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Finding The Right Barn For You!



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Before you begin looking for a place to learn how to ride horses *the first thing you need to do is ask yourself the following four questions:*

- *Why do I want to do this?*

Do you see yourself as a cowboy riding off into the sunset, or are you interested in going to the Olympics?

What style of riding are you interested in, English or Western? There are many disciplines including barrel racing, endurance riding, dressage and jumping just to mention a few.

Answering these questions will help you to choose your barn and trainer

- *How much do I want to spend?*

You can start for as little as \$40, currently the price of a half hour private lesson at my barn. You could also join a private club, take private lessons and buy your own horse. The sky is truly the limit.

- *How seriously do you plan on taking this?*

How far will you drive to get to your barn? How many days and hours per week do you have to put into this effort?

If you are going to learn the piano, and you only practice for one hour a week you won't be nearly as good as someone who is practicing every day.

- *Where do you want to be in five years?*

Do you ultimately want to have your own horse? Do you just want to be accomplished at riding a horse? Do you want to participate in horse shows?

Is going on trail rides what you desire? The next five years will go by, whether you plan or not, so think about where you want to end up.

Okay, let's explore some ways that you can find a quality lesson barn that will work for you and take you where you want to go.

Your first contact is generally on the phone. I recommend calling at least three barns in your area to help you make a good decision.

You can learn a whole lot by the first meet and greet.

I remember 30 years ago when my girlfriend, at the time, wanted to take horseback riding lessons. She left it up to me to find a place to ride.

I called and left messages at four different barns. We ended up taking lessons at the only one that returned my call.

Of course this was back in the 1980s, before the Internet was available, I used a phone book and telephone.

We ended up riding at that stable for a number of years. We rode every week as our schedule allowed.

The only reason we left to ride at another barn was because we bought a horse farm.

That being said, how responsive is the place that you are checking out? How they treat you on the phone will definitely influence your decision.

7 tips on evaluating a lesson barn!

1. First impressions are very important, but don't be knocked over by your first viewing of the property. Some barns may be older or gothic.

Are the stalls, aisles and grounds neat and clean? What kind of bedding do they use for the horses? Are cobwebs hanging everywhere?

2. Is there an indoor riding ring? Depending on where you live, this may be mandatory if you wish to ride year round. My farm is in Buffalo New York, and we need to ride inside more often than not.

Is the riding ring well maintained? Is the footing uneven or do you see hills, valleys and piles of horse manure everywhere?

What about air quality? Do they keep the ring watered? Go when horses are being ridden and see how dusty it is. Close, dank and dusty air is very unhealthy and unpleasant.

How do the lights work, is it bright and airy when you go in the ring? How high is the ceiling?

3. What is your impression of how well the school horses are treated? You aren't an expert so here are a few brief points to consider and look for.

Is there an overconcentration of flies around them? Flies are a fact of life in a horse farm. However, you would like to see or hear about some fly controls that are in place.

You don't want to see open wounds, weepy eyes or other areas on a horse that have a concentration of flies.

Are you observing horses that are undernourished or ill fed and have their ribs or backbones sticking out?

Healthy horses should seem curious and interested or happy to see you. If they don't they either just got fed, are sleeping or something is wrong. Trust your gut instinct when you are viewing the horses.

4. Be concerned if they insist that you buy a package or a series of lessons. Take one at a time and by your third lesson you will have a pretty good idea if this is a barn you want to continue riding at.
5. The equipment used on a horse while you are riding is called tack. The bridles and saddles should be clean and in good repair.

It's important that the saddles fit properly and the horse has the correct bit in his mouth.

As a beginner, you are not expected to know all the answers. But over time, you should educate yourself by asking appropriate questions, such as why are you using this bit? Or how do you tell if the saddle fits properly.

6. One of the most dangerous sports is horseback riding. There should be safety rules displayed.

The instructor should emphasize safe handling, and you need to make sure that you take some responsibility to make yourself aware of how to handle horses and to be safe around them.

You should expect to be asked to sign a liability release form. There is an inherent risk of going on a horse farm, and being around horses.

By this I mean that you should be aware that when you go near a horse or on farm property you might open yourself up to injury. It's not my intent to scare you, but I do want you to come to this new adventure with open eyes.

7. Finding a good trainer. Unfortunately I don't have a magic formula for you. Once you find a good trainer you want to stay with them as long as possible.

So ask how long they have been teaching where they are.

Ask your friends if any of them are taking horse lessons and seek other forms of word of mouth. The Internet can be very iffy and you need to be cautious when looking there. No easy answer here, trial and error is the norm.

My wish for you is that you will enjoy being around horses for the rest of your life. I think it's true what Ronald Reagan said about horses "The best thing for the inside of a child is the outside of a horse." Make sure you always wear your smile and have a good time.

Feel free to e-mail me directly with any questions and check out my website – www.GettingStartedWithHorses.com – where you can comment and ask questions.

Best of luck on your adventure with horses!