

## Free Rein: Hold on to Your Horses

By Elizabeth Moyer

October 2009

When so many horse owners are struggling financially these days, it probably seems crazy to look at taking on that responsibility again. So call me crazy!

Although having horses is a financial sacrifice at times, my horsey friends understand the essential role horses play in making our lives whole. But it can be a juggling act to balance the budget—even more so these days.

Contributing Editor Cindy Hale steps into the role of financial guru this month. If you are a struggling horse owner, check out her three possible solutions to stretch your horsekeeping dollars and hang on to your horse through these tough economic times. And, for the worst-case scenario: we have tips if you must sell. (See “Intro to Equinomics,” pg. 40.)

According to a recent poll on HorseChannel.com, 40 percent of visitors say the economy hasn’t affected their horsekeeping. Other respondents (close to 30 percent) said they have cut back on horse-related shopping sprees at the tack store. Tightening the belt (or girth) a few notches makes sense in tough times. Most horse owners I know are very budget-conscious, anyway. I definitely know some horsewomen who opt for horseshoes over Jimmy Choos and would take a good truck and trailer over a luxury vehicle any day. Only 5 percent of poll respondents indicated they had to sell or stop leasing a horse, which I find encouraging.

As I prepare for re-entry in to horse ownership, these things are foremost in my mind. We’ve been discussing the problem of surplus horses in some detail over the past year, including our in-depth report on the unwanted horse problem (April and May 2009), and our yearlong Rescue Reality column with the Kentucky Equine Humane Center (KyEHC). This month, we bring you the long-awaited survey results from the Unwanted Horse Coalition in “Survey Says,” on pg. 8. The KyEHC financials in “The Cost of Saving Horses” (pg. 52) are also eye-opening. Rather than being unwanted, many of those horses likely became unaffordable to their owners.

The purchase price of a horse typically isn’t the biggest worry—it’s the upkeep that will get you every time. It’s been a while since I’ve written checks for board, feed, the vet and farrier, and so on. I have been pecking away on my calculator to balance my budget and make sure it all adds up. (Our online Horse Cost Calculator is great for this.) Horsekeeping in my new Kentucky home is going to be very different from über-urban Southern California, so I have some new variables to take into account.

Despite the best-laid plans, there is always a budget buster—or two, or three. I’m trying to plan ahead for whatever that as-of-yet unknown will be. When I bought my last horse, Teddy, it was shavings. Where Ted lived while I was leasing him, bedding was included in the board. When I bought him we moved to a new barn where bedding was à la carte, and I didn’t adequately estimate for just how much it would take to keep a 12’x24’ stall fluffed and filled. We also needed to switch to a different (and pricier) kind of hay. And in the later years, supplements and more frequent veterinary maintenance added to the tab. I still consider having Ted in my life priceless, and I was able to make it work by being frugal in other areas of my life. With only one (albeit four-legged and non tax-deductible) dependent, it was doable.

And I am ready to do it again. Even with recession angst still swirling in the air, I am excited to be horse hunting. I realize I may have to make some trade-offs based on my budget. I’m keeping an open mind regarding breed, height and color. (It’s an occupational hazard that we profile a different breed every month!) Temperament is a quality I’m not willing to sacrifice. We have to be simpatico. Soundness is another big consideration. No horse is perfect, but what issues am I willing—and financially able—to live with?

In addition to trolling the ads, friends are e-mailing available horses in need of a home, and I always keep an eye on the adoptable horses at KyEHC, too (check out their horse of the week on our blog, [HorseChannel.com/Rescue](http://HorseChannel.com/Rescue)).

I can’t wait to have—and hold on to—a horse of my own again.

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