

# HOW-TO

# Market Your Horse for Sale

by Wendye Gardiner

## MARKETING: PART II



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Our horses' continuous well-being is a responsibility we all happily take on when we join this crazy world of horse lovers, and we do it contentedly. But there may come a time when we can no longer keep a horse for whatever reason. The most important thing is to be true to the horse, find him a good match and a good home where he will be loved and useful, and not be resold immediately and move on to a potentially unhappy life. Be fair to your horse and give him his best chance at a happy future, whatever his discipline may be.

Last month (February issue, page 58) we talked about how to market your horse to prospective buyers, covering everything from advertisements, marketing materials, photos and videos, and responding to inquiries. This month we will go over how to present your horse to the buyer in his best but also most honest light, how to handle sight-unseen sales and avoid scammers, different types of sales contracts and options, prepurchase exams,

This is second installment in a new series of "how-to" features. For all of the articles in the previous series go to [www.arabianhorseworld.com](http://www.arabianhorseworld.com).

Left: Leave the horse in his stall and when prospective buyers arrive, catch him for them so they can see how he reacts in his normal environment. If he lives in a giant pasture where it can take three hours to catch him, then you probably will want to catch him and brush him before their arrival, but let them know that is all that you did.

shipping, and your obligations as a seller. Next month will be geared to the prospective buyer — how to look for and safely buy your dream horse.

## INQUIRIES

We touched on this last month but I can't stress enough the importance of responding quickly. Be honest and forthcoming. Have the materials a buyer may request available or be ready to get them promptly. Long-distance buyers may have in mind specific photos or video they want to see before investing in a plane ticket or taking the leap of faith to buy sight unseen. Try not to make them wait for weeks for these things because they will lose interest. First chance you get, recruit some help, order some good weather, brush your horse and take those (sometimes weird) photos! Most people will want to see a pedigree and not everyone subscribes to Datasource. There are free pedigree databases on the web or you can simply scan and email a copy of your horse's registration papers. Be prompt! The early bird gets the horse sold ... or something like that.

Right: If the seller isn't willing to ride the horse for you, then you shouldn't be willing to ride it either. I don't care how experienced you are, an unknown horse with unknown habits and cues will react differently to a strange rider. Be prepared to ride first to show them the horse is safe. If you aren't able to ride him yourself, try to arrange for someone to come out and do so.

## BUYER'S FIRST VISIT

You have emailed, talked on the phone back and forth perhaps 50 times, or you were lucky and they live close and just want to come straight out and see the horse for themselves. Either way, they are coming! Hurry, hurry, ride the hair off him, wear him out, give him calming supplements and longe him for three hours before they arrive, wash him so he's dry by the time they arrive and ... yeah OK, so NO. Although it is not ideal to show your horse when he hasn't been out of his stall in three weeks, or hasn't been ridden in the last year, or is straight out of the pasture muddy, you also want the buyer to be able to get a REAL feel for the horse. You don't want them to buy your exhausted horse thinking he is always quiet and slow only to get him home and find out he really is Hidalgo and needs to ride 300 miles a week or he is crazy, when they are weekend pleasure riders. That doesn't help your reputation, the horse's well-being, or a buyer's love of Arabians. Work your horse as usual; stick to his normal routine. If he hasn't been ridden in a while, it is a good idea to give him a couple of reminder rides before the buyer arrives but don't wear him out. If he usually goes a day or two between rides, ride him two days before the buyers will arrive. Leave him in his stall and when they arrive catch him for them so they can see how he reacts in his normal environment. If he lives in a giant pasture where it can take three hours to catch him, then you probably will want to catch him and brush him before their arrival, but let them know that is all that you did. Remember, honesty is super important and omitting the fact that you longed him till he wanted to fall over sideways that morning, so he would hopefully behave, is not ethical (unless you *tell* them you did so).

If you do prefer to have your horse out of the stall and groomed when they arrived, that's OK. I recommend leaving his legs unwrapped and the saddle off so they can watch you tack him up and they can see his legs. If you know your buyer is in a hurry, then go ahead and have him standing tacked and wrapped before their arrival, but be prepared to take it all off



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after they ride him so they can see what he looks like beneath it all. But I have found that less is more — let them see right off the bat that you are not trying to hide anything.

The day before they come, you might clip off his whiskers and bridle path, give him a good grooming (or bath if needed) and have him ready to look his best. Just don't go overboard. Buyers will want to envision the horse in their environment, the way he will look at their house. If your horse is strictly a show horse, then by all means, show-clip him, pull his tail out of the bag, put a light coat of oil on his face, and have him ready to really shine.

It is always good to have some sort of handout to give the buyers to take home after they see your horse. Maybe a stallion card for his sire, a copy of his pedigree with your phone number written on it, a sales flier if you have one. If he has been shown, a copy of his show record, scorecards (if applicable), anything that will help keep your horse on your buyers' mind after they leave.

## TEST RIDE

Prepare the horse to ride, same as you would any day. If your horse is a show horse, then show him in show tack without any training aids. You might ask the buyer what sort of bit they are comfortable riding in before throwing them in a bosal or double bridle. Ask if they know how to ride with two hands — it's surprising how many people only neck rein. If your horse is used to being longed before riding, longe him. If you warm up

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Above: If your horse is a bit of a challenge and you don't know the rider's capabilities, explain to them the horse's needs and possible reactions and if they still feel they are up to the challenge, then likely it will be OK.

in a snaffle and switch to a curb — do it. If he has never been ridden without a martingale — use it. It is always ideal to have them try the horse in an enclosed area first, like an arena or a round pen. Even if they want a trail horse, let them figure out the horse's cues in a safe area first before hitting the trails. The point is, set your horse (and your buyer) up for success and don't change things at the last minute. If the buyer brought his own saddle, ensure that it fits your horse before hopping on it. If it hurts them, you may have an unexpected rodeo and get the pleasure of saying, "He has never done that before!" — while it may be true, it is rather embarrassing, not to mention clichéd! We have all had it happen but ... not an enjoyable experience!

One of the soapbox lectures that I give all buyers when they visit: if the seller isn't willing to ride the horse for you, then you shouldn't be willing to ride it either. I don't care how experienced you are, an unknown horse with unknown habits and cues will react differently to a strange rider. Be prepared to ride first to show them the horse is safe. If you aren't able to ride him yourself, try to arrange for someone to come out and do so. If you aren't able to get a rider who is capable of showing the horse to his full potential but know the buyer will be able to get it out of him, then make the buyer aware of the rider's capabilities and explain that a demonstration will show the horse

is safe and that you know the buyer will be able to get a lot more out of the horse. They will understand!

If your horse is a bit of a challenge and you don't know the rider's capabilities, explain to them the horse's needs and possible reactions and if they still feel they are up to the challenge, then likely it will be OK. It is always a good idea to get a signed liability release form and make sure they are wearing a helmet, because many riders will overstate their abilities, albeit unintentionally. A lot of beginners truly think they are experienced because they rode their neighbor's horse bareback a few times as a kid.

## LONG-DISTANCE BUYERS

A nerve-wracking experience for both buyer and seller is the long-distance sight unseen purchase. These buyers will be taking a very big risk that the horse is what they want. Many times they will buy based on pedigree, show record, and video, and in the case of a halter or breeding prospect, this usually works out OK. But if they are buying a riding horse, it is crucial that you be forthcoming with every detail you know about the horse's habits, manners, training, reactions, health, and soundness. This can affect your reputation, the horse's welfare, and the reputation of the breed as a whole. Long-distance buyers will generally want a lot of extra photos and videos to ascertain the horse is what they are looking for and to have the video be their "eyes" since they can't be there in person. Try to get as close to what they want to see as promptly as possible.

## PREPURCHASE EXAM

So your buyer loves your horse! Perhaps your feelings are bittersweet. Hopefully you feel it is a good match and a good home, and hopefully the buyer is enamored with the horse. But the caveat is the daunting prepurchase exam. Not all buyers will pay for one as it can be very costly and they may trust your recommendation and their own judgment that the horse is sound enough for their needs. But as a seller you should recommend they do one (which they can waive at their own risk) because there is no way to know if the horse is 100 percent sound and if you make the statement that the horse is fine, you as a seller are liable. It's best to say, "I believe he is



fine but I would recommend that a vet look at him if you want to be sure.” I once had a pending sale on a horse who I was completely confident would pass easily. Three years old ... he had juvenile cataracts. Buyer backed out and the horse ended up going blind. There are freak things that we as sellers can’t possibly know about without having had a vet check done. If my horse is iffy, I have one done prior to offering the horse for sale so that I know what I am selling and can be honest about it. If your five-year-old has juvenile arthritis in both hocks that will fuse in the next year or so, you might drop his price to make him more attractive to buyers. If the buyer asks you for veterinarian recommendations, it is generally best to suggest a vet who is close by but not your usual vet. A vet who has never seen your horse or worked for you will make the buyer most comfortable. Many times your own vet will refuse to do the exam on your horse for a buyer because of ethical questions that may arise later. Prepurchase exams are the number one cause of lawsuits with equine veterinarians, so vets have to be very careful. Remember, the vet’s job is to find a problem, and there should be no “pass or fail” — it should be a matter of “Here is a potential problem and this is the potential long-term repercussion.” There is no perfect horse.

## TRIAL CONTRACT

Some buyers will request a trial period. Sort of a “lease option” where they take the horse home for a period of time (usually one week to 30 days) and see how he adjusts to their facility and lifestyle and how they get along one on one. This

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is an especially attractive option if the horse is being purchased for kids to ride or if the buyer is somewhat experienced. In order to ascertain whether you would be willing to do this or not, find out what the buyer’s facility is like. Is it safe? Will the horse be with a trainer? Is the trainer reputable? Is the location within driving distance in case the worst happens and you need to go pick him up? How will your horse handle it if he goes for however long and comes back? Will you have to retrain him? Will it hurt future sales if you are forced to pull him off the market to retrain him?

If you do decide to do this, get a deposit of at least \$1,000 and write into the contract that if he is returned the horse must come back in the same condition he left, in order to receive full refund of the deposit. If vet care is needed it will be taken out of the deposit money and any amount left over will be returned to the buyer.

## SALES CONTRACT WITH TERMS

Many buyers will want to make payments. Decide in advance whether or not you will be willing to take terms on your horse’s sale so you have an answer if that is stipulated. Generally you will require a specific down payment, with monthly payments for a specified time to pay off the amount. Most of the time buyers can take the horse to their facility after they make the down payment and insure the horse with you named as loss payee. The registration papers are not transferred until the final check has cleared the bank. Get a good contract, something that a lawyer has written, and make sure that it is legal in your state in case the worst happens and you have to enforce it. Some people will take payments but require that the horse stay at their premises, board paid by the buyer, until the horse is paid for in full. There are a lot of options to enable a buyer to make the purchase, but only do what you are comfortable with — there are a lot of horror stories out there and you don’t want to be one of them!

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## BILL OF SALE

If the sale is being done outright, you will still want to do a sales contract or bill of sale to cover you as the seller. State on it that the horse is being sold as-is, that the buyer had the opportunity to inspect the horse to their satisfaction, and had the opportunity to have a veterinarian look at the horse. There should be a statement that the buyer is responsible for liability, care, feed, and veterinary expenses on the horse after the signing of the contract (or an agreed-upon date). You can include things like “right of first refusal” enabling you to have the first option to purchase the horse back should they decide to sell. You can retain breedings to stallions, embryo rights to mares, etc. Get the advice of an attorney or professional trainer if you need help with the contract.

## YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A SELLER

Many states require that you send the horse with current Coggins, vaccinations, a halter and lead. Find out the laws in your state, but either way, it is the ethical thing to do anyway to send your horse with all his veterinary records, up to date on farrier, worming and shots, information on his daily feed schedule, and a sturdy halter and leadrope if the buyer did not bring one. I have a superstition that the horse has to go with his halter, or he will come back for it. If you love your horse and want him back, by all means, keep his halter for yourself! If you don't like the horse, make sure the buyer takes it even if you have to hide it in their horse trailer!

## SELLER BEWARE

Don't give the buyer the horse's registration papers until the money is in your bank and cleared — you need something to hold on to in case the buyer defaults. Don't pay for anything for the buyer such as veterinary exams, shippers, even blankets until you are positive the funds are verified and in your bank. There are many scammers out there with strange ways of trying to get your money, including canceling checks after requesting you send them partial money back, for example.

## DELIVERY

Out-of-state buyers will frequently ask for your help in arranging shipment. Find out about the local haulers in your area and if you aren't personally familiar with them, check references. Ask local trainers and other horse friends. There are many bad shippers out there as well as many good ones, and you can't be too cautious. Make sure they are legal and not operating under the table or they could be driving exhausted and risk hurting the animals. There is no worse feeling than putting your horse on an unsafe rig with unsafe drivers. Get the hauler's information and have the buyer then contact them with payment. Give your horse extra treats and hugs and take a lot of pictures from all sides before loading him up whether it's a professional hauler or the buyer's own rig. Keep the photos for posterity (and memories).

Next month, we'll change gears and look at this transaction from the buyer's perspective. If you are looking for your new best friend or showring partner and are doing it without the specific guidance of a trainer or mentor, buying a horse can be a daunting task! We'll talk about ways to find that perfect horse for you, and what to watch out for.

*About the author:* Wendye Gardiner runs Solstice Training Center LLC in Aubrey, Texas, where she trains, markets, sells, and shows to the National level in several disciplines. Twenty years of experience and wonderful opportunities to work with some of the best names in the business have given her the ability to individualize her training perspective to each particular horse and she loves to teach interested people how to do it themselves. In selling, she wants to match up horse and buyer for lifelong companionship and is glad to help others learn to do the same for the benefit of the horse.