

Hot or Cold: Which Temperament is Best for You?

Select the horse whose "thermostat" is set in your comfort zone.

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August 18, 2003

When purchasing a horse or choosing one to ride, we tend to be smitten by a horse's appearance and abilities. Unfortunately, we often neglect to consider the horse's basic temperament. If that doesn't complement our own riding capabilities and comfort levels, riding may become a chore. Here's how to decide which type of horse is best for you.

A hot horse is one that is keenly aware of his environment, making him a little spooky out on the trails or tense amongst a group of other horses. If you're a rider looking for a leisurely ride, a hot horse is probably not for you. Ditto if you're a novice rider. Since a hot horse is very responsive to his rider, if your heel accidentally bumps against his side, you're likely to get a response. Hence, a hot horse quickly becomes frustrated with a rider who asks for one thing but actually wants something else. Conversely, an experienced rider who wants a ready-set-go type of performer yearns for a horse that's alert and responsive. Barrel racers, jumpers and endurance horses all have a tendency to be on the hot side.

At the other extreme of the temperament spectrum is the cold horse. Sure, they're a little lazy at times, but there's something to be said for a horse that enjoys life at a slower pace. Colder horses are perfect for equestrians who view riding as a hobby. Novices enjoy colder horses because, since they're less in a hurry to respond, they're more forgiving of miscalculated cues. If a cold-blooded horse is frisky at a show, it's easy to settle them down with a few minutes on the longe line or under saddle. They tend to reconsider whether it's worth the effort to break a sweat. Moreover, if you're nervous during competition, the cold horse is less likely to react to your emotions.

Riding should be a rewarding, pleasant experience. Choose the horse whose temperament thermostat is set just for you.

The author is a longtime hunt-seat competitor. After years of riding hot horses, her current mare never reaches the boiling point.