

Is shopping at the racetrack the right avenue for you?

Part Three

by Sue Smith

Plan Ahead! When we think about purchasing a new horse we often focus on finding the “perfect” horse, envisioning your new partner in the career of your choice, exceling in what you enjoy most. But wait, there is an intermediary step between buying and competing which involves a lot of hard work and preparation! This is a critical step that needs to be thought through and agreed upon before deciding whether a green horse is right for you.

7. Have you considered a “let down” period?

- a. Each horse is an individual and each rider has their own skill set and comfort level. Some horses leave the track and gracefully begin their sport horse career the next day, never blinking an eye at the lifestyle change. Other horses do best with a few weeks or even a few months of down time before they, mentally and physically, are at their best to begin retraining.
- b. Some horses will be sore when they leave the track. You may notice a horse being tight or “stingy” moving at the racetrack or being sensitive to the touch. Other horses may look great at the track but after a week or so on the farm, they become reactive. It may be wise to include a certain amount of downtime in your transition schedule; you may need it, you may not.



CANTER PA Alums Thundershock and Nkosi Reigns enjoying some down time.

8. Have you budgeted both time and money for training expenses?

- a. While one of the benefits of OTTBs is that they have had consistent, formal training, race training and sport horse training are two separate concepts. Most horses right off the track do not have the finesse you expect from the average sport horse. You may also find that acceptable track behavior is not what you want to reward in an amateur horse. It does not mean your horse is a jerk or is trying to hurt you, it simply means you need to fairly explain to

him what your expectations are. Horses excel with parameters, much like children and husbands!

- b. Are you capable of instilling life skills in your new horse? The best thing you can do for any horse is to give him marketable skills. A horse with limited training is very hard to place and are often most “at risk” for bad situations.
- c. If you come across an issue you are uncomfortable with, do you have the funds to seek help? If you don’t have the experience to restart your horse, training is a great investment in your new horse. We can’t emphasize enough the importance of safety for both horse and rider.



CANTER PA Alum, Bounissimo, with his owner Amie Loring.

9. What is your “Plan B” for the horse if he is not the right match for you?

- d. Realistically, not every horse that is purchased is immediately going to his or her life-long home. Create a fallback plan for the possibility that your horse is not the right fit and you may need to find another home for him. If the horse requires more training to make him marketable, are you prepared for that cost? If you try to sell your OTTB, have you budgeted for additional board costs until he is placed?
- e. If you purchase a horse with a soundness problem or he develops a soundness problem, can you afford retirement? If not, are you comfortable with euthanasia? As harsh as it seems, euthanasia is a real life scenario and part of being a responsible horseman.

These are a few issues to think about before determining whether a horse directly off the track is the best option for you. Be honest with yourself. As much as we appreciate your support, if our program is not a good fit for your situation, consider one of the other CANTER programs that offer horses with after track training, or locally, please check out Mid-Atlantic Horse Rescue. These reputable organizations give you a chance to try the horse under saddle, spend more time with him and experience the horse in a farm environment which would more closely mimic your situation. Most of these placement programs also offer a return contract in the event it is not a match made in heaven.

Keep in mind, a great horse and a great rider do not always equate to a great partnership, there is no shame in that. But considering there are so many variables that go into buying horses, try to set yourself up for the highest likelihood of success!