

Safety first

Safety is everything when riding a new horse, and Natalie advises wearing a body protector as well as a safety helmet.

"Even if it's an older horse, you don't know what he's going to be like. And use a neck strap. I ride all my horses in one."

She also recommends lungeing before climbing into the saddle.

"After lungeing, make sure that you have a safe space in which to get on, ideally with a helper. The weather is another factor. If it's blowing a gale, postpone climbing on board for another day."

The first time out on the roads with a new horse can be particularly daunting. Natalie advises choosing companions — equine and human — wisely.

"Always go out with another horse who is good in traffic and who will give confidence to yours," she says. "And go out with a rider you trust who is going to be sensible. If you're nervous you don't want to be pushed. You just want to go on a short hack and have a nice time. Even having someone sensible on the ground walking alongside you can give you and the horse confidence."

Natalie says that wearing high vis is a must, and she adds: "Think too about the time of day you head out. Near me, the roads are quieter around midday."

Don't expect too much too soon

Once a new horse has been ridden a few times the rider may wish to start planning for their future together. Patience, however, is key.

TOP TIPS FOR SNAPPING UP SECOND-HAND KIT

The cost of the horse, the vetting and the transport may leave the purchaser's bank balance somewhat depleted, and if the horse doesn't come with much of a wardrobe from the vendor perhaps buying second-hand is the way to go.

Some tack shops have second-hand sections, or alternatively there are

plenty of sites online, such as eBay and Facebook Marketplace, while apps like Equipt offer thousands of items for sale.

While it may be difficult to locate the desired colour, and items may show signs of wear and tear, it will save money until the coffers have been built up again.

"To begin with, both horse and rider are learning a huge number of new things about one other," says Tracey Cole, a master trainer in neurolinguistic programming who specialises in equestrianism. Rather than setting goals, Tracey suggests taking a new partnership in micro steps.

"Alleviate any pressure by not expecting too much too soon. By increasing the time and difficulty of the riding in incremental steps, you can ensure greater success down the line," she says.

Natalie agrees: "I wouldn't set goals initially. Don't feel under pressure, especially if you're on a yard where there are lots of competitive people. Take things at your own pace."

New purchasers should also bear in mind that every horse is an individual.

"Finding the key to each horse comes with time and patience," says Natalie. "They're like a puzzle to work out.

Don't see a bad day as a downside; see it as a positive because you can work through it."

To stay positive, Tracey recommends using a journal — in app or notebook form — to keep track of progress.

"I like to make a table with headings like 'time of day', 'weather', 'how I was feeling', 'what small thing I want to focus on', 'how my horse felt when I was getting on', 'what I learned from the ride (positives)' and then jot down what I want to focus on next time too."

Anyone starting to doubt themselves should call a coach, says Tracey.

"I know this involves a cost, but another pair of eyes on the situation can help a struggling rider overcome a blip."

Natalie agrees: "Although good quality tuition with someone you trust can seem expensive, it's invaluable."

With the extensive preparations involved in taking a new horse home, it might be all too easy to lose sight of the fun element. Natalie, though, always reminds her clients to enjoy their new partnership.

"Enjoy the journey and enjoy the learning because every horse will teach you something," she says. 🐾

Horses in harmony! However, finding field companions who gel with a new addition to the herd may involve trial and error initially

