



# HOW TO AVOID A HORSE MISMATCH

## Round Table with Buck Brannaman, Alicia Landman, Missy Fladland, Mindy Bower and Kristin Jacob

By Tom Moates

**S**hopping for a new horse can be a stressful and emotional experience. We visited with horse professionals who have had much experience seeing good... and not so good horse and human matches. What follows are their suggestions that will hopefully help you avoid a mismatch when looking for your next horse.

**Buck Brannaman** is a renowned horseman who travels the country conducting clinics. He has authored the books *Groundwork* and *The Faraway Horses*, and has produced many horsemanship videos. Learn more at: [www.brannaman.com](http://www.brannaman.com)

"Probably the best advice I could give, first of all before people ever go get a horse, is go to somebody's clinic or find somebody to hang around that knows something and learn a little bit about horses," Buck Brannaman suggests.

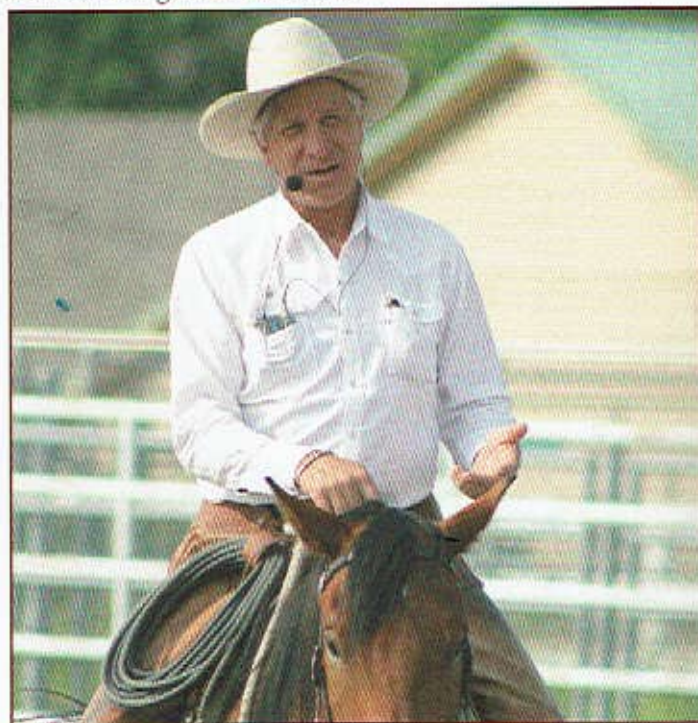
Then, the basic knowledge of how a horse should operate in an acceptable manner on the end of a lead rope will help the buyer to better see if a horse is a good choice or not.

"Put it this way," Buck says, "if the person selling the horse won't let them take ahold of him on the end of a lead rope, walk away. If you just take a rope halter and a flag while you're looking at horses and checking them out [and do a little groundwork], you're going to eliminate a lot of horses that you might not need to buy. You basically just have to acquire enough rudimentary knowledge to where you're going to be a little more discriminating.

"When most people are telling a potential buyer about a horse, I would like to think that they're not just flat out lying—

that maybe the information they're giving the person a lot of times is based on what they don't know. But that's not good enough. You really need to ask the horse. And sometimes you get horse traders, and they might lie like a rug; that's possible too. I'd like to think the best of people and that maybe the bad information that they're giving is because they don't know much.

"I will say this, it's not that unusual that someone will buy a horse and then realize, 'Gosh, I've got a lot more on my plate than I thought I had, and I don't have very much experience.' It's okay to move on rather than get yourself hurt or get the horse in trouble. The horse will fit someone else perfectly, but he might not fit that person that owns him. There's plenty of people out there that could maybe fit the horse and the horse would have a decent life. But if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. Move on and get another horse."





## ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

chase exams. So I said, 'Well, did you pre-purchase that horse?' She said, 'No, no, I trusted that it was going to be alright. So, he's totally crippled. And then he's spooky, because now he's in pain. She quit riding. I'm like, 'Aw, man!' I would say go look at everything and don't even think about price. At least, if you go look at them you know [what's available], and only buy horses from people who are willing to tell you the whole story."

Mindy also says that recommendations from a third party can be a good way to get a window into sellers and the horses they have for sale.

"One other thing is, some people like this other lady that I helped," Mindy explains, "she bought a horse on Craigslist and then he was spooking and she got scared of him. So she brings him to me and I watch her walk down the driveway and I'm like, 'Uh-oh.' She brings him in the arena and I go, 'Have you ever worked him with the flag?' 'Oh no,' she says. So I pull the flag out and he just comes unglued. And I was like, 'Whoa!' I said, 'I don't see how people can ride a horse like this.' She's been riding him, but he's spooky and scaring her. So, the cool thing about it is he led her down this entirely different path, and now she's gotten help. She's doing really well with him. She's figured out the groundwork. She understands. She's ridden in a Buck [Brannaman] clinic a couple times. She's got enough now that she's not going to get killed. And before, there was a good chance she was going to end up at the ER because she had no idea.

"I have another horse right now, same thing, they bought it from a horse dealer and they brought it to me to refine it. I pulled the flag out and it took me six weeks to get on him because I was not going to get on him. You could not touch him with the flag. He was so scared of it that if you ever came off of him got hung up in the stirrup, you're going clear to Kansas and you're going to be pulp when you get there. And now, he's totally fine but it took a couple of months to get him to where I would be okay about selling this horse. You know, these horse dealers, they just find a pretty horse, get him shined up, put their daughter on it, ride the horse around and do a video, and then find somebody to pay whatever for it. And then these other people [buyers], they just don't know."

Mindy says that any horse can be a good horse if the owner gets the right help.

"Any horse can teach you," she says. "Sometimes I think it's a real mismatch but I feel like in the long run if you just realized that you have a mismatch and you start getting help, then that horse might save your life, because now it has led you down this path and you found the right help."

Another pitfall to avoid, Mindy warns, is to be careful of preconceived notions. Sometimes the right horse for a person isn't what she or he had in mind at first.

"I had a lady that wanted to buy a horse and I didn't have anything for her," Mindy says. "But then I got this National

Show Horse. We started him. He was just a baby but he was such a cool guy. And so I said to her, 'Hey, by the way I have this horse; you should come look at it. 'Oh, I hate those horses; I'm not looking at one of those,' [she said]. 'Just come try him [Mindy replied]. He's really cool.' So she ended up buying him. He's got to be 20 now. She's living in Montana and she just trail rides him all over. It's like the horse of her dreams. I think you've got to look outside the box and don't shut yourself in to only one."

**Kristin Jacob** focuses on the training and development of horse and rider for competition on the "A/JAA" Hunter/Jumper circuit. The unique Blue Star Farms program that Kristin has developed focuses on fostering a willing partnership between horse and rider, with emphasis on good horsemanship and the fundamental elements of the American Forward Riding System. For more on Kristin visit: [www.bluestarfarmsllc.com](http://www.bluestarfarmsllc.com).

"Looking for your next equine partner is an exciting but potentially daunting endeavor," Kristin Jacob says. "No two horses and no two riders are alike. Finding a good match can be something of an art."

Kristin buys and sells show jumping horses both as investments for her business and for clients.

"I buy horses both locally and abroad, mainly from Holland, and have a great network of honest and knowledgeable horsemen and trainers who supply me with quality horses," she explains. "Whether working with a professional or searching on your own, I believe that the horse must minimally meet three requirements: it must be safe for the rider's ability, it must be physically sound, and it must be suitable for the job. Breeding, sex, age, and looks are less important to me but I do take these into consideration, too."

On the points of safety and soundness, Kristin says:

"Horseback riding and working around horses is inherently dangerous and I like to minimize the risk, in part, through buying horses that are safe, good minded, and kind hearted. Most of my clients are junior or amateur riders who ride and show their horses for pleasure in their leisure time. The rider must look forward to coming out to ride the horse without any fear or apprehension about getting on their horse. Owning and riding a horse should be fun and it should be the highlight of your day to go and spend time with your special equine partner. There are too many good horses out there to waste your time on one that you are not comfortable riding.

"The most talented horse in the world is worth nothing if it is not sound to do its job. Diagnosing and treating lameness issues can be time consuming, expensive, and deeply frustrating. There is no crystal ball for the long-term soundness of any horse but I do like to minimize the risk by having a trusted vet preform a pre-purchase exam (PPE). A PPE is a snapshot of the

horse's health and soundness at the moment in time that it is preformed but can help the buyer determine if the horse will meet their long-term needs. I have very rarely seen a totally clean PPE. It is realistic to expect that the vet will find something and it is up to you, as the buyer, to determine whether you are willing to take on the risk depending on the specific job you would like the horse to do.

"I like to think that most people are honest but sadly there can be a darker part to this industry. Some people will disguise lameness or behavior problems with drugs and medications. Fluphenazine is a sedative that can last up to six weeks in horses and can disguise a slew of behavioral problems. Bute, Banamine, and Equioxx are common NSAID pain relievers and will reduce lameness. If you do not know the seller, ask the vet who is performing the PPE to take a blood sample and screen it for any substances. If a substance is found, ask the seller why it is there."

Kristin stresses the importance that the right horse have both mental and physical suitability and possess the right temperament for the specific rider and job.

"I find quite a few people want to buy the Formula One model when they really need a Honda Civic," Kristin says. "For a rider wanting to move up the ranks, I think buying a horse that can perform the job at a few levels higher is sufficient as to not overwhelm the rider with too much power or horse. A 4' 6" jumper would probably be too intimidating for a beginner rider showing in the 2' 6" hunter division, although the 4' 6" jumper may be a good-minded, safe horse. Be honest with yourself about your riding abilities and goals and select a horse that is within your riding capability.

"There are quite a few people out there who want the challenge of bringing up a young, green horse. This can be a wonderful opportunity to learn and the experience can be very rich and rewarding. This can also be incredibly time consuming and potentially frustrating. I generally believe that the more experienced the rider/horseman the younger, greener the horse can be. Be realistic about your riding abilities and the time you can put into the horse. If you choose to buy a young, green horse and work with a professional, make sure that person has experience with young, green horses and isn't just a big name rider. A great rider is not always a good horseman. A lot of times it's better to get something that is a little older and has already done the job you would like it to do.

Working with a trainer or trusted professional can be very worthwhile and potentially save you money and headache down the road, Kristin says.

"It is standard to pay them a 10-15% commission," she explains. "You are not only paying that person for their eye in selecting the right horse and their help in navigating the sale process, but you are also paying them for the vast array of professional contacts that they have in the industry. I strongly caution against buying from someone that you do not know. If you go this route, I would recommend that you go to try the



horse over a couple of days. Spend time with the horse, go out to catch the horse, groom and tack the horse up, and ride it in different settings, if possible. If the seller will let you, bring the horse back to your farm for a trial period or arrange for a lease-to-buy. I would never buy a horse sight unseen off the internet from someone whom you do not know. More times than not I have seen this go terribly wrong."

Even with all of the best laid plans to find the perfect equine partner, Kristin knows that the horse/human relationship can begin to grow apart.

"This is OK and is not anyone's fault," she says. "In this case you have two choices: one, continue to work through the problems or; two, sell the horse. Some of the biggest growth in a horseman's career can come from situations like this. The rider must look inside and figure out how to change to fit the horse."

If a rider can learn to fit the horse, Kristin has seen that such riders are likely to be a fit for a lot more horses in the future.

"There are occasional times where the match simply does not work and the relationship is not enjoyable for the horse or rider," she says. "If you purchased a horse that is safe, good minded, and physically sound, there will always be a market for the horse and you hopefully will be able to sell the horse at a similar price to what you paid for it and have something to put towards the next one.

"Happy horse hunting!"