

Alert | Equine Industry Group



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10 Steps to Import Your Dream Horse and Minimize Risk Along the Neigh

Importing an expensive horse that you've never laid eyes on can be intimidating. The equestrian world can be difficult to navigate "on the outside" of a close-knit community operating with handshake deals and unclear business practices.

This GT Alert discusses considerations for avoiding common pitfalls of importing your dream horse.

1. Shop with someone you trust.

Shop with your current trainer or someone with whom you have a long-term working relationship. Your trainer should be invested in the potential horse, knowing that the horse will live at his farm and that he will be working with the horse. Finding a quick deal on the internet is no way to purchase abroad!

2. Research show records.

Review the horse's show record in depth, going back several years. Stay attentive to gaps in the show records, a frequent change in rider, eliminations from the course, and the number of clear rounds at the height you plan to compete the horse. A gap in the show record could indicate the horse was lame for a period of time. A frequent change in rider could indicate that the owner was trying to sell the horse rather than keeping the horse to develop it. And eliminations and clear rounds are strong indicators of how competitive (or not) the horse is.

3. Watch videos online.

In today's world, websites such as Clip My Horse and Rimondo make it easy to watch every single round a horse has jumped in the past few years. Spend time on these websites, watching the horse you're interested in. You'll discover a lot about the horse watching recent rounds and comparing them to rounds from years ago.

4. Vet the horse.

The vetting will consist of X-rays, flexions, a ride under tack on a hard service, and bloodwork, which includes doping drug tests. The vet abroad will conduct this work. The bloodwork should be done at the same time as the flexions and X-rays to ensure the horse has not ingested any form of tranquilizer, steroids, or pain-relieving agents that would affect the horse's soundness.

Have the pre-purchase exam videoed and request your vet in the United States to review the records and videos. Because you are buying sight unseen, you will not have a direct representative on the ground at the pre-purchase exam. A video ensures that a correct and thorough examination is done, as well as confirming that the correct horse is examined.

To take it a step further, consider asking the seller for a copy of prior vet records. If they do not want to turn these over to you, this is a red flag. Check for completeness.

5. Request a copy of the passport.

In advance of paying for the horse, ask for a copy of the passport. Double check the age, show name, and breeding. If you saw show videos of a horse with a different name, this may indicate you are not buying the horse you were advertised.

6. Negotiate the price. Be wary of layers of commissions.

Consider negotiating the price after the vetting. If you don't intend to fly to Europe to try the horse, and you aren't sending a representative to buy the horse, the seller is expending minimal effort for the sale. There is no hauling the horse to a show or prepping the horse for a trial ride. Because of this, there may be room in price.

More importantly, be wary of layers of commission. Often your trainer will request 10-15% commission. If using a horse broker in Europe, that person may also be requesting a 10-15% commission. These amounts can add up quickly.

Ask questions to flush this out. Does the price include all commissions, or are there additional commissions on top of the price you were quoted?

7. Sign the bill of sale.

A seller may provide a very simple bill of sale, as if it could be written on a napkin over dinner. Buyers should consider preparing the bill of sale with counsel experienced in equine law and providing it to the seller in order to start the negotiation at a point where they are more in control and comfortable.

8. Insurance.

It's important to insure your new horse effective immediately upon purchase. Arrange this in advance of signing the contract so that it's in place the day you sign the contract. Most insurance carriers will backdate the coverage, but knowing that the policy is in place from the moment payment is sent offers peace of mind. With such a valuable asset in the hands of an unknown person abroad, the investment should be insured.

For transporting the horse to the United States, an insurance broker can provide an additional coverage for the travel time.

9. Fly time!

As soon as a bill of sale is signed, your horse can be booked on a flight to the United States. While the transportation element of importing a horse sounds complicated, it's probably the easiest from the buyer's perspective. The horse transportation marketplace is a level playing field with companies of similar quality. The horse transportation company will retrieve the horse from the seller's farm and take it to the international airport. The horse will then fly to the United States, and then the horse will quarantine.

All horses will quarantine for 72 hours at the U.S. Department of Agriculture sight at the airport the horse lands.

Additional quarantine processes range in length and pricing based on the gender of the horse. A mare and stallion will continue to quarantine at a contagious equine metritis quarantine site for around 14-21 days or 32-35 days, respectively.

The horse transportation service will then coordinate with the buyer to ship the horse to the buyer's farm.

10. Let your new horse settle.

Your new horse has been on a long trip. Give it at least three days before returning to work to allow the horse to settle into its new home. Start slow, with hand walks and paddock time, before taking your horse out for a ride. Your new horse is adjusting to a totally new world, and likely language. Be patient as it adjusts to a new environment and program.

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