



Turning passion

Buying an equestrian property with business potential can generate a useful income, especially if you think outside the box, as *Catherine Welton* discovers

EQUESTRIAN properties usually come with a premium price tag as well as ongoing maintenance costs – no wonder some owners look to make an income from theirs. And whether they have a few acres with a handful of stables or a big yard with all the facilities,

there's an equestrian business to suit.

"First, people think of a livery yard," says Cheryl Johns, founder of LiveryList, "but over the past few years, the trend for livery has switched. DIY spaces are filling more easily, part and full livery not so much."

It can be difficult, however, to make a decent income from DIY livery. And,

as Cheryl points out, DIY has another downside: "If you have a smaller, more private property, you probably don't want lots of horse owners turning up every day."

Megan Wright, head of marketing at Michael Graham Estate Agents, has noticed another type of livery increasing in popularity: "Equine



into profit

retirement homes are gaining traction due to ageing horse populations and owners seeking peace of mind."

Cheryl points out that, as well as being a growth market, retirement livery can be a more attractive option for property owners.

"You don't need facilities like an arena, you get the horses without the owners and the horses are generally easier to handle," she says. "Although you're also more likely to have horses with medical conditions, so that takes more time and management."

Shadowmere Equine Retirement Livery, in Lincolnshire, opened in 2022.

"We originally had the idea because our own thoroughbred was nearing retirement," says Caroline Hirst, marketing manager for the yard.

So Caroline's parents, Lizzie and Chris, set about turning part of their family home into what they call an "exclusive country club" for retired horses. With facilities like red light therapy, air-quality and water-consumption monitoring technology,

a weighbridge and CCTV for owners to watch their horses, they earned a highly commended from the British Horse Society in 2024. The yard is currently full, with a waiting list.

With Lizzie and Chris living on-site, the decision to offer retirement livery only was also a personal one.

"We're able to provide a calm and relaxing lifestyle for our livery horses and for ourselves," says Caroline.

Retirement liversies vary in what they offer and, therefore, the financial investment and time commitment required and prices they can command. But even a simple set-up providing the basics can still charge more than DIY livery, while retirement yards offering more extensive or specialist care packages can price themselves equal to the premium full-livery bracket.



Whether a few acres or a yard with all the facilities, there's scope to build a business – from livery to a competition centre

ANOTHER alternative to more traditional livery businesses is holiday accommodation.

"It's a small but growing market," says John Coleman, head of farm and country estate agency at GSC Grays.

Horsemanship trainer Will Hunt and his partner Laura Thyer converted old barns into holiday accommodation on their Bircher Farm Stud, so that Will could offer residential training camps to his clients.

"From there, it was a natural step to open the farm up for horse holidays, allowing riders to bring their horses," says Laura.

She credits the farm's location – on the Herefordshire, Shropshire and Welsh border – as a key part of its success as a holiday business.

"Guests love the fact that they can enjoy training, ride out in stunning scenery, then explore everything the area has to offer," she explains.

Laura points out that offering holiday accommodation is more people-focused than any other livery.

"Hosting is time-consuming, but it's also incredibly rewarding," she says. "And

the holiday accommodation directly supports Will's training work."

Will agrees: "We've tried to create a place where horses and riders can learn, relax and make memories together."

WHILE the livery market continues to evolve in different directions, Cheryl has also noticed a trend for venues that specialise in hire facilities only.

"I'm seeing some purely training or competition venues, with no horses

few fences for rings. The decision to focus on facilities was a practical one at the time.

"I had a full-time job, so it was a weekend project, hence the show venue route," she remembers.

Jane took her time upgrading to the multiple arena set-up it is now.

"We did a lot of research on the surface," she says. "We visited many venues and spoke to almost every company. Our warm-ups are also a good size, something all the competitors appreciate."

The venue now has a clubhouse with a café and tack shop.

"I'm a great believer that you never stand still in business – you're either progressing or falling behind," says Jane. "The other thing I've learnt is

always to grab every opportunity that is thrown your way."

For Jane, the decision to focus on events and facilities hire has been the right one.

"I'm not going to lie, on a Sunday evening as the last lorry drives out of the gate, it's a relief to know the event has gone well and I look forward to a 'quiet' Monday," she says. "We all know that horses are a 24-7-365 job, but at least with a show centre you can plan the occasional day off."

"I've learnt to grab every opportunity that is thrown your way"

JANE GREGORY, FROM CHARD EQUESTRIAN, ON PROGRESSING YOUR BUSINESS

on-site," she notes. "With enough land, you can put in multiple arenas, cross-country courses and summer jumping paddocks. If you do it properly, events can provide a good income and there's potential to expand, for example, by having a tack shop and restaurant on-site."

Chard Equestrian, on the Somerset and Devon borders, has done exactly that. Owner Jane Gregory started the business in 2013, when it was a grass field with a

Don't forget!

Megan Wright, of Michael Graham Estate Agents, says these are the considerations that buyers mustn't overlook...

- planning permissions and business-use consents
- local authority regulations, particularly for change of use or expansion

- access for large vehicles, such as horseboxes and deliveries
- soil type and drainage, which directly impact pasture management
- staffing and accommodation for employees, especially when in more remote locations

And when it comes to selling a property with business potential, she advises the

following to maximise the selling price...

- keeping business accounts and occupancy records up to date for credibility
- presenting the property well, both facilities and branding
- highlighting unique selling points, such as proximity to competitions, bridleways and tourist attractions
- obtaining necessary consents so buyers see a "ready-to-go" package



Diversification is key: some rent out their arenas for dog agility or beach volleyball

Other big venues are focusing on riding camps as their main revenue stream.

"Some places do them week in, week out," says Cheryl. "Adult riding camps are particularly popular these days. If you can find a niche, that's even better. People are more likely to travel a bit further for a confidence camp or a discipline-specific one."

CHOOSING the right business idea for the property is just the start, though. A common mistake Cheryl sees is opening too quickly.

"People buy an equestrian property and rush into what they're doing," she says. "You need the permissions in place. You need to sit on it for a while and make sure the standard of everything is up to scratch."

Cheryl always reminds clients that an equestrian business is exactly that, a business.

"A lot of people open yards because they are horse people," she says. "Then they realise they are not business people and they're not people either."

She also warns that going for the most expensive and best of everything isn't always a guarantee of success.

"If you set up a bells-and-whistles, high-end yard, there is scope to charge more," she says. "But you have to work harder. I know people who have yards that are out of this world, but they don't make any money because it costs them so much to keep it maintained and have someone running their social media for them."

This can also be problematic if it comes to selling up as buyers will want proof of a viable business, warns John Coleman.

"Overinvested equestrian set-ups are certainly struggling to recoup even their initial build-cost values and there

is market evidence to support this.

Trading accounts are becoming ever more important, given more dependence on commercial lending."

ULTIMATELY, to make the most from your equestrian property, Cheryl encourages owners to think around their main revenue stream.

"If you have a livery yard, do facility hire or become a base for a riding club," she says. "It doesn't even have to be equestrian-related. A lot of people rent out arenas for dog agility and one lady I know rents hers out for beach volleyball."

She also recommends creating units on your property that can be rented out to other small businesses.

"Some people have an equine physio working out of their yard," she says. "I know one couple in Hampshire who rented a unit on their yard to a dog groomer, which is a good

example of thinking laterally."

Megan Wright agrees: "Diversification is the word of the day. Many owners are blending two or three complementary operations – for example, running a livery yard alongside holiday accommodation or combining retirement livery with equine therapy programmes."

Cheryl's final piece of advice to anyone looking to run a business from their equestrian property is to set clear boundaries, to help maintain a clear work-life balance.

"Favours can be your downfall. Someone messaging you at 9pm every night to change their horse's rug will become an issue," she says. "When people are coming to your home every day, it can be easy to make friendships that might backfire. Therefore, always think of them as your clients." **H&H**

"Always think of them as your clients"

CHERYL JOHNS ON SETTING A WORK-LIFE BALANCE

On the market



ACE CROSS-COUNTRY TEWKESBURY, GLOS

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Business potential: detached annexe cottage for holiday let.

£1.75m

Fine & Country, 01227 479317, fineandcountry.com



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Business potential: detached two-bed barn conversion for holiday let.

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Fine & Country, 01938 531006, fineandcountry.com