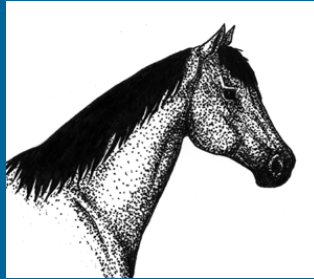


# A Horse At Last

An Acreage Equines Guide to Buying Your First Horse



Elizabeth Gredley

## The Author

A horse owner for more than 25 years, Elizabeth Gredley has kept her horses in many different stables, as well as boarding other peoples' horses on her acreage. She has taught riding and stable management to Pony Club members, other children and adults. Now operating as Acreage Equines in Strathcona County, east of Edmonton, Elizabeth specializes in teaching recreational horse owners who keep their horses at home during the summer.

**Acreage Equines**  
provides services to  
recreational horse  
owners which will  
increase their  
enjoyment and their  
horse's welfare.



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# A HORSE AT LAST

An *Acree Equines* Guide to Buying Your First Horse

Written by Elizabeth Gredley

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First Electronic Edition June 2000

Second Electronic Edition July 2000

Third Electronic Edition October 2000

*Other books by this author*

***How to Find the Perfect Place for Your Pony: 101 Questions to Ask about Boarding Stables***

***A Barn Fit For King: An Acree Equines Guide to Choosing a Boarding Stable***

*Gender usage*

Gender pronouns have been used at random and interchangeably throughout the text. The author feels very strongly that animals should be referred to as *he* and *she* rather than *it*.

# A HORSE AT LAST

An Acreage Equines Guide to Buying Your First Horse

Written by Elizabeth Gredley



Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada

# So You Want to Buy a Horse?

Horses are beautiful creatures and somewhat addictive. There seems to be a "horse gene" some of us are born with. From the time we're old enough to notice the world, we're drawn to these magnificent creatures.

As children, we read every horse book, watched every horse movie, played with model horses, and begged our parents for a real horse, or at least for riding lessons.

So here we are - adults with an acreage and our own money. Finally we can get a horse. Should we?

A love affair with horses in abstraction is not the same as a love

affair with the real animal. A real horse needs more than love.

Horses are big, beautiful, sensitive and flighty. In the right human hands, they make wonderful companions, exercise partners and dream fulfillers. In the wrong human hands, they suffer.

Horses are the most abused domestic animal and usually not by intention.

Before you own a horse, please be sure you are ready to make a long term commitment and take on the responsibility for an animal which, despite its size, is remarkably fragile both psychologically and physically.

## Are You Ready for Your Own Horse

### Horse Know-How

How much do you know about horses?

- Can you recognize when a horse is not feeling well?
- Do you understand horse behaviour and body language?
- Have you experienced handling horses outside as well as in a barn?
- Do you know what is involved in routine horse care?

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Visit the [Acreage Equines Book Store](#) and [Links](#) pages for reading and surfing suggestions.

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Just for fun, take our [Horse-Q Test](#)

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Unless you can honestly answer "yes" to all four questions, spend some more time learning from books, videos, internet sites and other people's horses. You'll still find you have a lot to learn when you do become a horse owner, but the learning curve won't be quite as steep or as dangerous.

### Riding Ability

Assuming you're buying a horse because you want to ride, it's important to buy a horse you can ride

now. Realistically assess your temperament and your riding skill. A real beginner needs a different kind of horse than someone with a year of riding lessons under their belt. A nervous person, no matter how experienced, needs a quieter horse than does a fearless person of the same riding level.

Before you consider buying a horse of your own, you want to be riding well enough to handle a horse you can progress with. At the very least, you should be comfortable cantering or loping a school horse without stirrups.

How often do you want to ride? If the answer is once or twice a week, it will be cheaper to stick with riding

lessons and/or part-leasing a horse. Do you want to look out your window and watch horses grazing? Allow a neighbour to use your pasture.

Unless you plan to ride regularly, you really don't need to own your own horse.

### **Financial Health**

It's a good idea to know what you're getting into financially before you decide to buy a horse. The purchase price is only the beginning. If half way through the winter you decide you can't afford to keep your horse, realize that you can't sell him overnight and he doesn't stop eating because you decide you can't afford the hay.

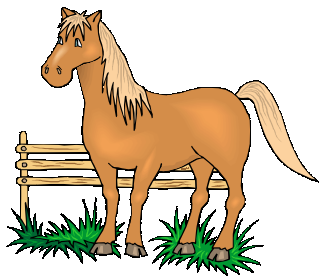
Use our **worksheet** to make a budget for the first year.

### Time Availability

How much time does a horse require?

If the horse is boarded out, you're paying someone else to feed and water him, clean the stall, turn him out and bring him in. You'll still need to make time for regular visits to keep an eye on his welfare. Each time you ride, figure on two hours plus driving time, longer in the winter or if your horse is on outside board.

For a horse kept at home, you won't have driving time but you will need at least half an hour a day for feeding and other horse related chores. Periodically, you'll need to repair fences, pick up or spread the manure in the pasture and harrow your riding ring. And you'll probably have to take time off work for veterinary and farrier calls.



## The Perfect Horse for You

Your ideal horse will depend on your level of riding and horse-handling experience, your personality, the kind of riding you plan to do, where you're going to keep your horse, your financial resources, your physical characteristics and your personal preferences about such things as colour.

Before you start your actual search, decide what kind of horse you're looking for. Imagine you're going to advertise a job opening. What characteristics are you looking for in the ideal applicant? Write a job description.

Have fun with this. Get ideas from **equestrian books and magazines**. Explore internet sites. Talk to horse owners. Go to horse shows and select sales.

Honestly assess your riding abilities and aspirations. The more advanced you are before you take the horse ownership plunge, the clearer you'll be on the kind of horse you want and the more horse you can buy. If you buy too soon, either you'll end up scared of a horse who is too much for you or bored with a dull horse who was suitable at the time but you've now outgrown. Having said that, it's better to err on the side of quietness.

Who will be riding the horse? Keep in mind the abilities of the least proficient rider. Size is a particularly important consideration for a family horse. You'll need one tall enough for adults to feel comfortable on but not too tall for children to ride.

Where are you going to keep the horse? If the answer is a professionally run boarding stable where you'll have an indoor riding arena, lots of support, and regular riding lessons, you can consider more horse than if you'll be relying on your own resources at home. Also, a horse who is well-mannered in the controlled environment of a well run

stable, may not behave the same way in the less disciplined environment of acreage living.

How much can you afford to spend for your horse. Set a realistic budget and don't look at horses who are outside your price range. It's hard to settle for a \$2000 horse if you've been looking at ones worth \$20,000.

Make a chart of characteristics the successful applicant must have and those you'd like him to have. Also include characteristics that would eliminate a horse from consideration. As you start looking at actual horses, you'll probably find yourself adding to your chart.

### How Tall is Tall?

Horses are measured from the withers to the ground. In North America and the UK, they are measured in hands. In Europe they're measured in centimetres. With the popularity of European warmbloods, it's becoming more common to see horse heights given in centimetres.

A hand is 4 inches. A horse could be 15 hh, 15.1 hh, 15.2 hh, 15.3 hh or 16 hh. A pony is under 14.2 hh.



For English riding, average horses are in the 15.2 to 16 hand range. 16.1 hh and over is tall. Under 15.1 is small. Horses used for western riding are usually shorter.

People often overestimate the height of their horse. If you don't have a proper measuring stick to measure the height, you can get a good estimate by measuring yourself. How tall is a horse that comes to your nose or the top of your head?

## Getting Ready

Decide where you're going to keep your horse. For some helpful suggestions, read the **second chapter of *How to Find the Perfect Place for Your Pony***.

If you plan to keep your horse in a boarding stable, decide which stable and check that they have a stall available. Use the **Finding a Boarding Stable Checklist**.

If you're taking your new horse home, prepare your property. Make sure the fences are safe, the shelter cleaned and ready to house its new occupant. Find out where to buy good hay and get some.

Purchase buckets, shovels and other horse care equipment, but wait until you have a horse before buying tack or horse clothing. It's important that tack fit properly. *(If you already have a saddle, either be prepared to trade it in on another one or look for a horse the saddle fits.)*

Find out who the vets and farriers are in your area and get recommendations.

## To Board or Not to Board

Excerpt from *How to Find the Perfect Place for Your Pony*

Buying a horse is a big move. You're taking on the responsibility for a living creature who will depend on you for everything from food to exercise to quality of life. Your first decision, and one you hopefully made before buying him, is where he is to live. Whether you keep your horse at home or board him



out, you'll want to make sure that he receives the best care possible.

For city dwellers, boarding is the only option and this book will help you find a suitable place. But if you live on a country property, you might be considering keeping your horse at home.

There are many advantages to having your horse close at hand. For one thing, it's a lot cheaper. Then, there's all the time and gas you'll

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You can find more information about [How to Find the Perfect Place for Your Pony](#) on the [Acreage Equines web site](#). It's an e-book too.

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save not driving to the stable.

You'll get to know your horse much better if you spend lots of time with him. When you only see your horse a few days a week, and then in very structured circumstances, you don't form the same understanding of his individual personality as you do when you can watch him just being a horse. A bond forms between an animal and the person who feeds him; at home, that bond is with you.

You'll also have complete control over what he eats, what weather he's

A good book on setting up a home stable is Cherry Hill's *Horsekeeping on a Small Acreage*. It's available from both [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and [Chapters.ca](https://www.chapters.ca).

Check the [reading list](#) for other good horse books.

out in and how he's handled. Out of necessity, you'll learn lots about horse management when you're on the front line for all his care.

Are you convinced that a horse in your backyard is the way to go? Hold your horses! Before you jump in, do you know enough to be solely responsible for a horse or two? (*TIP: Horses are herd animals and most do better with company.*) You're the one who will have to recognize potential problems and know when to call the vet. You'll do the worming, call the farrier and select the hay.

Realistically assess the time commitment you can make. You won't have to drive to the stable, but you will have to feed two or three times a day, muck out stalls, pick up manure, repair fences and harrow your riding ring. Do you know a reliable horse sitter for those days when you can't be home at feeding time?

Assess whether your property is set up for horses. Loose barbed wire is dangerous and a field of slough grass is not a pasture.

Do you have the equipment and help to do the physical labour associated with moving hay, repairing fences, mucking stalls and

generally keeping up with destructive equines?

Horses can be very hard on fences and also tend to tear up the ground. Aside from the safety aspects, if you like to have a picture-perfect property, be prepared for a lot of hard work.

Where can you ride if you do keep him at home? Do you have your own horse trailer? Without access to a trailer, you'll be limited in your equine activities.

Although not its main intention, the rest of this book (*A Barn Fit For King*) can help you decide whether to look after your horse yourself. Many of the things you'll look for in a

stable, you'll have to provide at home if you choose to go that route.

There's nothing like sitting on the deck with a cool drink watching your sleek horses playing tag, but know what you're getting into. If you're a first time horse owner, consider keeping your horse in a reputable stable for the first year while you learn as much as you can about horse management.

### The Search: Where to Look

When you're ready to start your actual search, there are places to look and places to avoid.

#### **Personal Contacts**

As with everything else in life, networking is often the most effective way to find a horse. Much like the much touted "hidden job market," many good horses for sale are never advertised.

If you're taking riding lessons, the first person to talk to is your instructor. He or she will not only know of horses for sale, but will also have a good idea - probably better than you do yourself - of what kind of horse you need.

Talk to the staff at tack stores. If you have friends involved with horses, let them know you're looking. Their network will include other horsepeople, farriers and veterinarians.

#### **Professionals**

There are horse professionals who will find you a horse for a fee, usually based on the value of the horse. If you have more money than time, this can be a good option as long as you go with someone reputable. Don't be afraid to ask for references.

This works best when the professional is someone you already know and trust such as your riding instructor.

If you decide to go this route, be prepared to pay for their time. Don't also look on your own hoping to avoid having to pay the commission.

### Notice Boards

Tack stores, feed mills and vet clinics usually have notice boards. Because of the large number of horses advertised, many of them have a binder of horses for sale. You'll usually find lots of details and a picture in these poster ads, but check dates because some of the horses will have been sold years ago.

In your horse-hunting notebook, write down all the details of any horse who sounds promising as well as the phone number. There's nothing more frustrating than having several phone numbers and not remembering what horse you'll be phoning about.

### Classified ads

Horses for sale classifieds were traditionally found in two different types of publications: newspapers and horse periodicals. Now there are also classified ads on the internet. Although not always true, often people don't pay for advertising until they've exhausted other options or they're looking to sell quickly.

Horse publications typically have a greater selection and include more detail, often with photographs, but horses won't necessarily be local. The advertisers are more likely to be horse people, descriptions are more likely to be accurate and asking prices are usually higher.

Horses advertised in newspapers will be local but you're less likely to find a good horse. Horses advertised on the internet could be from anywhere.

### **Breeders**

Going to the source is a good idea down the road when you're ready to take on a young horse. For now you're looking for an older, well

trained horse. However, if you have a particular breed in mind, it doesn't hurt to phone breeders because people selling their horse will often let the breeder know.

### **Auction Markets**

Do not go to an auction market looking for a horse. Yes there may be good horses at bargain prices - but you have to be able to recognize them and you're still taking a chance on health and soundness. Definitely there will be horses in need of rescuing from the meat buyer, but rescues are not to be recommended for the first time horse owner.

Select auctions are a different thing. The horses have been vetted,

the owner is there for you to talk to, and prospective buyers have an opportunity to ride the horses. They're a good place to go as part of your learning process, particularly if you have a knowledgeable friend with you who can point out the strengths and weaknesses of the various horses. But go as a learning experience, not to buy.

### Test Your Horse-Q Answers

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. F  |
| 2. a | 7. T  |
| 3. b | 8. F  |
| 4. b | 9. T  |
| 5. d | 10. F |

For more information on horses and their care, visit the **Acreage Equines web site.**

# The Search: Looking at Horses

When you've done all the preparatory work and are ready to start looking at prospects, start a "horse search" notebook. Give each prospect a separate page. Keep track of the horse's name, age, sex, breed, colour, height, markings, price and what you like and don't like about him or her. Write down the owner's name, phone number and directions.

### What to evaluate:

- temperament
- health and soundness
- training
- conformation

### Steps to follow:

1. **Telephone interview to find out whether the horse is worth a visit**
  - Get relevant details not included in the ad – sex, breed, height, price
  - Tell the person what you're looking for and ask whether they think their horse is suitable
  - Ask why the person is selling the horse
  - If you have a good feeling about the horse, make an appointment and get good directions. If not, thank them for their time and make the next phone call.

### **2. First visit with a friend who is familiar with horses**

- First impressions
- Watch owner handle horse
- Watch owner lunge and ride horse
- Ride horse yourself
- Ask questions about training, experience, health care, trailering, showing, trail riding, horse's strong points, weak points
- Take photographs
- If you feel this is the horse you want, make arrangements to come back for a second visit.

### **3. Second visit with an objective, knowledgeable horse person**

- After you leave, discuss the horse.
- If you still like the horse and your expert agrees, make an offer contingent on vet check.

### **4. Vet check**

### **5. Trial**

### The Purchase

Once the horse has been looked over by a veterinarian and declared sound for the purpose you want, it's time to complete the deal.

For the protection of both parties, make sure you have a bill of sale that clearly describes the horse, the price and payment terms.

If you're buying a registered animal, make sure the owner signs and hands over the registration papers in exchange for your cheque. If the papers are missing, getting new ones can be an expensive affair so make sure the owner has them.

If you are buying a competition horse who has a CEF passport, the

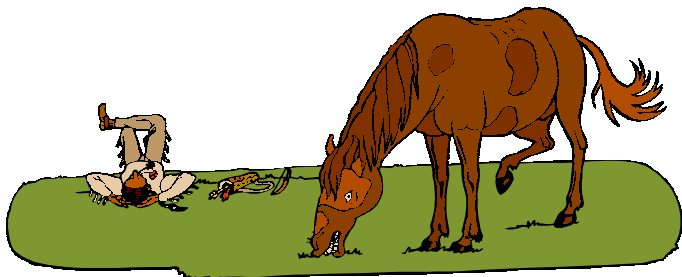
owner needs to sign that over to you as well. The passport belongs to the horse and has to stay with him. One horse can't have two different passports.

During the evaluation process you asked the owner about health records and foot care routines, but now ask for specific dates and copies of the records so you can maintain the schedule. Also get the horse's diet so you start him on the feed he's been used to and make changes gradually.

## Starting Out on the Right Foot

Congratulations. You are now a proud horse owner. Over the next few weeks, months and years, you'll learn more about horses than you

ever thought there was to know. Approach the adventure with an open mind and an open heart and you will join the ranks of "horse people."



### Test Your Horse-Q

1. A relaxed, healthy horse normally stands
  - a) with one foreleg resting on the toe
  - b) with one hind leg resting on the toe
  - c) with both forelegs extended
  - d) with all four legs close together
2. A horse breathes
  - a) slowly
  - b) rapidly
  - c) with frequent shallow breaths
  - d) with frequent deep breaths
3. How much hay would you feed an average sized horse in a day?
  - a) 5-10 pounds
  - b) 20-25 pounds
  - c) 40-45 pounds
  - d) 25-30 pounds
4. How often does a horse need his hooves trimmed?
  - a) twice a year
  - b) every 6 to 8 weeks
  - c) once a year
  - d) every 3 months
5. When should you deworm a horse?
  - a) every spring
  - b) every fall
  - c) if the horse is underweight
  - d) every two months

#### True or false?

6. Horses never need dental work.
7. Horses can catch cold.
8. Horses don't need drinking water if fresh snow is available.
9. Most pleasure horses do fine without grain.
10. Foals get lifetime immunity from their mother's milk.

**ANSWERS**

### Reading List

On the next few pages are a few of my favorite books on horse care and riding. They are all available to purchase online, or if you prefer,

check your local library or book store. To order online, click on US for amazon.com, CA for amazon.ca, or UK for amazon.co.uk.

#### Horse Magazines

Our scientific knowledge of horses as everything else is changing constantly. Magazines provide up-to-date information. My favourite magazines are *Equus* and *Practical Horseman*. I was a charter subscriber to *Equus* back in 1977 and over twenty years of back issues form the core of my horse care library.

#### Centered Riding

Sally Swift

Sally Swift's use of imagery and her concepts of "soft eyes," "building blocks" and "riding with your bones" help riders achieve a softer, more natural position. This is a book I go back to over and over again and recommend to all my students.

**US CA UK**

## Books by Cherry Hill

Cherry Hill's practical, easy-to-follow books belong on every horse person's bookshelf.

### ***Horsekeeping on a Small Acreage***

**US CA UK**

### ***Horse Health Care***

**US CA UK**

### ***Horse Handling and Grooming***

**US CA UK**

### ***Becoming an Effective Rider***

**US CA UK**

### ***101 Arena Exercises***

**US CA UK**

## Books by Jessica Jaheil

Jessica Jaheil takes a practical but compassionate approach to both horses and people. *Horse Sense*, her free e-mail newsletter, is well worth subscribing to.

### ***Riding for the Rest of Us: A Practical Guide for Adult Riders***

**US CA UK**

### ***The Parent's Guide to Horseback Riding***

**US CA UK**

### ***The Complete Idiot's Guide to Horseback Riding***

**US CA UK**

## Pony Club Books

For all round books on riding and stable management, you can't beat the Pony Club manuals. My favourites are the New Zealand series, but the British Horse Society and US Pony Club books are good as well. The US Pony Club series is available online. Start with the D manual for basic information.

***Basics for Beginners/D Level***  
**US CA UK**

***Intermediate Horsemanship/C Level***  
**US CA UK**

***Advance Horsemanship/B, HA and A Levels***  
**US CA UK**

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## ***Veterinary Encyclopedia for Horsemen***

Equine Research Associates

This was an expensive book even ten years ago when I first bought it, but it has more than paid for itself. Every time I need to know something on horse anatomy or health

problems, this is the first book I go to. It's now available on CD ROM as well. Regard this book as an investment.

**US CA UK**

## From the Author

I hope you enjoyed this little e-book and that you found some useful information in it. Please let me know what you think, and pass it on to your friends as well.

**Click here** to send an e-mail with your comments.

I really would like to hear from you!

Before you close this file, have you seen our unique **Horse E-Notes**? **Click here to have a look.** You can also read about ***How to Find the Perfect Place for Your Pony.***

And please feel free to visit **www.acreageequines.com** often for free horse information, puzzles, and book reviews. Add your general comments to the **Horse Talk Forum**, or share your horse book opinions on **Horse Book Talk.**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth".