

There are various options and factors to consider to ensure success when looking to buy a retired racehorse



The search IS ON

Ex-racehorses can make exceptional partners, but how you find yours matters. From charities to auctions and private sales, **Catherine Welton** explores the different ways to source a former racehorse and finds out what prospective owners should know before taking the plunge



EX-RACEHORSES | WHERE TO BUY



BRINGING AN EX-RACEHORSE into your life can be an incredibly rewarding journey for both horse and owner. But where and how that journey begins varies hugely — and choosing the right seller goes a long

way to getting your partnership off to the best possible start.

“The different routes available to prospective owners offer varying levels of support and require different levels of experience,” explains Philippa Gilmore, head of welfare operations at Retraining of Racehorses

(RoR). “From rehoming through specialist charities to sourcing directly from trainers or retrainers, understanding the options and carrying out appropriate checks can help ensure both horse and rider have the best chance of building a positive relationship.”

OPTION 1

DIRECT FROM A TRAINER

Some former racehorses are rehomed directly from the trainer and, as Philippa explains, this can have advantages for buyers: "Trainers and their teams often know the horse extremely well and can provide valuable insights into temperament, history and potential for retraining."

This route is particularly well suited to knowledgeable owners, keen to take on the retraining themselves.

"Horses obtained this way often are at an earlier stage in their transition from racing, which can be appealing for experienced riders who are confident bringing on a Thoroughbred," adds Philippa. "It's a process that can be hugely rewarding, but it does require patience, understanding and access to knowledgeable support where needed."

Kevin Atkinson, co-founder of rehoming charity New Beginnings, agrees. "If you're very capable, taking one straight from racing is not a bad idea because you can put your own stamp on it."

But he cautions that managing the horse's transition from the track isn't something to take on lightly.

"The trainer can give you lots of information, but once the horse leaves the yard and that racing routine, it can change," he says. "Some horses adapt quickly and well, and some don't. It's not that people can't manage it, but you do need to know what you're getting into."

OPTION 2

VIA A RETRAINER

Some ex-racehorses are first placed with professional retrainers before being offered for sale or loan.

"As the horse may already have begun adapting to life beyond racing and started work in a new discipline, prospective owners may find this offers a stronger foundation on which to start building their partnership," advises Philippa.

Inevitably, because of the work that has gone into the horse, prices tend to

Many trainers look to rehome retired ex-racers directly, often to people they know

PHOTO: IAN FORSYTH/GETTY IMAGES

be higher, but Philippa thinks it's worth it for some buyers.

"While purchase prices may reflect the level of training already achieved, many riders value the insights this route can offer," she says.

OPTION 3

REHOME FROM A CHARITY

For buyers looking for more support, a charity can be the best choice.

"If you take a horse from a charity such as ours, you're loaning the horse, so it's

in the charity's interests to make sure you get the best match," Kevin points out.

Like many rehoming charities, New Beginnings has a lengthy application process. While that might be off-putting to some, for others it is reassuring.



A charity will help to ensure you and the horse are a good match

PHOTO: PAT SCALA/GETTY IMAGES

A REASSURINGLY THOROUGH PROCESS

Helen Le-Bon Olive sourced two ex-racehorses, Chrissie and Dora, from charities and found it to be a reassuringly thorough process.

"On both occasions the assessment ensured that I was a suitable owner/rider as well as the horse matching my requirements," she says. "The full history of each horse was known and, on both occasions, I was introduced to their previous jockeys, trainers and owners, who were all invested in a great retirement for their horse."

For Helen, there was the added benefit of knowing that she was contributing to the welfare of other former racehorses.

"By rehoming an ex-racehorse from a charity, you not only save money on the upfront cost of purchasing a horse, but any funds provided go towards ensuring the continuation of the charity's work."



PHOTO: EVENT TO PHOTOGRAPHY



There are yards that specialise in retraining ex-racehorses

PHOTO: YOUR HORSE LIBRARY



"First of all, we clarify what the potential owner is looking for and ask for videos of them riding so that we can get an idea of what horse might suit them," says Kevin.

If the charity thinks they have a potential match, a visit is arranged: "We'll put them on a schoolmaster first, then show them their potential match being ridden by a member of our staff before they get to ride, under supervision in a safe space, such as our round pen."

On a second visit, the prospective owner can tack up the horse or bring them in from the field, as well as riding them. On a third visit, they might have the opportunity to hack out.

Aftercare

The other advantage of rehoming from a charity is the aftercare, as Kevin explains. "Owners become part of our big family and we're always at the end of the phone. We also have a closed Facebook group, where people can ask questions and post pictures. It's a safe group where people know they won't be judged."

Philippa agrees that this ongoing relationship with the charity is of huge benefit for both owner and horse.

"The charities will lease or loan the horse to safeguard its wellbeing for life and this ensures the horse always has a secure future, regardless of changes in the loaner's circumstances."

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'I WAS BEING "VETTED" BY THE SELLER'

Matthew has bought four ex-racehorses over the years, including the latest addition, 17.3hh ex-pointer Black Alpha ('Alfie'). Matthew bought him from a private home.

"He'd been off the track for two years and had only been lightly hacked in that time. The previous owner was only selling him as they were going abroad."

For Matthew, the important thing was the trustworthiness of the seller: "Buying from a genuine and caring home was important, and we knew the sale was genuine. I felt that as much as I was trying the horse, I was also being 'vetted' by Alfie's seller to ensure that the horse was going to a good home. He was clearly very cared for and his former owner wanted to ensure the best for him."



PHOTO: YOUR HORSE LIBRARY

Always take a second pair of eyes with you — ideally someone with experience of ex-racehorses — and a vetting is recommended. Be honest about your own experience and what you'd like to do with the horse. Any reputable seller will be able to say whether the horse will be suitable.

OPTION 5

AT AUCTION

Experienced buyers can also consider an auction, where you'll have less information about the horse's background, but prices can be lower for those destined for the leisure market.

However, if your heart strings are easily pulled, then an auction might not be wise, as Kevin points out: "Rescuing a horse can be noble, but it's not always the right thing for the horse."

A lot of ex-racehorses pass through the sale ring at places such as Ascot and Tattersalls. There are many success stories, but it really is only an option for experienced buyers because you don't truly know what you've got until you get the horse home. Some will arrive in the ring days after racing for the last time, so their new home also marks the start of a whole new way of life — physically and mentally.



PHOTO: ANADOLU/GETTY IMAGES

OPTION 4

FROM A PRIVATE HOME

Another option may be to buy a former racehorse from another private owner, via an advert or social media. In this instance, apply the same scrutiny as you would when buying any breed of horse.

"How long have they had the horse and why are they selling it? If someone has had a horse for three or four months and they haven't ride it, then I'd wonder why," says Kevin.

But with the appropriate due diligence, buying an ex-racehorse from someone with a genuine reason for sale can be a good option.

Do your research

Find out as much about the horse's history as you can, including how long since they finished retraining and what level they are training at now. You'll also want to get a good idea of their temperament, behaviour and things they like and dislike.

No horse is perfect and a thorough look at their health and veterinary history, as well as seeing them ridden — and riding them yourself — in different places and in varying weathers at various times of day, will all help you to establish a picture of what the horse is like.

WHEN YOU FIRST GET AN EX-RACEHORSE HOME

- Treat your former racehorse as an individual. Depending on where they are in their retraining journey, they may benefit from being turned away or may be better off kept in their existing routine.
- Build a good support network around you. "Make sure you have an instructor and a farrier that understand Thoroughbreds," advises Kevin.
- Arrange for a vet, farrier, physio and equine dental technician to MOT the

TOP TIPS



PHOTO: DAN KITWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

Any new horse needs time to adjust to their life and an ex-racer is no different



PHOTO: YOUR HORSE LIBRARY

horse before you ask them to begin any work. You'll need a saddle fitter out, too.

■ Don't forget the paperwork! "New owners should ensure legal requirements are met, including updating ownership details with Weatherbys within 30 days of purchase and ensuring passport information is correct," says Philippa.

■ Joining the ex-racehorse community can be a fun way to enjoy your journey and make friends.

"RoR offers a network of support designed to help ensure that every former racehorse can thrive in a suitable home and that owners feel confident and well equipped as they build their partnership," Philippa explains. You can register your horse with the RoR free of charge.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Ultimately, knowledge is power when it comes to buying any horse, but with ex-racers, there's plenty of information out there, if you know where to look.

■ "Look at the horse's racing history," says Kevin. "That will tell you how many times they raced and if there is a gap between races. If they'd been racing consistently, then had three or four months off, you might question if they'd had an injury."

■ Do your due diligence on any trainer or retrainer you think might be a good source. Kevin advises looking for those with National Equine Welfare Council membership: "That's a good sign; it shows they've got standards."

■ It's a good idea to check the reputation of a private seller, too, especially if they buy and sell a lot of horses. Ask around as friends and instructors may be able to recommend a seller they've had a good experience with.

■ Take your time and make sure the decision is right for you.

"Regardless of the route taken [to find an ex-racehorse], careful matching between horse and rider remains one of the most important factors," concludes Philippa. "Taking time at the sourcing stage to ensure compatibility can make a significant difference to the long-term partnership." 🐾



SUPPORTING AN EX-RACER'S STOMACH

Reports indicate that up to 93% of racehorses have gastric ulcers during their racing careers. This susceptibility is rooted in a combination of factors inherent to training and management.

➢ Intense exercise increases stomach acid production and pressure, stressing the stomach lining. The stress of racing and travelling further disrupts their digestive system.

➢ Energy-dense, high-starch diets are common in performance feeds and prolongs high stomach acidity, which can exacerbate gut issues.

The physical presence of fibre is crucial for digestive health. Chewing fibre stimulates saliva production, which acts as a powerful buffer for stomach acid when swallowed. Fibre also contains soluble pectins, an ingredient abundant in beet pulp, which reduces stomach acidity.

■ British Horse Feed's Fibre-Beet is a conditioning feed with a carefully formulated combination of Speedi-Beet and alfalfa supplemented with biotin, sodium and calcium. With all the benefits of Speedi-Beet's high level of easily digested, soluble fibre for slow energy release, along with low starch and sugar, Fibre-Beet provides a balanced combination of essential amino acids and minerals for optimal health and muscle support.

Fed wet, it slows eating, increasing the time feed spends buffering acid in the stomach compared to high-starch feeds, reducing stress and promoting healthy gut function. In short, Fibre-Beet, with its blend of alfalfa, pectins and emulsifiers, is an excellent dietary choice for ex-racehorses in retraining and in their new career.

The UnBeetable Conditioning Mash



Superior fibre blend of alfalfa and beet



Condition without the fizz



5% sugar, 3% starch



Suitable for horses & ponies prone to gastric ulcers*

*When fed as part of a balanced diet

