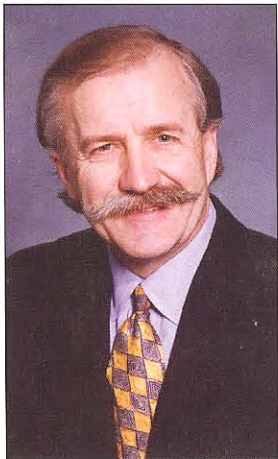


pre-purchase exams



By Mati Jarve
Attorney

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A PRE-PURCHASE EXAM? THE SHORT answer is whatever is important to you. Nevertheless, most exams are divided into four basic areas. The first part of the examination involves a detailed and specific identification of the horse. This should include a written description of the color, markings and other identifying characteristics of the horse. The most typical markings include a star, strip, blaze or snip of the face, along with any white markings on the legs or body. In addition, there may be brands, tattoos, scars, splints or other joint abnormalities to note. In this day and age of inexpensive and readily available digital photography a photograph of the horse would be invaluable in case a dispute arises after the sale. The age of the horse should be verified by an examination of the teeth. An examination of the eyes, along with auscultation of the heart and lungs should be performed, as well as recording the temperature and pulse rate.

The second part of the exam consists of an evaluation of the general skin and body condition. The body habitus may be described from thin to obese and the condition of the coat should be described. Next, observation and palpation of the limbs, hoof examination with hoof testers, and passive/active flexion tests should be done. In addition, the horse should be observed on a lead line and longe line at different gaits in a straight line and circles over different surfaces. All such observations should be recorded.

If the horse is a performance horse that can be ridden it should be observed under saddle while ridden. Often subtle lamenesses and other vices can be detected when the horse is ridden.

The final part of the pre-purchase exam usually consists of diagnostic tests. Typically it will include x-rays of the hooves, fetlocks, hocks and/or stifles to rule out any otherwise undetectable unsoundness. Depending on the potential issues, ultrasound, nuclear scans and even MRIs may be employed to detect suspected problems. The cautious buyer will also request a drug screen for any possible masking of either a lameness or behavior problem of the horse. The blood samples may be kept by the veterinarian for a reasonable period of time after the sale in the event of such an occurrence. Also, if the horse has a pedigree that makes it a potential carrier of genetic defects such as HYPP or HERDA, appropriate tissue samples should be taken to obtain independent testing. The same reasoning applies to horses that are advertised as homozygous. The only way to be sure is by genetic testing.

If the horse is being purchased for breeding purposes, the breeding soundness of the horse must be evaluated. In the case of a broodmare, a breeding soundness exam may include a rectal exam, obtaining uterine cultures, an endometrial biopsy and/or a transrectal ultrasound. In addition, a detailed history of pregnancies, or attempts at pregnancies, should be obtained by the veterinarian. For stallions, the horse should be examined for cryptorchidism and if the horse is of breeding age, the semen should be tested for viability and motility.

Of course if there are any specific health concerns about the horse it should be brought to the attention of the examining veterinarian for evaluation and comment. Upon completion of the exam the veterinarian should prepare a written report and give it to the buyer. The report should include a description of the abnormal or undesirable findings, along with an opinion of the functional effects of those findings. However do not expect the veterinarian to either "pass" or "fail" the horse for any particular or anticipated use. That decision will need to be made by the buyer based on the information obtained from the pre-purchase exam, along with any information obtained from the seller and of course the buyer's good judgment.

Mati Jarve is the managing partner of the Marlton, New Jersey law firm of Jarve Kaplan Granato, LLC. He is certified by the New Jersey Supreme Court as a Civil Trial Attorney and the National Board of Trial Attorneys as a Trial Advocate. Licensed in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Arizona, he maintains a national practice in civil litigation, including equine related issues. This article is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be legal advice. If you have a specific legal question or problem you should consult with an experienced and knowledgeable equine law attorney. Questions, comments or suggestions can be e-mailed to mjarve@nj-triallawyers.com, by visiting www.nj-triallawyers.com or writing to The Way To Go.