

## Buyers, Beware!

By Cindy Hale

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When I was a kid (yes, way back then) there were used car lots that proudly displayed signs reading, "A-Okay!" Such a declaration certified that the cars had passed a quality inspection and that the seller was above the level of riff raff. I wish we had the same stamp of approval for the horse market. Looking to buy a horse? Make sure you visit a seller qualified to post the "A-Okay!" sign.

This concept has been on my mind since I started horse shopping in an adventure that ultimately ended up with me owning cute little Joey. You know what I discovered? Horse sellers fall into three categories: The good, the bad and the naïve.

The good folks are the sellers who represent their horses honestly. They're upfront about chronic soundness issues, quirky behavioral traits and, in the case of performance horses, their animal's athletic abilities (or lack thereof). Such candidness can cost them a sale. When I was horse shopping, I admired the trainers and private owners who listened to my criteria and made note of the disability in my right arm and then said, "You know what? I don't think Sparky (or Pepper or Star) is the right horse for you." Such brevity is refreshing. I might not buy a horse from them this time around, but I'll definitely head their way if I'm ever in the market again. Why? Because I can tell they sincerely try to match the right horse with the right buyer.

I can't say the same for some other sellers I encountered. Before I bought Joey, I made dozens of calls that had been prompted by ads and fliers I'd found. Though I felt like I asked more questions than a contestant on Jeopardy!, I still ended up looking at horses that bore little resemblance to the horses that'd been described over the phone. One time I drove three hours to look at a trio of "working ranch horses" that were supposedly lovely trail mounts. Their photos were glorious. Each one looked like a Breyer model, with glistening coats and finely combed manes and tails. When I arrived I was greeted by three malnourished, bramble covered horses, none of which went confidently down the trail. I'm sure there are a myriad of reasons why a seller would be so misleading as to lure me several hundred miles on a wild goose chase, but all of those reasons equate to me labeling them bad.

The final category is the naïve horse sellers. I continue to believe these people seek to be honest, but they don't have the background or sophistication to know when they're wrong. To them, the mere fact that their horse permits a human to sit astride its back warrants the proclamation, "Anyone can ride!" Here's a specific example: During my recent horse hunt I picked up a flier on a pretty buckskin mare. Underneath her photo was the caption, "Quiet on the trails. Neck reins beautifully." It seemed like the perfect horse for me. But when I asked the seller for more information on the mare's training, specifically as to what kind of bit she went in and how well she neck reined, the response was, "Well, she doesn't neck rein that good. Once you get her out on the trail though, and you're riding in a straight line, she neck reins great."

Hmmm... Let's see. Isn't the ability to guide and turn the horse the true test of neck reining?

Unfortunately, the horse world will never be rid of the good, the bad and the naïve sellers. If you ever feel inclined to go horse shopping, my advice is to be wary of every seller. That's the only way to ensure that you end up with a horse that's A-Okay.

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