



Pre-purchase Examinations

Notes on the examination of a horse on behalf of a purchaser – a pre-purchase examination

Veterinary surgeons have developed a general routine of examination in horses and ponies prior to purchase, which has been found to be satisfactory as a means of detecting signs of disease and injury ('pre-purchase examination'). This examination is conducted in five stages and all the stages should be completed, if the status of the horse/pony allows. If this has not been possible, it should be made clear on the certificate in what way the examination has been varied and that any opinions are based on this restricted examination.

The standard examination is conducted in five stages, although the exact sequence of the examination may vary. The stages are:

Stage 1: Preliminary examination

This is a thorough external examination of the animal at rest using visual observation, palpation and manipulation to detect clinically apparent signs of injury, disease or physical abnormality. It includes an examination of the incisor teeth, a thorough examination of the horse's eyes in a darkened area and auscultation of the horse's heart and lungs at rest. Examination of the eyes does not include dilating the pupil but should include examination of internal and external structures.

The examination does not include examination of the inside of the prepuce (sheath), a detailed mouth examination with a speculum, a height measurement or any examination for pregnancy.

Stage 2: Walk and trot, in hand

The animal is walked and then trotted in hand to detect abnormalities of gait and action. Ideally this is carried out on firm, level ground. The horse is turned sharply each way and is backed for a few paces. Flexion tests of all four limbs and trotting in a circle on a firm surface may be carried out if the examining veterinary surgeon considers it safe and appropriate to do so.

Stage 3: Exercise phase

The horse is usually ridden and given sufficient exercise to:

1. Allow assessment of the horse when it had an increased breathing effort and an increased heart rate.
2. Allow assessment of the horse's gait at walk, trot, canter and, if appropriate, gallop.
3. Allow assessment of the horse for the purpose of stage five.

If ridden exercise is not possible for any reason then this stage may be conducted by exercising the horse on a lunge, but this fact should be made clear to the purchaser and on the certificate.

Stage 4: Period of rest and re-examination

The horse is allowed to stand quietly for a period. During this time the respiratory and cardiovascular systems may be monitored as they return to their resting levels.

Stage 5: Second trot up

The animal is trotted in hand again to look for any signs of strains or injuries made evident by the exercise and rest stages.

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