

## The Examination of Horses on behalf of a Purchaser

A veterinary examination must be a careful one and it is to the credit of the profession that, in Parliamentary language and in common speech, to "vet" means to subject to a most thorough examination.

The veterinary examination of a horse in connection with change of ownership consists of establishing facts on which to form an opinion. The facts and the opinion are then presented in the form of a certificate. A standard procedure is necessary, devised to ensure that the advice given maybe intelligible to the public.

It will be seen that these notes and the form of the certificate refer only to an examination of horses on behalf of a purchaser. This is because the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and the British Veterinary Association are clear that the proper person to examine a horse prior to a change of ownership is the veterinarian appointed by the potential purchaser or his agent. Very serious difficulties have been encountered in the past in relation to the certification of horses intended for sale, particularly by auction, to persons unknown and for an unknown purpose. On the other hand, an examination conducted on behalf of a purchaser can be directed specifically to determining whether the horse is physically suitable for the purpose for which it is intended.

It will be voted that the recommended stages of the examination do not include the taking of a blood sample. This matter was most carefully considered in the hope of being able to provide further protection for purchasers and their veterinarians - with particular reference to the possibility that a vendor might have sought to mask lameness in an animal by the use of anti-inflammatory medicaments. Unfortunately, in the present state of scientific knowledge, it is not possible to store and analyse blood samples in a manner which would be acceptable in terms of practicality and cost while at the same time providing sufficient certainty that the analysis would lead to the defection of any anti-inflammatory medicaments present in the horse at the time of the examination. A blood sample may, of course, be taken if the purchaser so requests and the vendor agrees, but it is not considered that the taking of such a sample should form part of the normal examination of horses no behalf of prospective purchasers.

These notes have not sought to cover examinations for special or insurance purposes. Examinations for insurance may involve a full examination but are often for a limited or specific purpose only.

### Ascertaining the Facts: The Examination

A certificate of the veterinary examination of a horse for purchase should be a guarantee that the animal has been examined and reported on carefully in the established manner.

Veterinarians have developed a general routine of examination designed to detect clinical signs of disease and injury. The examination is conducted in five stages and all the stages should be completed. 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.

Stage 1: Preliminary examination

Stage 2: Trotting up

Stage 3: Strenuous exercise

Stage 4: A period of rest

Stage 5: The second trot and foot examination

#### *Stage 1 - Preliminary examination*

This stage is best conducted in the stable. Careful observation is necessary to note the animal's general appearance and condition. The veterinarian should develop the habit of examining a horse methodically part by part, so that there is no chance of inadvertently overlooking any part. The teeth should be examined and the animal's age assessed, according to the teeth or by inspection of the registered evidence of the date of birth. The resting heart should be auscultated for comparison with its action after exercise. The eyes should be examined with an ophthalmoscope. The veterinarian should run his hand over the animal's body and limbs to ensure he has not missed any abnormalities or lesions. The horse should be turned right round in the box or stable and each of the feet should be picked up and examined and the limb joints flexed to detect any pain or limitation of movement. The horse should then be brought outside and thoroughly inspected from all sides in daylight.

#### *Stage 2 - Trotting up*

The animal should be walked and trotted on hard, level ground - if possible by an attendant used to handling horses. The horse should be walked twenty yards away from the veterinarian, turned and walked back. The horse should then be trotted away for thirty or forty yards and trotted back. The horse should be led in such a way that there is no interference with its free action or with the veterinarian's view.

These preliminaries are necessary before the horse is strenuously exercised. If the animal is not fit to be exerted for some reason noted during the inspection in the stable, or if it is lame when trotted, the examination should not be continued. The examination of animals with ailments or injuries which the owner suggests are only temporary, may best be postponed until the complaints have been resolved. If everything so far has been in order, the animal should then be strenuously exercised.

#### *Stage 3 - Strenuous exercise*

The object of this stage is to exert the animal, not to exhaust it, and its age, condition and fitness should be taken into consideration in every case. The animal should be given sufficient exercise (1) to make it breathe deeply and rapidly so that any unusual breathing sounds maybe heard; (2) to increase the action of the heart so that abnormalities maybe more easily detected; and (3) so that strains or injuries may be revealed by stiffness or lameness after a period of rest.

Riding horses should be ridden at a canter for five or ten minutes and the rider should pass close to the veterinarian on each circuit so that he may hear the horse's breathing. The speed should then be increased to controlled gallop, the animal again passing close to the veterinarian until he indicates that the horse should be pulled up so that he can auscultate the heart and observe the rate and depth of breathing. Further exercise may then be given if necessary. Untrained animals and those too young or too small to be ridden may instead be lunged and this should be stated on the certificate. The horse is then returned to the stable.

*Stage 4 - A period of rest*

The horse should be allowed to stand quietly in the stable for approximately half an hour although a shorter period of time may be appropriate for some animals. Vigorous strapping or other attention by the groom defeats the object of the rest period. During this time, the veterinarian should observe the breathing and check the heart beat as if settles. He should write down the name, colour, breed, sex, age and markings needed for the animal's identification, and also any condition of disease or injury that may have been observed so far.

*Stage 5 - The second trot and foot examination*

The horse should be brought out and walked and trotted as before. It is then turned round sharply, first one way and then the other, and made to step back a few paces. If it is considered that an animal's shoes must be removed in order to resolve doubts regarding the condition of the feet, the owners permission should be obtained for this and if should be agreed that it is his farrier who will replace the shoes.

**Presenting the Facts and the Opinion in the Form of a Certificate**

A client who requests a veterinarian to report on the state of the health of a horse which he contemplates purchasing is entitled to a clear opinion that the horse is or is not a fit subject for purchase as far as clinical signs of disease, injury or abnormality are concerned.

The certificate should be as brief as possible but it should indicate clearly on what grounds the veterinarian's decision has been based. All clinical signs of disease, injury or abnormality observed during the examination should be recorded on the certificate. If some are not included, the veterinarian may be accused later of having carelessly failed to observe them.

In the light of his findings, the veterinarian should, (subject to (c) below), complete one of the following opinions, and strike out the other two:-

- (a) If no clinical signs of disease, injury or abnormality have been observed, the certificate should conclude under the heading "opinion" : "On this examination, I find no clinical signs of disease, injury or physical abnormality likely to affect the animal's usefulness for....."
- (b) If clinical signs of disease, injury or abnormality have been observed and listed on the certificate, but the animal nevertheless meets the requirements of the purchaser, the certificate should conclude under the heading of "opinion" : "In my opinion, on this examination, the conditions set out above are not likely to affect the animal's usefulness for....."
- (c) If clinical signs of disease, injury or abnormality have been observed and, in consequence the animal is considered unsuitable for purchase a certificate will normally not be issued. However, if a certificate is specially requested, it should conclude under the heading "opinion" : "In my opinion, on this examination, this animal is not suitable for purchase for....."

The inclusion of the phrase "in my opinion" is an admission that there may be other interpretations of the facts but it in no way reduces the veterinarian's responsibilities of careful observation and the application to the full of his professional knowledge and experience.

A veterinarian may sometimes find that for good and sufficient reasons he cannot carry out a full examination, e.g. he may find that he is dealing with a pregnant mare or an unbroken animal which cannot be subjected to strenuous exercise as required by Stage 3 of the examination.

In these circumstances, the stage in question may be omitted but it should be made quite plain to the client that the omission of this part of the examination may invalidate the opinion which is arrived at on the basis of the other stages of the examination, and the appropriate clause in the certificate should be completed.

**Vices**

Vices are objectionable habits but are not necessarily ascertainable during the examination. If, however, vices, or evidence of vices, are observed during the examination, they should be recorded on the certificate, under the heading "other observations", and taken into account in the concluding opinion

**Height**

For the purposes of this examination, the height of a horse or pony is not the concern of the examining veterinarian.

**Warranty**

If a purchaser wishes to obtain a warranty covering such matters as height, freedom from vices, the non-administration of drugs prior to examination, or the animal's existing performance as a hunter, show-jumper, riding pony, eventer, etc., he should be advised to seek such warranty in writing from the vendor, as these are matters between vendor and purchaser and are not the responsibility of the veterinarian.