



Waterlane  
EQUINE VETS

# FACTSHEETS

## Pre-Purchase Examination (PPE)

### Why do a PPE?

Pre-purchase examination, commonly known as a vetting, is designed to find any current conditions that would make the horse unsuitable for the activities it is being purchased for. Although a PPE cannot guarantee future soundness, it can identify issues that might be a problem in the future and help the buyer make an informed decision so as to reduce the risk of purchasing an unsuitable horse. It is important to be open with the vet about your expectations for the horse as the vet's opinion will be based on your description of intended use - it is perfectly acceptable for a horse to 'pass' a vetting if its intended use is hacking but the same horse could be unsuitable for purchase if the buyer wants the horse for competitive purposes.

### Two Stage or Five Stage?

There are two categories of PPE - comprising either two or five stages - and the choice will depend upon the buyer's personal preference and proposed use of the horse, as well as requirements of any prospective insurance company. Radiography, ultrasonography and/or endoscopy may also be performed. These procedures are more common in higher value horses being purchased with the intention of a high level competition career. Additional procedures can assist in identifying underlying conditions that might not otherwise be detectable during the course of a standard PPE. Descriptions of each stage of the PPE are as follows:

**Stage One - Clinical Examination:** the vet will check the identity of the horse against its passport and microchip and evaluate its general appearance and health. This will include conformation, examination of eyes and vision in



a darkened stable, basic assessment of teeth (including an estimate of age), auscultation of the heart and lungs, palpation of the limbs and back, and inspection of the body for scars or blemishes. Poor conformation - such as foot imbalance or a horse that is too straight in the hocks - can be a marker for future problems, whereas some heart and eye conditions can prevent use.

**Stage Two - Trot-Up in Hand:** the horse's movement will be assessed without a rider by way of trotting-up in hand in a straight line and on a circle on a firm level surface. The vet will be assessing soundness, straightness of limb movement and foot placement. At this time, the vet will also perform flexion tests - this is where the joints in each limb are flexed for around 45 seconds prior to asking the horse to trot away - to determine if stressing the joint causes lameness.

*It should be noted that flexion tests and trotting on a small, hard circle are not compulsory elements of a PPE but every effort will be made to perform these tests. If conditions are unsuitable or it is unsafe/impractical to do so, for example if there is no suitable space for lunging or if the horse is young or poorly handled, then they may be omitted.*

**Stage Three - Exercise Phase:** the horse's movement and behaviour will be assessed whilst ridden or on the lunge (or both). The vet will also ask for the horse to be exercised at a fast canter or gallop to help determine if there are any heart or "wind" problems. The vet will also be looking for behaviours that may suggest pain, such as reluctance to go forward or evidence that the horse is cold backed. Any behavioural patterns will be considered in conjunction with any corresponding clinical



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signs to establish whether they may be just temperamental or if there may be an underlying clinical condition.

**Stage Four - Period of Rest:** the horse will be taken back to the stable where its recovery from exercise will be assessed. The brief rest period allows time for the horse to elicit any stiffness when re-evaluated in stage five.

**Stage Five - Second Trot-Up:** this is the final step to see if any lameness has become apparent following strenuous exercise. Flexion tests may be repeated and the horse asked to turn in a tight circle to assess balance and co-ordination.

A blood sample is also taken, sent to a laboratory and stored for six months for possible future analysis. In case of any dispute this blood sample can be analysed for any substances that may have been administered to modify the horse's behaviour or soundness for the examination. This sample might not be taken if the horse 'fails' or is already under the purchaser's care.

Following the PPE, the vet will discuss the findings and their significance with the purchaser. It is helpful if the purchaser can be present at the PPE but this may not always be possible. A written report is subsequently issued and this may be required by a prospective insurer.

Please note that your insurer may exclude certain findings noted during the PPE from cover, even though these may not affect the suitability of the horse for purchase. Common examples include foot imbalance and sarcoids. In instances where there are relevant findings it may be prudent to ensure that you can obtain appropriate insurance cover prior to agreeing to the purchase.

We perform PPEs for both existing and non-existing clients on horses of all abilities and disciplines. We will also examine horses being sold by clients of the practice but only on the basis that we have permission from the seller to

disclose the full clinical history to the purchaser. In such instances we work exclusively on behalf of the purchaser.

## What Is Not Included:

- The certificate serves to identify the horse that has been examined, but it is the buyer's responsibility to determine that the declared seller has legal title in the horse.
- Unless paper records are available from foaling, it is not always possible to confirm the age of a horse with accuracy, therefore any age range stated on the certificate may be approximate and based on opinion only.
- There are certain matters that can only be established by the seller such as previous medical history, freedom from vices, temperament, current and previous performance levels. A seller's warranty may cover these points but is a matter between the seller and the buyer only.
- The PPE does not include a height measurement or pregnancy examination. It also does not include a jumping test during the exercise phase.

## Requirements For a Thorough PPE:

- The horse's passport for identification.
- Dark stable for thorough eye examination.
- Flat, hard surface for trotting up.
- An arena or suitable area for lunging/riding.
- A capable rider when a five stage PPE.
- The seller, or an agent of the seller, that can accurately answer any questions regarding the horse's history and current management/routine.

