

# Top Tips for buying a dressage horse

By Andrew Gould International Dressage Rider

Whether you're looking for a dressage schoolmaster or buying a young prospect, you can follow certain steps to ensure your shopping expedition is a success.

When it comes to buying a dressage horse, riders want to find the best partner they can afford. Andrew Gould, International Dressage Rider and owner of Priory Dressage, shares his advice and knowledge as well as some of the most frequently asked questions he receives from clients, particularly amateur riders, who are searching for their perfect dressage partner:

Looking to purchase a dressage horse is a massive financial commitment and a decision that you want to get right the first time. Unfortunately horses do not come with a logbook and therefore it can be very hard to gauge market value and know the truth about their history. When I look at purchasing a horse for a client there are key things that I look at. Firstly the client and I write out a detailed criteria of exactly what we are looking for, i.e. age bracket, level the horse is at, size and budget. I always advise people not to get too hung up on things like colour and breeding. If Anky's Salinero was grey we would all want one!

You must prioritise your list and think what is really important to you. At the top of the list should be temperament. It is crucial to have a horse that wants to



**“It is much easier to train horses with a good temperament”**

work with you and for you. It is much easier to train horses with a good temperament and therefore your job will be easier in the long run. Next on my list of priorities is conformation, type and movement. I will ask myself if the horse is built up-hill? Is he long in the back or short in the neck? which could prove to be difficult to train, and can make learning certain movements very hard work. Does the horse have three good paces? There is no point having a horse with an amazing trot if the horse has a lateral walk. Also be realistic about your financial status. Is your money going to be safe if you decide after 6 months that this might not be the right horse for you? Can you re-sell the horse at the same price or more if you have improved him?

When you go to view horses try and take your trainer or a knowledgeable friend with you. Take a video camera so you can record the horse both with the current rider and yourself. Make sure you see the horse working with the rider they are used to first. Ask them if they can show you walk, trot and canter on both reins and if it's a more trained horse then ask them to show you the different movements that he can do. If they show you the horse in an indoor school, but you only have an outdoor arena then ask them if you can see him work outdoors as well. It is very important to see how the horse copes with situations that you would likely put him in should you purchase him, as this will give you an indication of the horse's temperament. When you feel you have seen enough, ask if you can try him. Remember when trying a strange horse to have respect for the owner/rider and listen to any advice they can offer. They know the horse at the end of the day. Try and get the best feel you can in what is probably quite a short space of time. See if the horse responds to you in a positive way and if you feel comfortable and confident. I am a strong believer in knowing whether it's the right horse quite quickly from the initial ride. You can usually feel if it is good or not if you are enjoying the ride. Remember the horse may not be schooled quite how you would like or it may not be as supple as you would like, but these are all training issues rather than anything else and can often be rectified.

Talk to the owners and find out as much history about the horse as you can. Ask about its competition record (if he has one) and ask to see any test sheets that they may have. Find out if the horse is good at shows, how he copes with travelling and loading and whether he has any vices. If you like everything you have seen and heard then arrange to come back and see the horse for a second time. I always advise doing this, as you need to see a horse at least twice before making such a big commitment.

**“You need to see a horse at least twice before making your decision”**

### **A few questions my clients always ask me:**

**Is buying a dressage schoolmaster a good idea, since they drop in value after a few years?**

Generally, if you hear yourself saying that one of your major goals is to improve your riding in the next few years, you should consider a schoolmaster - a trained, experienced horse. There is so much that can be gained from riding a schoolmaster and they can provide the rider with an education that they will always value and use when training other horses in the future. You can buy a schoolmaster and then sell him after two years and use the money towards a younger, more in-experienced horse.

### **What is the best way to find out about horses for sale?**

There are many ways to find horses for sale. A lot of trainers and riders know of horses that are potentially coming on the market for genuine reasons and it is always advisable to put the word out if you are looking for a specific type of horse. Word of mouth can often be a great way to find your perfect horse. There are also equestrian publications that have pages full of quality horses. Sales sites like [www.horsequest.co.uk](http://www.horsequest.co.uk) also have a great selection. If calling classified ads is not really for you and you don't fancy driving the length and breadth of the country to see one horse that doesn't turn out to be as described then going to a yard/trainer/dealer that specialise in producing and selling horses is a good way to see a large selection all under one roof. There are more of these sorts of yards abroad in places like Holland and Germany and they are, after all the masters and medal winners of dressage.

### **Could I find a horse abroad?**

Going abroad to look for horses is not as scary or expensive as many think. In many ways it is more economical, safer and a lot less stressful. By going abroad to Holland or Germany I feel you see the very best of the European crop whether you are looking for a foal, young horse or a schoolmaster. You can often see 6 - 8 horses at one venue that all fit your specific criteria. Because you are seeing a large number of horses in one day or weekend you are not spending money travelling up and down the motorway, you are viewing horses that are generally at a lower price due to exchange rates and the growth and subsidence of the European breeding market. The cost of flights and accommodation can be less than £100. Many professional companies like ours that take clients abroad in search of horses and ponies will arrange for a trusted translator to meet you from the airport and transport you to the yards and they will look after you during your visit. They will set up viewings of horses that meet your criteria and they will translate your questions to breeders. The best companies will also arrange unbiased vettings with x-rays and passport checks etc. They will arrange transportation for the horse back to Britain and they will be concerned about finding the right horse for you not the most expensive. If you are going to look abroad for a horse then go with a reputable company that provide testimonials from other UK clients that have used their services.

My general advice to someone searching for a dressage horse is to ask a professional for advice and guidance, don't be put off by looking further a field and remember that the best horses are worth waiting for; you just need to keep looking!



Shadowfax  
(Oldenburg Sandro  
Hit x Rubenstein)

Andrew Gould sold  
this horse to Ruth  
Edge International  
Event & Dressage  
Rider.

He has won  
3 National  
Championships  
at only 6 years  
old and won  
the Brightwell  
Challenge in 2007.