

FINDING YOUR PERFECT DRESSAGE PARTNER

BUYING A DRESSAGE HORSE IS A MASSIVE FINANCIAL COMMITMENT AND A DECISION THAT YOU WANT TO GET RIGHT FIRST TIME. ANDREW GOULD GIVES SOME INVALUABLE ADVICE AND GUIDES US THROUGH THE PROCESS.

Write a list

When I'm helping a client find a dressage horse, I sit down with them and write out a detailed list of exactly what we are looking for, ie. age bracket, level the horse is working 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 but temperament should always be at the top as it's crucial to have a horse that wants to work with you and is easy to train.

Next, I will look at conformation, type and movement and ask myself whether the horse is built up hill, whether he's long in the back or short in the neck, all of which could prove to be difficult to train and can make learning certain movements quite hard. I also look for three good paces, there is no point having a horse with an amazing trot if it has a "lateral" (two time) walk.

Take someone with you

When you go to view horses, try to take your trainer or a knowledgeable friend with you and take a video camera so you can record the horse both with the current rider and yourself. Ask to see the horse working with the rider they are used to first, showing you walk, trot and canter on both reins and, if it's a more trained horse, the different movements that he can do. If they show you the horse in an indoor school but you only have an outdoor arena, ask to see him work outdoors as well, that way you can see how the horse copes with the



Conformation - is the horse built uphill?

situations that you are likely put him in.

Enjoy the ride!

When you've seen enough and it's your turn to ride the horse, have respect for the owner/rider and listen to any advice they can offer - they know the horse best, after all. Try to 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; if you are enjoying it, something must be right! Remember, the horse may not be schooled quite how you would like or not supple as you're used to but these are all training issues and can often be rectified.

Ask questions

Find out as much history about the horse as you can, including his competition record (if he has one) and ask to see any test sheets that they may have. Ask 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. When you are making your final decision, be realistic about your financial status and whether your money will be safe, if you decide after 6 months that this might not be the right horse for you.

FAQs

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

Generally, if 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 put the money towards a younger, less experienced horse.

What is the best way to find out about 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. The many equestrian publications and web sites generally also have a great selection but, if calling classified ads is not your scene and you can't face driving the length and breadth of the country, to see a horse that doesn't turn out to be as described, then going to a yard/trainer/dealer, that specialises in producing and selling horses, is a good way to see a large selection all under one roof.

Could I find a horse abroad?

Going abroad to look for horses is not as scary or expensive as many think and can actually be more economical, safer and a lot less stressful, if you go 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 and, 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. The price of horses is generally lower due to exchange rates and the growth and subsidence of the European breeding market, whilst the cost of flights and accommodation can be less than £100. Many professional trainers take clients abroad in search of horses and will arrange

for a trusted translator to meet you at the airport, transport you to the venue and look after you during your visit. They can also set up viewings of horses that meet your criteria and they will translate your questions to breeders. My general advice to anyone searching for a dressage horse is to ask a professional for advice and guidance, don't be put off by the cost, looking further a field and remembering that the best horses are worth waiting for. You just need to keep looking!

Further information on Andrew Gould and the horses he offers for sale can be seen at www.andrewgould.com



Baileys HORSE FEEDS SPONSOR'S CORNER

Before bringing your new dressage horse home, it's important to find out what his previous owners were feeding him. It will help him adapt to his new home if his diet remains as close to what he was used to, so try to match his previous diet as far as you can, even if you can't get exactly the same feed. Once he is settled, you can start to change what you feed, especially if you want to change the horse's condition or energy levels. For horses who find a change of home particularly stressful, a prebiotic, like Baileys Digest Plus, can help maintain the bacterial balance in the hindgut, supporting gut efficiency to help avoid digestive upsets or excessive loss of condition.



For friendly practical advice on feeding your horse at any time, contact Baileys Horse Feeds on 01371 850247 (option 2) or visit www.baileyshorsefeeds.co.uk