

While we'd all LOVE to find our very own pony under the Christmas tree this Summer, this month, HW Helpline's Michelle O'Neill has some terrific practical tips on new horse ownership. Michelle also talks about how to teach 'older horses new tricks', as well as dealing with the 'sensitive issue' of horse allergies.

Hi Michelle

I am looking to buy a horse next year. My parents are 'unhorsey', so I will keep the horse on agistment. I have been riding since I was about four and have been desperate to own a horse since then (I am 13 now.). Do you have any advice on buying a horse for the first time?

Charlotte :-)

Hi Charlotte,

How exciting that you are getting to join the great club of horse ownership! I am very happy to hear that you have been riding for such a long time before you get a horse of your own; I am sure you are an excellent rider by now, so you will possibly just need to learn a little more about horse care.

As you may know, HorseWyse Magazine and Cherry Tree Equine put together a great little DVD called "Please...can I have a pony?". I really recommend you get a copy of this before you go looking for your new horse. Not only has it got lots of great tips on buying your first pony, but also on how to look after him when you have him.

But to get you started, here are two great tips from the DVD. There are lots more, but these will help!

1. As your parents are not horsey people, I would be sure to take an experienced horse person with you when you go to look at potential horses. Perhaps your instructor can come with you? Even if you pay them, it will be money well spent.

2. One of the greatest mistakes people make, is to buy the first horse they look at. Be sure to remember that there are lots of horses out there and you don't need to buy the first one you see!

Good luck Charlotte. We look forward to seeing lots of photos of you and your new horse in HorseWyse next year!



Dear Michelle,

My name is Morgan and my sister and I, have a 13yo Standardbred gelding called Comanche.

Comanche is really well behaved and a great lead-line horse but there is one problem.

Comanche is an ex-trotter, so it is quite hard to ask him to canter. I remember to sit the trot and put my leg behind the girth, like my instructor taught me but he just won't canter!!! Am I doing something wrong? Please help me and Comanche!!!

Morgan.

Hi Morgan

Standardbred's often make great riding horses. They are often calm and quiet and fantastic to have around.

Have you tried to get Comanche to canter from the ground by longeing him? This might be a good start. If you can get him to canter by using groundwork, it is going to make your job much easier when you are sitting on his back.

When my students have trouble getting their horses to canter under saddle, I use either a trot pole or

a small jump to help get them cantering. It seems that the extra effort horses need to pick up their legs to go over the pole or jump, also encourages them to canter.

I would put a trot pole or small jump in the middle of your riding area. Trot Comanche around in a circle in a calm relaxed trot (rushing the trot will not help you get him to canter). When he is trotting nicely, put him over the pole or jump and as you do so, ask him for the canter like your instructor has taught you.

At first, I wouldn't worry about what canter lead he picks up or which direction you go. He may find it quite hard to canter in a circle, so let him canter wherever he likes and give him plenty of room to stretch and move.

If you can, ask him to go back to trot after a few strides of canter when you first succeed. That way, there is less chance of him falling out of canter before you ask him to go back to trot. Each time you get the canter, ask for a few more strides and before you know it, you will be cantering everywhere!



Photo by Rachel Vercoe

Hi Michelle,

My name is Lauren and I am 13 years old. I own a 14.3 hh, 16 year old bay Quarter Horse mare. Over the past month she has become very itchy all over her back down to the sides of her belly, and along the neck following the hair line. She also has two itchy patches on her belly towards her hind legs - these used to be scabby and losing a lot of hair, but now feel like normal skin, but she is still itchy. We have tried washing her in Quit-Itch, a medicated iodine solution, as well as treating her for lice. We have also washed all her rugs. None of this has made any difference to stop the itching. She is paddocked with another horse which shows no signs of this. Her previous owner also said that they had no problem of this sort ever with her. So I am just curious to know what is wrong with her so I can help stop the itch!

From Lauren

Hi Lauren,

Both Sophie and I have had previous experiences with this kind of problem. It is certainly not nice for the horse and

a big worry for you!

I once sold a horse to Canberra (which is really not that far away from us) and she developed something very similar. The mare was very healthy, had never had a problem when she lived with us and was the only horse at the agistment centre who developed itch.

The new owners got their vet to come and look at her and do a range of tests. It was eventually decided that she had an allergy to the grasses at her new home. They were lucky and could manage the itch through careful rugging and paddock management.

You don't mention if you have had the vet out to look at your mare. This would be the first thing I would do. You need to know exactly what she is reacting to, before you know how to stop it. It could be the environment making her sick, the grass, her feed or something else around her.

One of the big things that can affect horses with allergies is where they live. If you live near the coast or in the warmer climates, this may be contributing to your problems. Some horses just cannot live in these areas and sadly, sometimes the only thing to do in this case is look for a home for them elsewhere.

Good luck. I hope you get your mare well again, but with the help of a good vet I am sure you will have all the answers very soon!



Photo by Andrew Hennell



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