



### Taking on a new horse: Pre-purchase examinations

Choosing the right horse or pony can be a long process with many miles travelled and opinions sought. Once you are ready to make the final decision to buy, a pre-purchase examination (“vetting”) is sensible. It is not just the purchase price of the horse that you are protecting, but also your time, effort and money that will be spent on the horse once you own it. Preventing a potentially long and costly obligation of looking after an animal that is not fit for purpose is an important consideration.

The five-stage vetting is performed under guidelines from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). Requirements to perform this examination include a darkened stable, a level, hard surface to trot-up and an area to exercise the horse whilst ridden. The whole process is likely to take between 1½ - 2 hours.

#### **Stage 1**

First the vet performs a clinical examination of the horse at rest. This is a thorough examination to check for any signs of current or previous injury or illness. The eyes are fully examined using an ophthalmoscope, and the heart, lungs, skin, legs, back and teeth are all assessed and any abnormalities are noted on the certificate form. Before and during this stage, the vet will ask the owner or keeper of the horse some questions relating to the horse’s history, including a declaration to say it is free from vices such as wind-sucking or weaving.

#### **Stage 2**

The horse is trotted up on a level, hard surface. Flexion tests are also performed, and whilst these are only a subjective measure, these are assessed using the vets experience of dealing with many different lameness in different ages of horse and knowing what a normal response is. The vet will also see the horse lunged on a circle during this stage, where the most useful surface is a school or lunge pen where the horse is comfortable of the footing.

To book your place please phone our office on 01829 770999  
Or email [office@cheshireequineclinic.co.uk](mailto:office@cheshireequineclinic.co.uk)  
[www.cheshireequineclinic.co.uk](http://www.cheshireequineclinic.co.uk)





### Taking on a new horse: Pre-purchase examinations continued

#### **Stage 3**

During stage three the vet needs to assess the horse during exercise and usually this is performed under saddle or on the lunge if unbroken. The vet looks at the different gaits and also listens to the airway for any abnormal noises during inspiration. The heart rate and lungs are examined at the end of exercise.

#### **Stage 4**

This is the cool down period, where the vet normally inspects the horse's teeth fully using a gag and light source, draws the markings and observes for any vices or abnormal behavior. The feet are thoroughly checked and examined using hoof testers and the horse is circled and backed up in-hand to assess for neurological abnormalities.

#### **Stage 5**

Second trot-up, the vet repeats the flexion tests at this stage and also sees the horse lunged on the surface for a second time. The horse is returned to the stable where blood is taken and sent for storage. This can be analysed in the future to detect any hidden substances in the horse's system, such as painkillers, that might mask a condition and affect the decision on the horse's suitability for the intended use.

#### **Further tests**

Further tests such as x-rays, ultrasound or endoscopy can be performed routinely on request, or if concerns are revealed during the vetting. Usually these tests are not required to assess a horse's suitability, but can be offered at the time of vetting and all can be performed remotely at the yard.

*A two stage vetting examination would not continue to stages three, four and five. We request that every client requesting a two stage vetting signs a disclaimer to agree they understand the limitations and exemptions of a two stage vetting.*

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