

HORSE AROUND

New Mexico

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FREE



A Horse of One's Own Part Three

Assembling Your Team

Article Series by Peggy Conger

So you have the horse, a place to keep him or her, and some folks to ride with. Now to one of the most important facets of horse ownership: your team of professionals. You're going to need one, and it should be comprised of people with good reputations, who you can relate to, and whose professional judgment you, and horse people who know more than you, trust.



Whether she's giving shots, performing colic surgery or doing any of the other myriad services that your horse needs, your vet will be a trusted advisor, sounding board, and resource.

Pictured: Stacie Boswell, DVM.; Photos: Stephanie Lancaster

The basics of who you will need: a vet, of course, a farrier and a trainer. That trio will get you through most issues with your horse. Where to find them? The place to start, as always, is with your horse friends and acquaintances. But first, ask yourself a few questions. What is important to you as a customer?

The Veterinarian

You will be dealing with your vet at least once a year, maybe more. Do you want someone who explains everything in great detail or just takes care of the problem? Do you look for the latest treatments or do you prefer the tried and true? Do you need your hand held through things? Are you price-sensitive? Do you have the skill to handle some items yourself, like worming or shots? Does your horse have special issues, like a tendency toward lameness or metabolic syndrome? How do you use your horse? An endurance horse will have different potential health issues than a backyard pet you ride on Saturdays. The answers to these questions will shape your decision when hiring a vet.

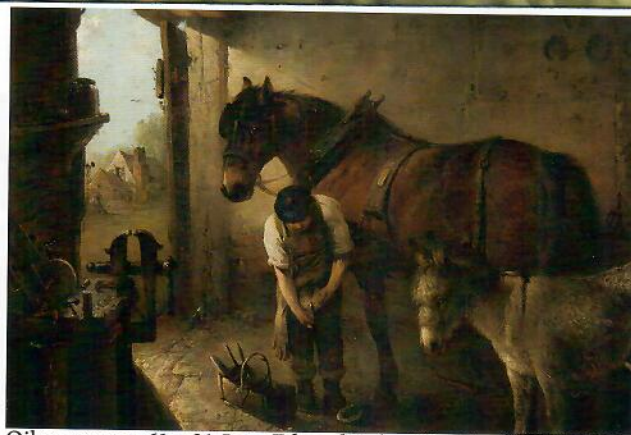
Once you have a handle on these things, start asking your friends and acquaintances who they use -- and why? The why is important because choosing a vet is highly individual. Someone may have a vet who has successfully seen their horses through many health crises, while someone else may just use the vet their neighbor uses. Think about what's important to you, and see if the vet being recommended fits the bill. Ideally, your vet will be a trusted advisor, sounding board and resource.

"This is a long-term relationship," says Betsy McClelland, a horsewoman with 40 years' experience owning, riding and showing horses. "You need to be able to talk to your vet and trust the answers you're getting. And that takes time. You need to be in it for the long haul." You may need specialized help, too, like chiropractic for your horse. Again, do your research and look for recommendations.

The Farrier

The recommendations route is the way to go with a farrier too. Look for suggestions from those doing what you're doing, horse-wise. If you ride trails all summer long, you need a farrier who understands the challenges of rock and river crossings and steep climbs. If you're showing, you need a farrier with a different set of skills. So ask around, and dig deep to find out why they have that particular farrier. Owners should be able to readily tell you at least three good reasons they use their farrier.

For example, I'm a trail rider with a barefoot horse. I use a farrier trained in Natural Balance, which is primarily about trimming or shoeing the horse to maximize the strength of the hoof. I use my farrier because my horse has never been lame for a moment with him; because he's a trail rider, so he understands what we do; and because, when I decided to buy boots for my horse, he had savvy recommendations about using them. I have plenty of other reasons -- he's gentle with my horse, he's always on time or even early-- but you get the idea.



Oil on canvas, 61 x 91.5 cm Edward Robert Smythe (1810-1899)

Trying out farriers is tough. One route that doesn't involve shoeing your horse is asking friends if you can drop by the next time the farrier they recommend is coming. See how the farrier works with horse and owner. Will that approach work for you? Ask the farrier for more references, and be sure to check them out.

The Trainer

The first thing to decide: Exactly who needs training?

If you have followed the earlier recommendations in this series, for your first horse you have acquired a good-going steed who is solid in most areas. If so, the one who needs the training is probably you. You may need groundwork lessons, riding lessons, lessons in your chosen discipline, along with hours and hours in the saddle on your horse.

One of the biggest mistakes people make is sending a horse off for training, and then failing to ride the horse themselves. The only way you build a relationship with your horse is by riding it. The biggest mistake you can make is to stop riding your horse (I have made this one more than once), or assigning your horse's development over to a trainer and then not following that up with riding.

So find a trainer who will make you

ride, who won't accept excuses and who will call you out if you are being a knucklehead. ("We can't ride today; Dobbin's too upset by the wind/sun/rain/dog" or "I can't come out today because of the kids/the weather/the traffic")

Seeing how a trainer operates is easy: Ask to stop by during lessons, set up a ride with him or her, or better yet sign up for a clinic. See if his or her style is for you. You should have an idea how you like to learn and what motivates you -- do you want a coach who's a pal or a coach who's a bear?

Many approaches work, as long as they get you and keep you riding. However, do not hand over all authority to your trainer. Too often, people new to something look to some authority figure to make all the decisions. It feels safer that way.

Remember, this is your journey in horsemanship. Don't turn over the reins to someone else. Be looking not just to develop your riding skills, but your horsemanship skills. And keep looking until you find the trainer who will help you do that.



Editor's Note: There are lots of resources for the newbie horse owner in New Mexico, from this magazine to websites like maythehorsebewithyou.net, as well as all the clubs & associations' websites. *Don't forget the NM Trainer Showcase & Horse Expo May 16-17 at 4 Winds Equestrian Center. Another great resource!*

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**Suggested De-Worming
Schedule for Horses**



Jan/Feb
1 tube Pyrantel Pamoate

Mar/April
1 tube Oxibendazole or
Fenbendazole

May/June
1 tube 1.87% Ivermectin

July/Aug
1 tube Pyrantel Pamoate

Sept/Oct
1 tube Oxibendazole or
Fenbendazole

Nov/Dec
1 tube Praziquantel
Combination



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