



Pre purchase vetting's

Buying a horse is a major investment — not just financially, but emotionally and practically. Whether you're a first-time buyer or adding to a string of competition horses, a pre-purchase veterinary examination (vetting) is one of the most important steps in the buying process.

What is a Pre-Purchase Vetting?

A vetting is a clinical examination carried out by an equine vet on behalf of the buyer, to assess the horse's general health and suitability for its intended use. It's not about saying a horse is

“perfect” or “sound forever” but rather identifying any existing or potential health concerns and whether these may affect the horse's ability to do the job you're buying it for.

It is not a pass or fail test. Instead, the vet gives a professional opinion as to whether, on the day of examination, the horse is suitable for the intended purpose.

The Two-Stage vs Five-Stage Vetting

Both options are recognised by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and follow guidelines from the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA).

Stage 1 – Preliminary Examination (Both 2 & 5-Stage)

- Full physical examination of the horse at rest.
- Includes eyes, heart, lungs, skin, teeth (basic check), and limbs.
- Hooves and conformation are assessed.
- Palpation of limbs, tendons, joints, and spine for pain or swelling.

Stage 2 – Walk and Trot in Hand (Both 2 & 5-Stage)

- Horse is walked and trotted in a straight line on a hard surface.
- Turning in tight circles and backing up to assess coordination.
- Flexion tests may be performed to stress joints and look for subtle lameness.

At this point, the two-stage vetting ends.

A two-stage vetting is Suitable for:

- Youngstock not yet backed or ridden.
- Companion horses, retired horses, or those for very light work.
- Budget-conscious buyers willing to accept the limitations of a shorter exam.

Limitations:

- No assessment of the horse under saddle or during exertion.
- Subtle lameness or breathing issues may not be revealed.



Stages 3–5: Only in a Five-Stage Vetting

Stage 3 – Exercise Phase

- Horse is ridden or lunged (if unbacked).
- Work includes walk, trot, canter and sometimes gallop depending on fitness.
- Vet monitors heart rate, breathing, soundness, and willingness to work.

Stage 4 – Rest Period

- After exercise, the horse rests quietly while the vet observes recovery.
- Subtle signs of stress or stiffness may appear during this phase.

Stage 5 – Second Trot-Up

- Horse is trotted again to detect any lameness or stiffness post-exercise.

A 5-stage vetting is best for:

- Ridden horses of any level.
- Performance prospects, eventers, showjumpers, dressage, endurance, hunting etc.
- Buyers wanting peace of mind on how the horse performs under load.



Additional Tests

During any vetting, the buyer may request optional extras:

- **Blood sampling** (stored for 6 months in case of dispute – e.g., sedation or medication use)
- **X-rays** – usually for high-value horses or insurance requirements
- **Endoscopy** – to check airways, especially in performance horses
- **Ultrasound** – for known injury sites or conformation concerns

While a vetting isn't a crystal ball, it is the best way to make an informed decision and avoid unpleasant surprises down the line.

If you're thinking of buying a horse, we're always happy to discuss what level of vetting is appropriate and what extras might be worth considering based on your plans.

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