

## SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE

This month, HW Helpline's Michelle O'Neill from Cherry Tree Equine talks about the risks and realities involved in searching for our perfect equine partner and shares some tried and tested 'trouble shooting tips' for buying your next horse.



michelle o'neill

Buying a new horse, whether it is your first or your fiftieth is very exciting! Before you know it, your mind will have run away with dreams of all the amazing things you and your new partner will achieve and the fun you will have together! But sometimes we let emotion get in the way of the truth.

Sometimes we fall in love with the wrong horse.

Sometimes we make the wrong decisions.

And sometimes other people do not have out best interests at heart.

Buying a new horse is a very emotional decision. We want to fall in love with our new horse or pony, we want them to be our best friend and we want to spend lots of time with them. But sadly, sometimes this emotion means that we fall in love with a horse that is not suitable for us.

As you many of you know, HorseWyse Magazine and Cherry Tree Equine produced a DVD to help first time horse owners find the horse of their dreams. But recently I have seen a lot of people buying their second or third horse and making some very bad decisions.

Even I have been caught before!

I once bought a horse that I though was going to be amazing! But I didn't read the warning signs. The owner's wife (a very competent horsewoman) wouldn't ride the horse when I went to look at him. Friends of mine told me how "hot" the horse was and I heard lots of stories about how fast and strong he was. the horse was in very lean condition when I saw him, he had bad ground manners and he had not been started under saddle well.

All of these things should have been warning signs that I was headed for trouble! But I thought I was above all that. It was only after he had broken my arm and I was having lots of trouble with him that I realised that he was not suited to the event I wanted to do and that we were totally wrong for each other.

This was many years ago and I know a lot more now about what to look for in a prospective horse. But even now, I don't think I could have ever made that horse safe for speed events.

What did I do with him? I sold him. But, unlike when I bought him, I sold him with a full description and a video of all his bad behaviours. So his new owner knew exactly what she was buying.

**So here are some tips for any of you who are thinking of buying a new horse;**

### 1. Get Help!

There are lots of great people out there who will help you. Call up an instructor or an experienced

horse person and ask their opinion. If you have to, pay them to come and look at the horse for you.

### 2. Ask Around

See if you can find other people who know the horse or the seller. Find out what their reputation is like. Do not believe just what they tell you.

### 3. Price Check

Just because the seller thinks their horse is worth \$10,000, does not mean it actually is. Get online or buy a magazine and look at what horse of similar experience, ability, age and breed are selling for.

### 4. Never Take Your Float With You

Always make sure you look at a horse the first time without your float. It is just too easy to take home an unsuitable horse when you have the float.

### 5. Try To Look At More Than One Horse In A Short Time

Whether it is a day, a weekend or a week book in to look at as many horses as you can in a short time frame. This will make you feel like you have options.

### 6. Vet Checks Are Great But.....

Vet checks are well worth the money, but they will not tell you a lot of things and sometimes they will tell you things that don't really affect you. Just look at them as yet another tool to help you make your decision, but not necessarily the only tool.

### 7. Imagine Your Perfect Horse

Write down everything your perfect horse would be. You can be as specific as you like. Then put these requirements in order of importance. Each time you look at a new horse, see how many of these requirements you can tick off.

### 8. Excuses, Excuses

If the owner is full of too many excuses, or seems to be trying to cover up things, go and find another horse to look at. Whilst it seems hard to believe, not everyone out there has your best interests at heart and sometimes they will say anything to make a sale!

Good luck to any of you who are setting out to find a new horse. Take your time and in the end you will find the horse that you are meant to spend many fun filled days with.



Looking for the perfect horsey Christmas gift? You can buy Michelle O'Neill's and HorseWyse Magazine's 'Please...can I have a pony?' now at [www.horseywyse.com.au/gift\\_shop](http://www.horseywyse.com.au/gift_shop)

# ASK MICHELLE

*What are some ways to make horses find dressage/flatwork more enjoyable? I have an educated ex dressage horse who gets grumpy when doing flatwork. His old owners sold him because they were a dressage home and he wasn't enjoying his work. I don't particularly enjoy it either, but know that is necessary for jumping and sporting. What are some ways to make it more enjoyable?*

**Thank you! Jasmine**

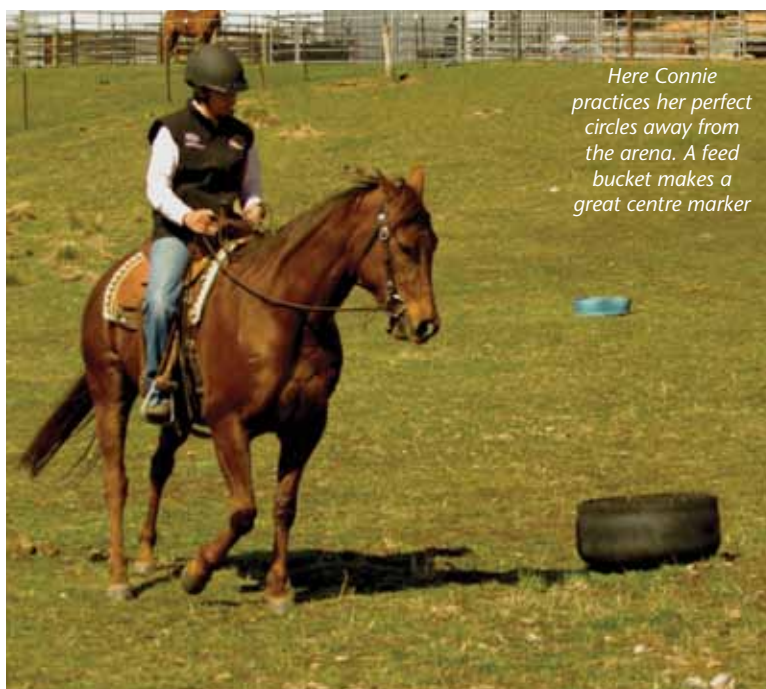
Hello Jasmine

You are correct; flat work is very important for everything we do with our horses!

The key with keeping it fun is to make sure we do not get too repetitive; I'll bet you get bored if your teacher makes you do the same thing over and over again, so why wouldn't your horse be exactly the same?

There are two ways we can make flatwork more fun; by doing different exercises or by heading out of the arena.

There are lots of ways we can change up our flatwork in the arena. Instead of just working your horse in circles, work him in squares or triangles or pentagons. Instead of practicing changes in pace from working to medium trot down the long sides of the arena, do it in a 'tear drop' shape. Instead of doing serpentine across the arena, set up cones and do it in a smaller scale like a bending race. Instead of backing your horse in a straight line, back him in a circle.



Here Connie practices her perfect circles away from the arena. A feed bucket makes a great centre marker

These are just some examples of the exercises you can use to make flatwork more interesting. Just use your imagination!

Of course the benefits of all of these different exercises are that you are using different parts of your horse's body and you will therefore end up with a fitter, stronger horse if they are done correctly.

The other option is to take your flat work outside. My young horses rarely do any work in the arena for the first couple of years of their working lives. I do all their training outside.

I can use logs as trot poles, trees, bushes or stumps to help them achieve perfect circles, long upward slopes to get them to extend their stride, down ward slopes to get them to shorten their stride, I can ask them to leg yield from one side of a track to another. The options are only limited by your imagination! Good luck with your riding!



If your horse is getting tired of being ridden in the arena, perhaps it is time to add a little ground work to your program to make it more interesting



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## UPCOMING EVENTS:

Be sure to check our new Cherry Tree Equine website for details of Michelle's upcoming clinics, lessons and confidence building trail rides.

[www.cherrytreeequine.com.au](http://www.cherrytreeequine.com.au)

