Shipping.

Many established sale barns have a long list of cross-country haulers they recommend for horses purchased through their sale.

"We keep a list of haulers we recommend," Bowman said. "Shipping a horse can be intimidating if you've never done it, but that's what we're set up to do—to help our buyers."

Soundness Problem?

If you checked with the sale manager and

read the sale paperwork before hand, you likely know the policy each sale maintains for the horse's soundness.

"When it doesn't work out, you have to figure out if that's on you or on the consignor," Parker explained. "That's part of going through the weeds. People don't want to take responsibility. Did you not ride him? Did you not get there early enough to watch him in the preview? I don't know one sale manager that isn't going to help someone out. Consignors on a better-end horse know that it better be good, or you better trade them out or help them find something. Consignors who want to be in this business 10 years from now will fix those things whether it's their fault or not."

Parker's BLS guarantees sound horses ridden through the ring until Monday at noon following a Saturday sale and Tuesday at noon following a Sunday sale unless otherwise stated.

"We have a 72-hour soundness guarantee on all horses sold through catalog," Bowman said. "Our policy is simple: If you trot across the driveway and they limp, they come back. If they are sound, they're sold. We honor it 100%. It's been a great policy to have and it's brought a lot of quality into the sale." ★

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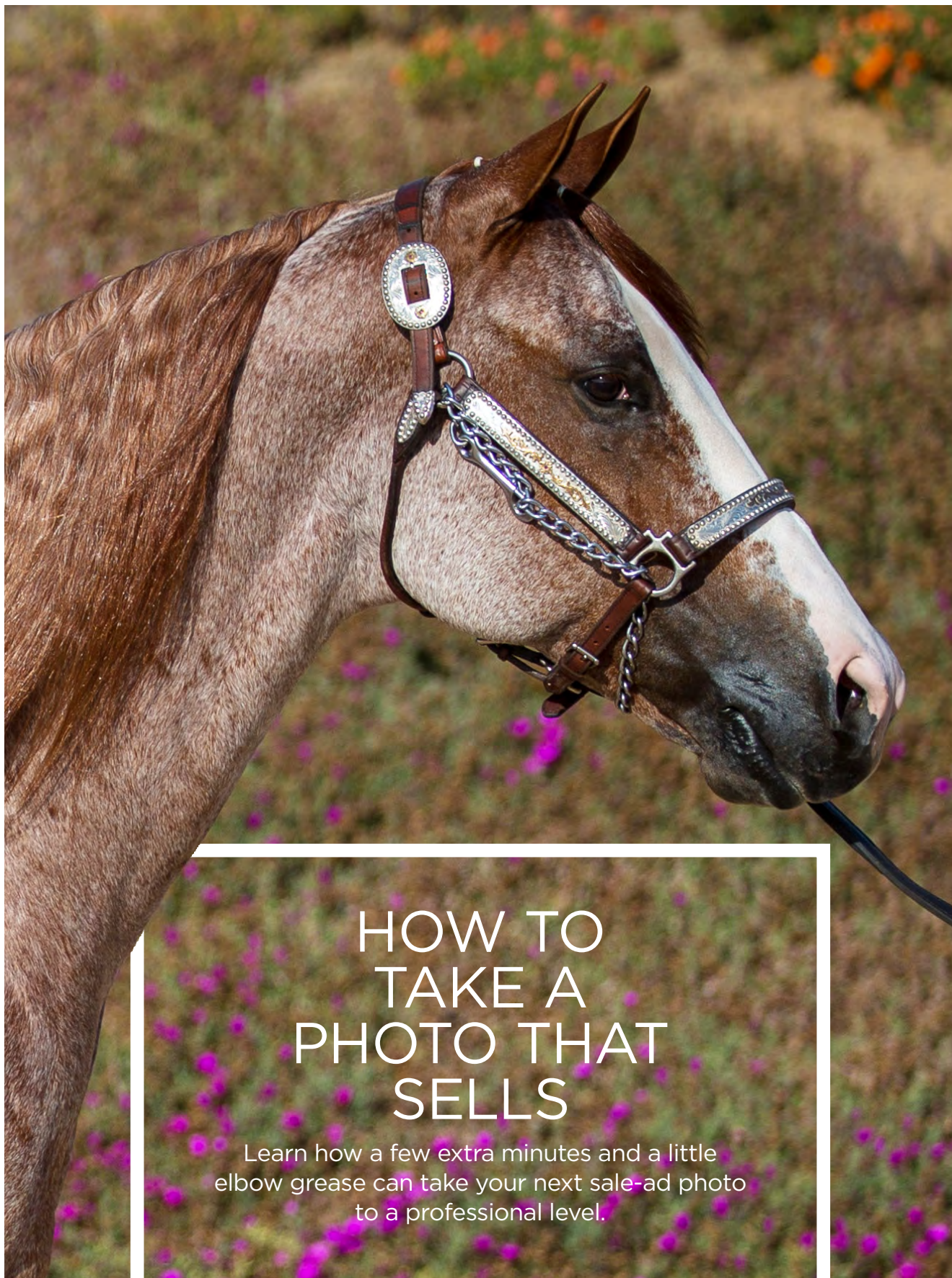
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HOW TO TAKE A PHOTO THAT SELLS

Learn how a few extra minutes and a little elbow grease can take your next sale-ad photo to a professional level.



In less than 15 minutes, with some elbow grease and inexpensive grooming products, we transformed the same horse into one that grabs a buyer's eye. The grooming effort, plus a clean, well-fitted halter and correct leg placement and photography angle, flatter the horse.

I shake my head every time I scroll through horse-for-sale ads online and in magazines. The photos that accompany many ads make it nearly impossible to gauge a horse's quality. The backgrounds are messy. The lighting is horrible. The horse is standing at an unflattering angle (and often is dirty).

How can anyone expect to sell a horse like that?

Just as in the show pen, first impressions matter. And with an ad (online or otherwise), that first impression is usually a photo. So make it count. No, don't just make it count; make it sell.

How? It's easy. And won't cost you anything but time, some inexpensive grooming products, and a little elbow grease.

SET UP TO LOOK BAD

Look at the two photos, above and on page 41, and you'll see what I mean. The photo above is an example of how to "un-sell" a horse. The background is distracting: a dog, cars, a golf cart, barn lights—all of that "stuff" takes away from the very thing the seller is trying to showcase.

The heavy clouds make the light gray and dull, which in turn makes the horse look dull. (Picture a supermodel on a magazine cover: The light will always be on the bright side, to make the model look her best; more about light in a minute.) Distractions and light aside, this horse is literally set up to look bad!

The photographer stood toward the front of the gelding, and the horse's left hind leg is set too far behind his body. Plus, the right hind is set too far

forward. The result? The bad angle, coupled with the way his hind legs are set, make the gelding's back look much longer and lower than it is.

The gelding's left-front leg is set too far forward, which (coupled with the photographer's forward angle) makes his shoulder look straighter than it is. His head and neck are too high, adding to the impression that his shoulder is straight. The high-headed stance also makes his neck look short and thick.

The halter hangs so low on this gelding's nose that his head looks long and unattractive. Plus, his eyes and ears look as distracted as the background! Couple all that with a raggedy mane (don't get me started on the shavings in his tail!), and I'd have to ask any seller who posts such a photo, "Are you really serious about selling this horse?"



In less than 15 minutes, with some elbow grease and inexpensive grooming products, we transformed the same horse into one that grabs a buyer's eye. The grooming effort, plus a clean, well-fitted halter and correct leg placement and photography angle, flatter the horse.

THE RIGHT WAY

Yup, that's the same horse in the photo above. It probably took us all of 15 minutes to convert him from drab to fab, grooming-wise. First, we clipped his muzzle, ears, bridle path, and the long hairs on his legs. Then we brushed him (we'd have bathed him, if necessary, which would've added a bit of time), and sprayed him lightly with a coat-shine product. We combed his mane and tail, then applied hoof-shine products to his feet.

Finally—and this is key—we found a clean halter with untarnished silver and made sure it was properly fitted to his head. If you don't have a silver halter, and can't borrow one for the shoot, a clean, well-fitted leather, nylon, or rope halter will work. "Well-fitted" means the buckle is up by the horse's ear, the throatlatch fits snug under his jaw, and the noseband fits snug

approximately halfway between his eye and nostril.

Once the gelding was spiffed up, we waited for good light. This occurs during the "golden hours": early morning or evening, when the sun is low in the sky and bathes everything in a golden light. If you were to shoot in the middle of the day, the directly overhead sunlight would be too "hot," rather than golden, it's harsh and casts hard shadows.

When the light was right, we led the roan gelding to an area with a background that was simple and attractive. It was nice that we had a spot with flowers, but you don't need blooming flowers for an attractive background. Just make sure whatever background you choose is clean and clutter-free, so it doesn't distract from your horse. Watch for such background problems as trees or fence posts appearing to grow from parts of the horse's body.

We set our model gelding up with his hind legs squarely under his body. Look at the difference that makes in his back's appearance—it no longer looks as long and low as it does in the first photo. I like to set the left-front leg slightly ahead of the right-front leg, so it doesn't look from the side as though a horse only has one front leg. Both legs are still straight beneath him, which shows off the slope of his shoulder.

Finally, the photographer stood opposite the gelding's barrel, so the horse was centered in the lens. We waved a rag to get his ears up (a bucket of feed works great, too), and snapped the shot when his head was at a natural level, which shows off the length and shape of his neck.

Which of the photos would prompt you to respond to an ad? I thought so. Sometimes a picture truly is worth a thousand words. ★