



Inexperienced new owners may benefit from keeping their recent acquisition at a livery yard, at least in the short term, as there will be expert help on hand



MISSED A PREVIOUS PART?

Buy Your Horse back issues at shop.kelsey.co.uk/issue/YHR



WELCOME home!

Bringing a new horse back to base can be both exciting and terrifying. **Catherine Welton** finds out how a recently formed partnership can get off to the best possible start

PART
TWO

BUYING A HORSE is a huge responsibility, so no wonder it's a rollercoaster ride of emotions for new owners.

"There's a great deal of excitement and then thoughts like 'what have I done?' come flooding in. It can be overwhelming, but it's normal to have those thoughts and react like that," says Natalie Passmore, a BHSII SM coach and livery yard owner who has helped many clients buy new horses over the years.

For new owners, it might feel like they have endless decisions to make, but prioritising what is important will make it manageable.

Where to keep the new horse is the first thing to consider. Natalie runs a livery yard that offers a variety of packages, but she also has clients who keep their horses at home, so she knows the pros and cons of all options.

She believes that new owners should start by asking themselves questions: "If I'm working full time will I need assisted or full livery? What facilities will I require? I have clients, for example, who work late and need floodlights so that they can ride late into the evening."

Natalie also advises making sure that the livery yard's facilities match the horse's needs.

"If your horse requires year-round turnout, check that the yard owner can accommodate this. It's also worth thinking about the environment your horse is coming from. If he's been living on a quiet yard, he may struggle to adjust to somewhere busy."

Location, location, location applies to livery yards too.

"Is it close enough to where you live? Is it near competition venues if that's what you want to do?" are all questions that Natalie would ask.

Natalie believes that there are advantages to opting for a DIY package with a new horse.

"You want to spend as much time as possible with him, to get to know his mannerisms and quirks, so you know what behaviour is normal for him," she says. "You can even learn a lot when poo picking in the field as you watch how he interacts with others."

That said, for some less experienced new owners Natalie believes that full livery is the better option.

"Full livery means that you have knowledgeable back up on hand if you need it," she says.

Anyone lucky enough to keep their horse at home will be able to spend as much time as they like with him — work and family permitting. Not having to travel to a yard saves time and can make it easier to fit everything into a frenetic daily routine. It can also be a more affordable option, although there may be upfront costs if the property is without equestrian facilities, with stables, field shelters, or fencing to build or erect. Maintaining everything, from the buildings to the grazing, will also fall to the new owner, and they will need to organise muck heap removals and hay deliveries too.

However, keeping a horse at home means that a new owner may miss out on the social aspect of a livery yard.

"I've had a few clients who have brought their new horse to me for the first couple of months so that they have support and company to hack out with. It can be quite daunting being on your own," cautions Natalie.

THE GRASS IS GREENER! TIPS FOR GOOD GRAZING

"Before bringing a horse home, get the health of your soil and grass sward analysed," advises Jonathan Holmes, an independent agronomist who also lectures in soil science and agriculture.

He recommends that anyone looking to sow grass seed should analyse the soil type first to see what ratio of sand, silt and clay they have, so that they can match the grass species to the soil type. He cautions against ryegrass, though: "It's full of non-structured carbohydrates which produce far too much energy for horses and exacerbate the laminitis risk."

"The most cost-effective management strategy for any horse pasture is to harrow appropriately in the autumn and spring," Jonathan says. "It rejuvenates microbial activity in the soil for the benefit of grass nutrition and productivity."

Jonathan also advises thinking about funding. "Maintaining good grazing for a horse always takes more time and money than you think."

Home from home

Stables should be a minimum of 12x12ft, or larger for bigger horses. Natalie's yard has an American barn, which she says is fantastic for keeping everything dry and allowing the horses to see each other.

"The downside is that if a horse picks up a virus or cough it can spread more quickly. This is why we have isolation stables too," she says.

Natalie prefers stone buildings to wooden ones.

"They're cool in the summer and durable," she notes.

On the fence

Secure fencing is vital, and Natalie advises checking what the horse is used to — and what he respects. From a maintenance point of view, she prefers electric fencing.

"Post and rails looks nice, but over time, especially with regular wet British winters, it can degrade and break. Also, horses tend to chew the wood unless you put electric on the top," she says.



Wooden stables will be hotter in the summer than stone

Keeping mud in check

Former event rider Kerry Weisselberg ran her own yards for over 40 years before starting her business, Mudcontrol, to help other equestrians protect their horses and their grazing. As Kerry knows only too

Perfect pasture? As if horse ownership isn't a steep enough learning curve for relatively new equestrians, caring for paddocks for those keeping their new charge at home is likely to be equally challenging



well, maintaining grazing in the winter can be little short of a nightmare, but providing turnout during these months is also vital for equine wellbeing.

"Horses without turnout can end up stir-crazy," she says. "Any equestrian with soil that doesn't drain well will find that it becomes a deep claggy nightmare and this destroys the grass root structure and makes for a miserable time for horses. Muddy conditions lead to mud fever, waterlogged hooves and thrush, not to mention lost wellies and stuck wheelbarrows. Therefore, careful planning and management are essential to make the best of what you have."

Kerry adds that because grass doesn't grow in cold temperatures, hay feeding stations outside will be necessary, and the ground around these (and in any other high traffic areas, such as shelters and gateways) can easily become poached.

"Creating hardstanding areas is vital if the mud is bad, and there are various temporary, semi-permanent and

New owners should request some of the forage from their horse's previous home and mix it in with their own for a while



permanent options available for this. I have found that whatever product equestrians put down, it will always have mud and manure brought onto it, so a topping like sand or wood chip is strongly advised," adds Kerry, who also advises rotating grazing if possible and allowing paddocks to rest.

"Lots of people create 'sacrifice paddocks' so that most of their land can recover through the wet months and then provide good grazing once the weather improves," she says. "Track systems, or larger 'loafing areas', are good solutions in these cases, as is the Equicentral System that incorporates paddocks too."

The right recipe

Feed and bedding decisions will also need to be made with a new horse.

"This is where good communication with the previous owner is so helpful," says Natalie Passmore. "Ask them what the horse was being fed and bedded on and stick to that for a while."

Model behaviour?

When it comes to the move, equine behaviour consultant Dr Debbie Marsden says that it isn't the change of yard itself that is particularly stressful for the horse.

"Horses have evolved to roam over vast areas, so a change of scene is unlikely to be stressful. However, their social nature means that changing companions is a major stressor." This goes for their human as well as their equine companions.

"Even a slight difference in how they're handled can cause confusion and leave them with a lot to learn in a short time.



IT'S ALL IN THE PLANNING

Planning permission is required by anyone constructing equestrian facilities, and in some cases even just using the land to keep horses.

"We find that many people don't realise this," says Eleni Marshall, director of The Equestrian Planning Consultancy. "Often they've purchased land with a property that is categorised as agricultural, but horses can't come under the definition of agriculture if they're being fed and cared for in a manner that's living on the land rather than living off of it.

"Any new permanent building or stabling within a field will always require planning permission as a building is, by definition, development," adds Eleni. "However, in some cases, field shelters don't require planning permission, but they must be truly mobile and moved on a regular

basis. They should also be capable of being moved with a standard 4x4 and not specialist equipment."

And, as Eleni points out, it isn't just buildings that may come under the planning umbrella.

"Arenas, hardstanding and muck heaps (formally constructed) would all come under the definition of development and would all need planning permission," she says.

Electric fencing isn't a permanent construction and so doesn't fall under development, but the regulations for other types of fencing may need to be investigated, depending on location.

"There is scope to construct fencing under permitted development, but there are certain restrictions that people should be aware of, such as the height of fencing adjacent to a highway or around a listed building," adds Eleni.



Equine behaviourist Dr Debbie Marsden believes that horses should be ridden as soon as possible after arriving at their new base

It's probably not unlike children starting a new school," she explains.

It is rare for a horse to change homes with an existing companion — unless the purchaser bought two at the same time — so Debbie recommends trying to have some continuity of human contact if possible.

"It can be helpful for you to spend time with the horse before he leaves his previous home, if the seller permits this. Even a few short visits before leaving are better than one try-out ride. Chat away to the horse so that he gets used to your voice."

Debbie points out that this is also a great way to find out details about a horse's routine that will help to keep everyone safe.

"Is he used to being led in or out singly or in a pair? How does he manage at gates?"

As horses' digestive tracts are so sensitive to change, Debbie advises asking the seller for some of their hay.

"Make up the horse's haynets from half of his previous hay and half of your new hay for a few days so that he doesn't experience a sudden change. If you're going to change his feed, don't do it for a couple of weeks, and then only one handful of new feed at a time every three days."

While all horses are different, most will settle within a couple of weeks once out of isolation.

"One of the most important things to get right is the new social group — finding horses that your new one will get along with — and some experimentation may be necessary," says Debbie.

Signs that a horse is starting to settle include more consistent droppings and flat patches where he will have lain down or rolled.

"A settled horse will potter about eating for a couple of hours, then stay resting with his ears at about withers height for a couple of hours. He should lie down for around half an hour mid-morning, and flat out for about 15-20 minutes between 12-2am," says Debbie.

New owners who spend time with their recent acquisition will also start to see the results of this before too long.

"You'll notice him learning your habits and starting to react to your activity; for example, coming to the door when you arrive, or lifting his legs for hoof picking out and so on. Then you're well on your way to developing a good relationship," says Debbie.

Saddling up

When it comes to the question of how soon to ride a new equine, Natalie and Debbie both agree that it should be as soon as possible.

"It's really important for the horse's physical and mental health to maintain previous exercise patterns, and riding is a great way to properly get to know your horse and remind him that it's business as usual, that you're in charge and that he isn't alone," says Debbie. "This will be reassuring for him."

Natalie adds: "You should take into account the new horse's age, level of training and temperament. If he's quite a straightforward horse, the sooner you ride him the better. The longer you leave it, the more it can become an issue for horse and rider."

Debbie points out that exercising a horse is also a good way to check that he's physically fine after the move.

"Does the horse behave, move and feel as he did when he was tried and vetted," she says. "If there's a problem, the sooner it can be discovered and dealt with the better."

Debbie also recommends keeping the horse's exercise and work pattern as similar as possible to that in his previous home — to begin with at least.

"Even a week or so of this will really help your horse to adjust and then you can gradually alter the pattern," she advises.



Take a new partnership in micro steps — including the riding element

"It's important for the horse's physical and mental health to maintain previous exercise patterns"

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

