



Taking Ownership:

Tips for the New or Longtime Horse Owner



TRIGIA BOOKER

Debbie Bass (right), the chair of the USHJA Owners Task Force, with fellow USHJA Board of Directors member Cheryl Rubenstein

In this series of articles, the USHJA Owners Task Force members share their insights into making the most of the horse ownership experience.

By Megan Lacy

When I was 4 years old, I told my mother—a non-horse person—that I didn't want to do ballet anymore, but I wanted to ride horses. Because this revelation came out of the blue, she wasn't really sure where to start.

As a school teacher who wanted to give her child every opportunity, she picked up the phone book—yes, that tome that may still land at your door occasionally was once the best way to find a business—and thumbed through the Yellow Pages to find a suitable instructor. Looking for a place that catered to a rider that young, she contacted barn after barn, each redirecting her until she ultimately found one that taught young children.

At that first lesson, she was all eyes and ears, assessing the instructor's approach. She was impressed by the focus on safety and horse care, and the simple yet detailed explanations for why things

were done a certain way. She'd found the right fit, and while I no longer ride there, that barn created lifelong friendships and nurtured my passion for horses.

There are many ways to enter this sport. Some would-be riders come from generations of horsemen, while others get their start through friends and some, like me, cannot resist an unknown force pulling us in.

As part of the Hunter/Jumper community, with few exceptions, you generally either own, have owned or will own a horse. Horse ownership can take many different forms, from simply satisfying a personal passion to a business investment. Regardless of your motivations, becoming a horse owner is transformative, and with it comes an important responsibility—another life that ultimately depends on you. The good news is that you're not alone.

The USHJA established its Owners Task Force

UPCOMING SERIES TOPICS

- Finding the Right Professional
- Purchasing or Leasing a Horse
- Horse Care and Training
- Horse Shows

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Competing at a horse show is often the crowning moment for a horse owner.



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to focus on the development, encouragement and retention of owners through education, including such topics as best business practices and the creation of ownership opportunity programs. As part of this commitment, the Owners Task Force members have developed resources that focus on important aspects of horse ownership for those who are completely new to the sport, as well as those who've been entrenched for years.

The next article to be published in this series focuses on finding the right professional to guide your riding and your horse ownership experience. While my mom resorted to the Yellow Pages to find our options, there are many more resources available today to help those who are new to the sport find the right fit. Knowing how and where to look can help simplify the selection process.

Choosing a trainer isn't to be taken lightly, said USHJA Owners Task Force Chair Debbie Bass. In fact, she contended that selecting the right trainer is essential to a rider's long-term enjoyment of the sport, because it sets the tone and direction for your experience in the sport.

"It shouldn't be a cavalier decision. Trainers are not a dime a dozen, so that first decision is really important," said Bass. "That professional will become a huge part of your life, often for many years; it's choosing a partner for the long term."

She recommended that new equestrians take their time and evaluate trainers based on the qualities that are most valuable to them. Our next article will delve into this process, exploring ways to gather information, why it's such a critical first step and how long-term relationships built on trust and openness begin. This same process applies to experienced owners and riders who relocate or find themselves in need of a new trainer for other reasons.

Once you've found the ideal professional for your needs, and you're ready to purchase or lease your first (or next) horse, the journey becomes more complicated. Fortunately, if you've done your due diligence in the beginning, you have a trusted partner at your side to make the buying or leasing process painless, and hopefully, fun!

Buying or leasing a horse does come with a lot of paperwork and often requires plenty

of money. We'll discuss the processes, from deciding what you need to do before signing on the dotted line to ensuring that you know what to expect and how to navigate the ins and outs of purchasing a horse.

The next phase is creating your plan of action based on the goals you've set and your skills, as well as those of your horse. We'll look at what questions to ask and what to consider as you and your trainer map the care and training of your horse with your desired goal in mind.

"When you become a horse owner, you join a team that, at its core, is made up of you, your horse and your trainer," said Bass. "Your veterinarian and farrier and others are also part of your team, and your team will evolve as your goals do. At the end of the day, though, you're the one who is responsible for your horse, and that's a big responsibility that requires you stay involved and informed. You are the ultimate steward for your horse."

Putting all of your hard work to the test and competing at a horse show is often the crowning moment for a horse owner and rider—in addition, of course, to working toward those year-end awards or championship titles. Whether you're riding or watching, it's important to know what to expect before you attend your first horse show, and again, open communication with your trainer is key to success in the show ring.

The series will also examine the roles that expectations, opportunities and potential challenges may play during your showing experiences, touching on some important reminders for those who show often.

You are the ultimate steward for your horse.

—Debbie Bass

Owning a horse is a great privilege, and by building the right team and staying involved and informed throughout your equestrian endeavors, you'll be more likely to reach your goals and thoroughly enjoy the Hunter/Jumper sport.

For more information on horse ownership, please see the USHJA Owners Resource Guide at www.ushja.org/bestpractices.